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## HISTORICAL METHOD IN RESEARCH : A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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**Abstract:-** Historical method comprises the techniques and guidelines by which historians use primary sources and other evidence, including the evidence of archaeology, to research and then to write histories in the form of accounts of the past. The question of the nature, and even the possibility, of a sound historical method is raised in the philosophy of history as a question of epistemology. The study of historical method and of different ways of writing history is known as historiography.

**Keywords:** Historical method, historiography.

### INTRODUCTION

The process of learning and understanding the background and growth of a chosen field of study or profession can offer insight into organizational culture, current trends, and future possibilities. The historical method of research applies to all fields of study because it encompasses there: origins, growth, theories, personalities, crisis, etc. Both quantitative and qualitative variables can be used in the collection of historical information. Once the decision is made to conduct historical research, there are steps that should be followed to achieve a reliable result. Definition of Research is the continual search for truth using the scientific method. It is the pursuit of the truth with the help of the study, investigation, observation, comparison. Research is a quest for knowledge through diligent search or investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of new knowledge. Scientific method is a systematic body of procedures and techniques applied in carrying out investigation or experimentation targeted at obtaining new knowledge. Here research and scientific methods may be considered a course of critical enquiry leading to discovery of facts or information. Historical methods of research are the process of systematically examining an account of what has happened in the past. It is not facts and dates or even description of past events. The dynamic account of past events that involves an interpretation attempt to recapture the nuances, personalities, and ideas that events. One of the goals of historical research is to communicating of past events. In the field of library and information science, there are vast arrays of topics that may be considered for conducting historical research. For example, a researcher may chose to answer questions about the development of school, academic or public libraries, the rise of technology and the benefits/ problems it brings, the development of preservation methods, famous personalities in the field, library statistics, or geographical demographics and how they affect library distribution. Historical methods of research is a scientific method in which comparison is used to reveal the general and the particular in historical phenomena and to gain an understanding of the various historical stages of development of one and the same phenomenon or of two different but contemporaneous phenomena. The historical method comprises the techniques and guidelines by which historians use primary sources and other evidence, such as secondary sources and tertiary sources, to research and then to write history. The question of the nature, and indeed the possibility, of sound historical method is raised in the philosophy of history, as a question of epistemology. The following summarizes the history guidelines commonly used by historians in their work, under the headings of external criticism, internal criticism, and synthesis. The historical method is employed by researchers who are interested in reporting events and/or conditions that occurred in the past. An attempt is made to establish facts in order to arrive at conclusions concerning past events or predict future events. Harter and Busha define library history as “the systematic recounting of past events pertaining to the establishment, maintenance, and utilization of

systematically arranged collections of recorded information or knowledge...A biography of a person who has in some way affected the development of libraries, library science, or librarianship is also considered to be library history.

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

To give a conceptual review on Historical Method in Research

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

It is completely based on literature review on the concept of Historical Method in Research.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

#### **STAGES OF HISTORICAL METHODS OF RESEARCH CONDUCTING:**

1. Identify an idea, topic or research question  
2. Conduct a background literature review  
3. Refine the research idea and questions  
4. Determine that historical methods will be the method used  
5. Identify and locate primary and secondary data sources  
6. Evaluate the authenticity and accuracy of source materials;  
7. Analyze the date and develop a narrative exposition of the findings. Sources of historical methods of research  
Primary Sources of Information - Direct outcomes of events or the records of eye witnesses) Original documents) Relics) Remains) Artifacts  
Secondary Sources of Information - Information provided by a person who did not directly observe the event, object, or condition  
Periodicals Review of research and other references  
External Criticism - Asks if the evidence under consideration is authentic. The researcher checks the genuineness or validity of the source. Is it what it appears or claims to be? Is it admissible as evidence?  
Internal Criticism - After the source is authenticated, it asks if the source is accurate, was the writer or creator competent, honest, and unbiased. How long after the event happened until it was reported? Does the witness agree with other witnesses?

