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The Historical Method in Educational Research

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Abstract

Historical research method has become more important from the view of present education system and many excellent scholars in the domain frequently examine to succeed in the science of education by bringing out experimental research. Exploring and experiencing the history of pedagogical thinking is a chance to open up the essential areas of a heritage that can motivate and build us in all present and creative future attempts. Research in education can't be minimized to only empirical observation and investigation found on which innovations are conduct about in education and integrating the outcome of historical research into the current repeatedly increasing scientific knowledge, which is a main factor in innovations, developments and changes in the theory and practice of 21st century education. The objective of the study is to learn the historical research importance, steps, sources, values and significance towards research methodology and from this it can be used for educational purposes for conducting research on historical information. It can be suggested that, true historical method towards research is a process of reconstructing the past through systematically and objectively collecting, evaluating, verifying, synthesising, etc., evidence relating to the past events to establish facts and defensible conclusions, often in relation to particular hypotheses towards what happened in the past. The present

study provides a greater appreciation and the role which education is to play in the progress of society, and know important information concerning the effects of certain past educational practices and may suggest programmes for future action, based upon the evaluation of the past experiences. It helps avoiding making mistakes of the past, enables to understand the dynamics of educational change and also develops understanding of the deep-rooted causes of the present-day educational problems and helps remove educational prejudice, misconceptions of facts and stands for necessary foundation for any educational reform. It can be suggested that historical research method can be systematically utilized towards understanding of the research work and hence, the present study focuses on the amplification of historical research, one of the main aim to recuperate proposals and meanings of the earlier, which can impact and mould a 21st century individual.

Keywords: Education, Historical Method, Importance, Research, Sources.

Introduction

Historical method in education has been in use in the past to a greater extent than any other method of research, during the development of educational research and it is also called the documentary research as it makes use of historical documents and other records. Many scholars in the field of science education consider historical investigation as a means of defining and setting the limits of traditions in their field of interest. Kerlinger (1972: 673) defines historical research as critical investigation of events, development and experiences of the past, careful consideration of past testimonies from the perspective of information sources validity and subsequent interpretation of the concerned testimonies. The term historiography comprises a description of methods which need to do historical research and collecting historical data is only one part of historiography. Historical research finds its use

in various areas. It is involved with the study of past events and some of the examples are factors leading to the development and growth of cooperative learning, effects of decisions of Supreme Court of India on Indian Education system, how private school education is differed from government schools, etc. It relates to the historical technique of research where historical records and documents are made use of in dealing with problems of past life and critical research for truth is made in the light of past events. It is defined as the study of problems of education making use of historical source and techniques in order to evolve universal generalization and principles and it is the application of scientific method of inquiry to historical problems. Historical method in education has been in use in the past to a greater extent than any other method of research, during the development of educational research. Historical method of research is also called the documentary research as it makes use of historical documents and other records. It relates to the historical technique of research where historical records, documents and relics are made use of in dealing with problems on hand recounting some aspects of past life and critical research for truth is made in the light of past events. Historical research may be defined as the study of problems of education making use of historical source and techniques in order to evolve universal generalization and principles and it is application of scientific method of inquiry to historical problems. The historical research method collects information from primary sources and secondary sources and the primary sources include all types of first-hand information, including original documents, eyewitness accounts, etc. Secondary sources are descriptions sources that were not actually present at the event and also include a textbook analysis of the event or theory. Primary and secondary sources both assist the researcher in contextualizing an event or theory within its historical and cultural context.

Historical Research Meaning

Its the systematic collection and evaluation of data to describe, explain, and understand actions or events that occurred sometime in the past and there is no manipulation or control of variables in experimental research also in the research, an attempt is made to reconstruct what happened during a certain period of time as completely and accurately as possible.

Historical Research Objectives

- To identify research gaps.
- Test hypotheses in relation to current trends.
- To interrogate the present educational practices and policies.
- To study the past events in an attempt to interpret the facts and explain the casual relationship.

Literature Review

Findings ascertained by historical research can confirm, enrich information from secondary sources, it can be a springboard for further studies and scientific work. Mouly (1978) argues that historical research can't fulfil some of the rigors and challenges of the scientific method used in physical sciences. If we try to draw fixed boundaries between the historical science of past human deeds and a science of present human endeavours, since in reality, there are no facts that are historical by nature (Seignobos, 2014). Hill and Kerber (1967) show that when evaluating and formulating a problem, in association with the historical research process, the personality of the researcher is often involved to a greater extent than another fundamental research. The investigator's subjective factors, such as interest, motivation, historical curiosity and the educational background engaged in the interpretation of historical facts and events tend to greatly influence the selection of the problem and the way in which it is dealt with. Historians regard their investigative approach as being interpretative and fluid because they accept the challenge to recognizing and investigating the relationships between past and the present. (Bodin, Blandy and Congdon, 2000). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p. 48) define historical research as the "systematic and objective localization, evaluation and synthesis of evidence in order to establish facts and draw conclusions about past events." Historical research is seen as an act of reconstruction performed in a critical spirit aimed at achieving a faithful representation of a previous age (White, 1990). Many will admit that history is an explanatory endeavour that creates comprehension, and therefore it must expose both the facts and the connections between them (Kuhn, 1982, p. 64). However, its explanatory function is fulfilled without resorting

