

Types of Historical Research – An Overview

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Abstract— The term history is derived from the Greek word ‘istoria’ which means enquiry, research, exploration information or learning. History is an enquiry into human events or learning based on ascertained facts. In a restricted sense, history is nothing but the recorded past based on research. In this sense, history can be used to stand either for a well-known genus of researches and writings which usually take the form of historical books. History is a meaningful record of human achievement. It is not just dates and events but an unique account of relativity between time period, people, places, and events. The study of history has both a practical and educational value. It help us to develop an active enquiring mind, promotes the use of critical skills in the handling and evaluation of various types of source material and assists in the presentation of written work.

Keywords— History; Research; Types of research; Historical research.

1. Introduction

The word research is derived from the French word ‘rechercher’(Lategan, Lues & Friedrich-Nel, 2011), meaning to search back. Research is undertaken to find out new facts or to re-examine the facts. Research is undertaken to find out new facts or to re-examine the facts already known or to interpret facts or to revise or revalidate accepted conclusions in the light of newly discovered facts. Research may be positive or negative. Positive research may formulate new principles and generalizations on a scientific basis. Negative research may dismantle old assumptions and conclusions. In short, research is a pursuit of truth, a purposeful study and an attempt to provide new insight into the problem selected.

Research types are generally classified as fundamental, basic or Theoretical research and applied or practical research. And research suffered with certain restrictions in spite of its relevance and usefulness. In example, the social research is subject to changes in the society, as the social structure changes the decisions taken cannot be implemented as it is. There are several other factors which influence the decisions. Unless these factors are properly analysed decision may be biased (Upagade, et al.: 2010).

2. Historical Research

Historical research is conducted on the basis of historical

data. It can be taken as all the research depends on history because it relies upon the erstwhile recorded findings. But the problem treated in historical research is essentially historical in nature. Since historical facts could not be repeated accurately as can be done under laboratory conditions, historical research necessarily depends on source materials. Only problems as are based on historical records can be taken up for investigation. Historical research is the systematic investigation, evaluation, synthesis of evidence with the objective to lay down the facts and derive conclusions regarding past events (Borg: 1967).

Historical research is concerned with establishing the occurrence of unique events. Historical research is not only determines past events but also interprets such events and establishes pattern of relationships (Murdick: 1969). “Historical research is digging into the past in order to re-enact the past in its entirety... to explain the meaning and significance of the past events, to correct the notions... and to elaborate, analyze, synthesize and philosophize ideas in the light of the knowledge we possess” (Ali: 1991). The aim of historical research is to apply the method of reflective thinking to unsolved problems by means of discovery past trends of events, facts or attitudes (Whitney: 1961).

3. Types of Historical Research

Historical researches have been classified based on the approach the purpose and the nature of a research activity. Broadly speaking historical researches can be classified into four categories such as (1) Historical Events Research (2) Historical Process Research (3) Cross-Sectional comparative Research (4) Comparative Historical Research.

3.1 Historical Event Research

Historians examine the past so that we may have an excellent understanding of the content of past events and the context in which they took place. In a limited sense, therefore histories are confined to such past events as have been recorded or remembered or as can be inferred or recognized on the basis of partial records and memories (Gallie:1964). In the broader sense, history means knowing the past with a view to understanding the present so as to envision and anticipate the future. ‘The past is intelligible to us only in the light of the present and can understand the present only in the light of the past’ (Carr: 1969).

3.2 Historical Process Research

A. Topic

Selection a research topic is a stepping stone to research. Choosing a viable topic is a challenge to the uninitiated and one must think thrice before selecting its.

Hypothesis is a specific, clear, and testable proposition or predictive affirmation with regard to the feasible result of a scientific research (Lavrakas, 2008). It is a temporary assumption that needs to be established before it is accepted. It is a provisional explanation and a tentative solution. It is a guide to the problem under study. It may be modified during the course of the investigation if necessary.

Bibliography, the research scholar must make the maximum use of the library. A suggested list of references is often included with set assignments. Reference books themselves contain further references and these, if available in the library, provide promising leads.

Notes making is an art, using notebooks allotting a page for each and every single idea. But the notebook or ledger system is inappropriate for historical research. It will be cumbersome, inadequate and inefficient.

B. Sources

Primary sources is testimony of a witness or a mechanical device like archaeological remains, inscriptions, coins, correspondence, travel accounts, literary source, confidential reports, government orders etc.,

Secondary sources are the finished product. It is produced out of the primary source. It is an indirect testimony of someone who was not present at the time of occurrence. The secondary source is the coherent work of history in the form of article, dissertation or book, which will widen the general historical knowledge (kadhivel: 1985)

C. Analysis

External criticism is a preparatory study of documentary evidence. External criticism is 'the search for material and the preliminary study of that material to know a few essentials of it' (Ali: 1991).

Internal criticism can be applied only where the research workers are dealing with writing, whether in documents or in inscriptions, in monuments, coins, medals or seals. In internal criticism documents are looked at from the inside with the purpose of finding out whether the message it carries is genuine. It is not a separate operation.

D. Synthesis

Selection of facts is as important as collection of data. Collection and selection of facts, though independent, are interdependent functions. Facts are varied. They must be related to the research topic, directly or indirectly.

Arrangement of facts, grouping or arranging or classifying facts is a vital step in synthetic operation. Facts are to be grouped according to some definite plan. Historical facts may be grouped on the basis of chronology, topic, geography, personality, institution, problem, and concept and so on.

Role of reasoning, Constructive reasoning has to play a significant role in synthetic operation. In the absence of adequate data reasoning is required to fill many a gap. Reasoning may be positive or negative. The analogy between the past and the present is adopted in positive reasoning. Negative reasoning is 'argument from silence' (Ali: 1991)

3.3 Cross-Sectional Comparative Research

Cross-sectional Comparative Research is a one point prevalence measurement for multiple risk factors associated with a particular condition. It's also called prevalence studies. Two or more social setting or groups are comparing at one particular point in time. They are also used to document comparisons among the various attributes of a group.

3.4 Comparative Historical Research

Comparison is inherent in all science, including the social sciences, where comparative research has played a most prominent role in their development as scientific disciplines. Comparative historical research is a method of social science that examines historical events in order to create explanations that are valid beyond a particular time and place, either by direct comparison to other historical events, theory building, or reference to present day. At a very general level, comparatives are involved in identifying the similarities and differences among macro social units. This knowledge provides the key to understanding, interpreting and explaining diverse historical outcomes and processed and their significance for current institutional arrangements.

4. Conclusion

This study offers a number of suggestions for future research. The paper examining the Types of historical research, are more important to the true outcome of the research. Since historical research relies on data from the past, there is no way to change it. Historical research has its special value. It is necessary to understand that there is no specific sequence or established order in which research work is carried out.

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