#### **RESEARCH PLAN OF HISTORICAL METHODS OF RESEARCH:**

1. Choose a subject Choose a subject (usually it will be relevant to you class, or limited by your instructor). Probably, you will then need to narrow your topic down, and often define your research paper by gaining a working hypothesis and a thesis. 2. Find sources. You should use both internet and libraries to find your sources. The best sources are still those that are found in libraries or archives, so do NOT limit your searches to the web, even if it is easier. In libraries you can find sources through: Library Catalogue and library database and other links of database On the internet you can find sources through subject directories, hierarchical indexes, etc., such as yahoo, or even set library pages, or Prof. Pavlacs Women History Site; search engines (For a list of the better ones, with descriptions, click here). 3. Learn from your sources. Historians usually distinguish between three kinds of sources, tertiary, primary, secondary. You can use sources to find more sources. Reading tertiary sources like encyclopedias, dictionaries, and handbooks can give you the general outline of subjects and their problems. They often have useful bibliographies (lists of books used), that are sources you can use. Secondary sources (professional historical books, scholarly articles) also have bibliographies that should lead you to more information. Primary sources, the immediate records of the past, should be used whenever possible. 4. Evaluate your sources. While you are researching, you should be carefully judging each source. Take careful notes from your sources, always recording carefully from where you got what information.

Start writing, while you research. You can, and should, begin writing as soon as possible. Do not wait until you have collected all your information. Prewriting can be based on good notes. You should be shaping your thesis in writing. To get there, if you started with a broad subject, along the way you should have been refining your subject into an arrow topic or a hypothesis. Writing as you go helps you to clarify your ideas, measure the length of parts of your argument, and finish the paper sooner. 6. Write a rough draft. Write your rough draft as if it were your finished paper. Put it aside, and go over it again carefully. You might use the checklist provided by the instructor. 7. Have other people critique your draft. It is best to talk to the person, but written comments, perhaps according to a checklist, are also good. Rewrite until you have a polished draft. The more you rewrite, the better it will be. 8. Submit your final draft. Notice that the end product is called a draft. Do the best you can, but every piece of writing have room for improvement? Try to get it done well in advance of the deadline, in case you have problems with printing out the paper. Characteristics of Historical Methods of Research: Historical methods of research are a process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting information to answer questions. But to qualify as research, the process must have certain characteristics: it must, as far as possible, be controlled, rigorous, Controlled-? systematic, valid and verifiable, empirical and critical. In real life there are many factors that affect an outcome. The concept of control implies that, in exploring causality in relation to two variables (factors), you set up your study in a way that minimizes the effects of other factor affecting the relationship. This can be achieved to a large extent in the physical sciences (cooking, bakery), as most Rigorous-you must be scrupulous of the research is done in a laboratory in ensuring that the

procedures followed to find answers to questions are relevant, appropriate and justified. Again, the degree of rigor varies markedly between the physical and social sciences and within Systematic-this implies that the procedure? the social sciences. Adopted to undertake an investigation follow a certain logical sequence. The different steps cannot be taken in a haphazard way. Some procedures Valid and verifiable-this concept implies that must follow others. Whatever you conclude on the basis of your findings is correct and can be verified by you and others.

Empirical-this means that any conclusion drawn are based upon- hard evidence gathered from information collected from real life Critical-critical scrutiny of the experiences or observations. Procedures used and the methods employed is crucial to a research enquiry. The process of investigation must be foolproof and free from drawbacks. Methods of using in historical methods of research. There are four major methods that researchers use to collect historical data. Running records, and? Secondary sources,? Archival data,? These are Recollections. The archival data, or primary sources, are typically the resources that researchers rely most heavily on. Archival data includes official documents and other items that would be found in archives, museums, etc. Secondary sources are the works of other historians who have written history. Running records are "documentaries maintained by private or nonprofit organizations." Finally recollections include sources such as autobiographies, memoirs or diaries. The values of historical research have been It enables solutions to categorized by Hill and Kerber as follows: It throws light on cotemporary problems to be sought in the past. It stresses the relative importance and the? present and future trends effects of the various interactions that are to be found within all. It allows for the reevaluation of data in relation to selected? cultures hypotheses, theories and generalizations that are presently held about the past. Advantages and disadvantages of historical methods cannot control for threats to internal validity-research Disadvantages