to explicit generalisations. The work of the researcher is discovering and expressing the universal truth valid throughout all times and places rather than sharing a manner of understanding the events that have taken place at a given time and space. Berg (2012) highlights that historical research serves for revealing the unknown, answers questions which have not been answered yet, searches for events and relations in the past whose consequences reach up to present and it assesses activities by individuals, agencies and institutions in the past which have contributed to their today's success. Likewise Kerlinger (1972) explains the importance for all social sciences and for political formulations are because of all data used in social sciences are taken over from records, experiences or evidences from the past, all policies respecting human issues include interpretation of the past or conjectures as to it and all those who work in social sciences are people at a time, in a particular place and with particular experience; their thinking is subject to and determined by historical circumstances of their lives. Danto (2008) stress that historical research in social work can be useful in providing examples for current programmes of social services, in providing models for community development, they can influence direct work with individuals or families, providing a new evaluation strategy and offering understanding of social work as a profession from various dimensions.

Importance of Historical Research

- It provides essential information concerning the effects of certain past practices and may suggest plans for future actions.
- It helps to gain an accurate account of the past and clear perspective of the present.
- It gains a clear perspective of the past and the present.
- It provides us with a greater appreciation of the culture and of the role which education is to play in the progress of society.
- It provides important information concerning the effects of certain past educational practices and suggests programmes for future action.
- It helps avoiding making mistakes of the past.
- It enables to understand the dynamics of educational change.

- It develops an understanding of the deep-rooted causes of the current educational problems.
- It develops an ability to locate, analyse and appraise historical evidence.
- It helps to remove educational prejudice, misconceptions of facts, etc.
- It is a necessary foundation for any educational reform.
- It enlightens the roles of social institutions from time to time.
- It inspires respect for sound scholarship and reverence for great teachers.

Steps in Historical Research

- Selecting the problem
- Formulation of hypothesis
- Collection of data
- Interpretation of data
- Writing of research report

Sources of Historical Research

- **Documents**
  - Legislative acts
  - Court decisions
  - Reports of various committees
  - Proceedings of officers like NCERT, UGC, etc.
  - Reports of commissions like Radhakrishnan, Kothari, Mudaliar, etc.
  - Newspapers, magazines, periodicals, etc.
  - Autobiographies, letters, novels etc.
- **List of Remains**
  - School buildings, furniture etc.
  - Photographs of teachers, children, parents, etc.
  - Forms of certificates, attendance sheets etc.
  - Textbooks, exercise books etc.
- **Primary Sources or Archival Data**
  - These are the original sources and the first witness to a fact and it has been kept unconsciously or consciously. Tools, weapons, clothing,

building, painting, coins etc., are the examples, autobiographies, letters, diaries, etc., are consciously kept for information.

- **Secondary or External Sources**

  - These are the reports of the persons who reported the testimony of an actual witness and these are not trusted completely, but they serve some useful purpose.

Values of Historical Research

- It allows the investigating, identifying and extracting optimal solutions to contemporary problems, from past times.
- It contributes to clarifying current and future global trends.
- It highlights the relative importance and effects of different interactions that can be found as a common thread, in all cultures.
- It allows the reassessment of data in relation to hypotheses, theories and generalisations in circulation at present.
- It predicts the future and uses the present to explain the past, makes investigator to work and effort particularly useful in supporting a large variety of scientific studies and research.
- It involves the identification and differentiation of a problem or a field of study, sometimes the generating of a hypothesis/set of questions and, the collection, selection, organization, verification, validation and analysis of data.
- It also requires testing hypotheses/answering questions and, where appropriate, writing research reports. Such an approach leads to a new understanding of the past and to the need of highlighting its relevance in shaping our present and future (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000).

Significance of Historical Research in the Field of Education

The historical research method serves to scientifically determine the ideas and historical facts to group them into an explanatory scientific system. Data from the past are systematically collected and evaluated to describe, explain and understand the ideas, actions, events, etc. that have taken place. It has often been defined as systematic localization,

evaluation and systematic synthesis of evidence in order to establish ideas, facts, past events, and subsequently reach useful conclusions about them (Borg, 1963; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). It is also an act of reconstruction performed in a spirit of critical-reflective investigation, for the purpose of achieving an accurate representation of the reality of past times, based on physical evidence, corpora of documents, observations and written accounts of other people. Reconstruction implies a holistic view, in the sense that historical research attempts to include comprehensively and explain the whole domain that is being studied, from a perspective that captures the social, cultural, economic and intellectual dimensions of its development (Hill and Kerber, 1967). All these aspects help to grasp the events that happened in the past, their impact, but also the causes of failures and successes of past times, as useful knowledge for solving current problems, making predictions, testing hypotheses about relations, correlations, trends, etc. but also for a better understanding of current educational practices and policies, etc. Education addresses and involves the dissemination of a cultural, cognitive and practical heritage, of knowledge, and skills acquired and developed by many generations over time (Le Cam, 2013). Students use the past to understand the present and to prepare for the future and the past is often projected and discussed in contemporary debates on education and school/college systems. Hence the history of education could again be a source of inspiration for decision-makers and reformers of contemporary and future education, thus contributing to the 21st century education sciences. Historical research in education may concern an individual, a group, an ideological movement, an idea, an educational practice, or even an institution (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). On the one hand, the study of ancient ideas, practices, institutions, etc. can help investigators to understand how current educational system was created and evolved and on the other hand, this kind of knowledge can provide investigators with a solid foundation for further progress or change in the field of research.