Limitations are imposed due to the content analysis Bias in Researchers cannot ensure representation of the sample. Interpreting sources is very time interpreting historical sources. Lack of Sources of historical materials may be problematic consuming. Throws light on present and control over external variables Advantages. It enables understanding of and solutions to future trends. It can illuminate the? contemporary problems to be sought in the past. It allows? effects of key interactions within a culture or sub-culture. For the reevaluation of data in relation to selected hypotheses, theories and generalizations that are presently held about the past and the Permits investigation of topics and questions that can be? present. Can make use of more categories of evidence? studied in no other fashion than most other methods (with the exception of case studies and ethnographic studies) Conclusions. Historical methods of research can also mean gathering data from situations that have already occurred and performing statistical analysis on this data just as we would in a traditional experiment. The one key difference between this type of research and the type described in the first paragraph concerns the manipulation of data. Since historical research relies on data from the past, there is no way to manipulate it. Studying the grades of older students, for example, and younger students may provide some insight into the differences between these two groups, but manipulating the work experience is impossible. Therefore, historical research can often lead to present day experiments that attempt to further explore what has occurred in the past.

### **Garraghan divides source criticism into six inquiries:**

1. When was the source, written or unwritten, produced (date)?
2. Where was it produced (localization)?
3. By who was it produced (authorship)?
4. From what pre-existing material was it produced (analysis)?
5. In what original form was it produced (integrity)?
6. What is the evidential value of its contents (credibility)?

The first four are known as higher criticism; the fifth, lower criticism; and, together, external criticism. The sixth and final inquiry about a source is called internal criticism. Together, this inquiry is known as source criticism. R. J. Shafer on external criticism: "It sometimes is said that its function is negative, merely saving us from using false evidence; whereas internal criticism has the positive function of telling us how to use authenticated evidence." Noting that few documents are accepted as completely reliable, Louis Gottschalk sets down the general rule, "for each particular of a document the process of establishing credibility should be separately undertaken regardless of the general credibility of the author." An author's trustworthiness in the main may establish a background probability for the consideration of each statement, but each piece of evidence extracted must be weighed individually.

### **PROCEDURES FOR CONTRADICTORY SOURCES**

**Bernheim (1889) and Langlois & Seignobos (1898) proposed a seven-step procedure for source criticism in history:**

1. If the sources all agree about an event, historians can consider the event proved.

2. However, majority does not rule; even if most sources relate events in one way, that version will not prevail unless it passes the test of critical textual analysis.
3. The source whose account can be confirmed by reference to outside authorities in some of its parts can be trusted in its entirety if it is impossible similarly to confirm the entire text.
4. When two sources disagree on a particular point, the historian will prefer the source with most "authority"—that is the source created by the expert or by the eyewitness.
5. Eyewitnesses are, in general, to be preferred especially in circumstances where the ordinary observer could have accurately reported what transpired and, more specifically, when they deal with facts known by most contemporaries.
6. If two independently created sources agree on a matter, the reliability of each is measurably enhanced.
7. When two sources disagree and there is no other means of evaluation, then historians take the source which seems to accord best with common sense.

Subsequent descriptions of historical method, outlined below, have attempted to overcome the credulity built into the first step formulated by the nineteenth century historiographers by stating principles not merely by which different reports can be harmonized but instead by which a statement found in a source may be considered to be unreliable or reliable as it stands on its own.

### CORE PRINCIPLES FOR DETERMINING RELIABILITY

The following core principles of source criticism were formulated by two Scandinavian historians, Olden-Jørgensen (1998) and Thurén (1997):

- Human sources may be relics such as a fingerprint; or narratives such as a statement or a letter. Relics are more credible sources than narratives.
- Any given source may be forged or corrupted. Strong indications of the originality of the source increase its reliability.
- The closer a source is to the event which it purports to describe, the more one can trust it to give an accurate historical description of what actually happened.
- An eyewitness is more reliable than testimony at second hand, which is more reliable than hearsay at further remove, and so on.
- If a number of independent sources contain the same message, the credibility of the message is strongly increased.
- The tendency of a source is its motivation for providing some kind of bias. Tendencies should be minimized or supplemented with opposite motivations.
- If it can be demonstrated that the witness or source has no direct interest in creating bias then the credibility of the message is increased.

### EYEWITNESS EVIDENCE

#### R. J. Shafer offers this checklist for evaluating eyewitness testimony:

1. Is the real meaning of the statement different from its literal meaning? Are words used in senses not employed today? Is the statement meant to be ironic (i.e., mean other than it says)?
2. How well could the author observe the thing he reports? Were his senses equal to the observation? Was his physical location suitable to sight, hearing, touch? Did he have the proper social ability to observe: did he understand the language, have other expertise required (e.g., law, military); was he not being intimidated by his wife or the secret police?
3. How did the author report?, and what was his ability to do so?

1. Regarding his ability to report, was he biased? Did he have proper time for reporting? Proper place for reporting? Adequate recording instruments?
2. When did he report in relation to his observation? Soon? Much later? Fifty years is much later as most eyewitnesses are dead and those who remain may have forgotten relevant material.
3. What was the author's intention in reporting? For whom did he report? Would that audience be likely to require or suggest distortion to the author?
4. Are there additional clues to intended veracity? Was he indifferent on the subject reported, thus probably not intending distortion? Did he make statements damaging to himself, thus probably not seeking to distort? Did he give incidental or casual information, almost certainly not intended to mislead?
4. Do his statements seem inherently improbable: e.g., contrary to human nature, or in conflict with what we know?
5. Remember that some types of information are easier to observe and report on than others.

6. Are there inner contradictions in the document?

Louis Gottschalk adds an additional consideration: "Even when the fact in question may not be well-known, certain kinds of statements are both incidental and probable to such a degree that error or falsehood seems unlikely. If an ancient inscription on a road tells us that a certain proconsul built that road while Augustus was princeps, it may be doubted without further corroboration that that proconsul really built the road, but would be harder to doubt that the road was built during the participate of Augustus. If an advertisement informs readers that 'A and B Coffee may be bought at any reliable grocer's at the unusual price of fifty cents a pound,' all the inferences of the advertisement may well be doubted without corroboration except that there is a brand of coffee on the market called 'A and B Coffee.'"

## INDIRECT WITNESSES

Garraghan says that most information comes from "indirect witnesses," people who were not present on the scene but heard of the events from someone else. Gottschalk says that a historian may sometimes use hearsay evidence. He writes, "In cases where he uses secondary witnesses, however, he does not rely upon them fully. On the contrary, he asks: (1) On whose primary testimony does the secondary witness base his statements? (2) Did the secondary witness accurately report the primary testimony as a whole? (3) If not, in what details did he accurately report the primary testimony? Satisfactory answers to the second and third questions may provide the historian with the whole or the gist of the primary testimony upon which the secondary witness may be his only means of knowledge. In such cases the secondary source is the historian's 'original' source, in the sense of being the 'origin' of his knowledge. Insofar as this 'original' source is an accurate report of primary testimony, he tests its credibility as he would that of the primary testimony itself."

## ORAL TRADITION

Gilbert Garraghan maintains that oral tradition may be accepted if it satisfies either two "broad conditions" or six "particular conditions", as follows:

### 1. Broad conditions stated.

1. The tradition should be supported by an unbroken series of witnesses, reaching from the immediate and first reporter of the fact to the living mediate witness from whom we take it up, or to the one who was the first to commit it to writing.
2. There should be several parallel and independent series of witnesses testifying to the fact in question.