Conclusion

Historical research serves us for capturing historical facts on a scientific basis and the result of it is not an accidental and random summary of

facts, data and findings as to the history of a particular area, but it is a scientific image of actual past reality, its connections and regularities (Hroch et al., 1985). It is a backward movement in knowledge to trace the cause of a phenomenon, it is concerned with what was, it is with regarding with the study of past problem, and provided insight for present as well as future. Conducting historical research is very difficult task, it refers to the application of scientific to the description and analysis of past events, it is the systematic collection and evaluation of data to describe, explain, and understand actions or events that occurred sometime in the past and an attempt is made to reconstruct what happened during a certain period of time as completely and accurately as possible. Its purpose is to understand the past to explain the present or future. It throws light on present and future trends and enables understanding of and solutions to contemporary problems to be sought in the past. It allows for the revaluation of data in relation to selected hypotheses, theories and generalizations that are presently held about the past and the present. Most historical research has a qualitative nature, since the object of historical research consists, to a large extent, of texts and other symbolic materials originating from the past of a society/culture. Among the basic competencies required by the researcher for the purpose of analysing this type of qualitative or symbolic material, one can mention identifying, collecting, classifying, ordering, synthesizing, evaluating and interpreting. There is nowadays a certain reluctance to the past and to history in general and most of the people who believe that the past is dead and that it has no importance in the evolution of the present and, especially, the future. An essential role of the historical method used in educational research, which also provides its well-deserved place in the vast array of feasible methods, is to help researchers understand the inevitable relation between past and present in all products of knowledge. Separating the present from the past is not possible, and for this reason, critical historians massively reject such segregation tendencies and strive to understand the complexity of such a relation. All social sciences refer to phenomena that evolve and change constantly, they do not remain the same; to understand them, we need to know how they evolved. Evolution is an essential element of scientific knowledge. Therefore, a historical study of previous phenomena is

necessary, and such a study is possible by using the historical method of research. In relation to the objectives established and pursued by contemporary researchers, systematic historical studies may prove to be indispensable. Generalizations on the scientific knowledge in the field of education can be justified satisfactorily when researchers start examining the stages of development of this scientific discipline. It goes without saying that the notions, ideas and methods used within a discipline have their own history, so that the scientific achievements of the past, in as far as they are important and still currently applicable, are retained and exposed in contemporary works of a certain discipline, sometimes in a clearer formulation than in primary scientific sources. General stages of historical research consist in defining and formulating the research issue/research questions, subsequently ascertaining the state of the issue under study in secondary sources, identifying and localizing relevant materials, applying a research technique and finally evaluating the historical research, interpreting and publishing the ascertained findings. In conclusion, historical research is a methodology for studying past events, phenomena/occurrences. On a side note, it should be noted that with the advancement of technology today, the use of Internet for the correspondence of both primary and secondary sources have increased greatly since more and more information are been stored electronically and the future of historical research will change as more correspondence and eyewitnesses accounts are recorded over the Internet and become available as new data sources for historical researches (Lundy, 2008).

Summary

Historical research method purpose is to gain a clear perspective of the past and the present. The present problems are understandable only on the basis of past. Historical research can be defined as the process of investigating past events systematically to provide an account of happenings in the past and it is not simply the accumulation of dates and facts or even just a description of past happenings but is a flowing and dynamic explanation/description of past events which include an interpretation of these events in an effort to recapture implications, personalities and ideas that have influenced these events. Berg (2000) stressed that it is crucial to distinguish nostalgia from historical research

since the former is the retelling of comfortable past pleasantries, events/situations that lacks research vigour while the later attempts to methodically recapture the complex nuances, people, meanings, events and even ideas of the past that have impacted and shaped the present (Hamilton, 1993; Leedy 1999 as cited in Berg, 2000). The purpose of historical research is to verify and explain history of any area of human activities, subjects or events by means of scientific processes (Špiláčková, 2012). The important aims for conducting historical research are to reveal or uncover the unknown, to answer questions which have yet been answered, to search and identity the relationship of past happenings and their links with the present, to record and assess past activities and achievements of individuals, agencies and institutions and to assist in the understanding of human culture (Berg, 2001). Furthermore, historical research method helps to identify individuals as a community since the construction of links between past and present. On the other hand, for researchers to determine the reliability of a source using internal criticism, the trustworthiness of the source is questioned, such as the author's perceptions and biases of the phenomena, and whether the author is reporting from intimate knowledge or from other's description of the event. Lundy (2008) cautioned researchers to be vigilant in including both positive and negative criticism of all data sources which includes missing accounts, lack of relevant viewpoints and the persons involved in the event.

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