### 2. Particular conditions formulated.

1. The tradition must report a public event of importance, such as would necessarily be known directly to a great number of persons.
2. The tradition must have been generally believed, at least for a definite period of time.
3. During that definite period it must have gone without protest, even from persons interested in denying it.
4. The tradition must be one of relatively limited duration. [Elsewhere, Garraghan suggests a maximum limit of 150 years, at least in cultures that excel in oral remembrance.]
5. The critical spirit must have been sufficiently developed while the tradition lasted, and the necessary means of critical investigation must have been at hand.
6. Critical-minded persons who would surely have challenged the tradition – had they considered it false – must have made no such challenge.

Other methods of verifying oral tradition may exist, such as comparison with the evidence of archaeological remains.

More recent evidence concerning the potential reliability or unreliability of oral tradition has come out of fieldwork in West Africa and Eastern Europe.

Once individual pieces of information have been assessed in context, hypotheses can be formed and established by historical reasoning.

## ARGUMENT TO THE BEST EXPLANATION

### C. Behan Mc Cullagh lays down seven conditions for a successful argument to the best explanation:

1. The statement, together with other statements already held to be true, must imply yet other statements describing
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present, observable data. (We will henceforth call the first statement 'the hypothesis', and the statements describing observable data, 'observation statements'.)

2.The hypothesis must be of greater explanatory scope than any other incompatible hypothesis about the same subject; that is, it must imply a greater variety of observation statements.

3.The hypothesis must be of greater explanatory power than any other incompatible hypothesis about the same subject; that is, it must make the observation statements it implies more probable than any other.

4.The hypothesis must be more plausible than any other incompatible hypothesis about the same subject; that is, it must be implied to some degree by a greater variety of accepted truths than any other, and be implied more strongly than any other; and its probable negation must be implied by fewer beliefs, and implied less strongly than any other.

5.The hypothesis must be less ad hoc than any other incompatible hypothesis about the same subject; that is, it must include fewer new suppositions about the past which are not already implied to some extent by existing beliefs.

6.It must be disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs than any other incompatible hypothesis about the same subject; that is, when conjoined with accepted truths it must imply fewer observation statements and other statements which are believed to be false.

7.It must exceed other incompatible hypotheses about the same subject by so much, in characteristics 2 to 6, that there is little chance of an incompatible hypothesis, after further investigation, soon exceeding it in these respects.

McCullagh sums up, "if the scope and strength of an explanation are very great, so that it explains a large number and variety of facts, many more than any competing explanation, then it is likely to be true."

Historical research is the type of research that examines past events or combinations of events to arrive at an account of what has happened in the past. Historical research is conducted to

- Uncover the unknown,
- Answer questions,
- Identify the relationship that the past has to the present,
- Record and evaluate accomplishments of individuals, agencies, or institutions,
- Aid in understanding the culture in which we live.

Historical research can show patterns that occurred in the past and over time which can help us to see where we came from and what kinds of solutions we have used in the past. We usually will see that what we do today is specifically rooted in the past. Understanding this can add perspective on how we examine current events and educational practices. It can also show us that we do not need to continually reinvent the wheel because we should always start with what history tells us. Here are the five steps:

1. Identification of the research topic and formulation of the research problem or question.
2. Data collection or literature review
3. Evaluation of materials
4. Data synthesis
5. Report preparation or preparation of the narrative exposition

Much of the time in conducting historical research involves the process of collecting and reading the research material collected, and writing the manuscript from the data collected. The researcher often goes back-and-forth between collecting, reading, and writing.

**Here are a few sources of topics:**

- Current issues in education
- Desire to understand the impact of a specific individual, an institution, or a social movement on an educational policy or educational reform
- You might want to understand the relationship among different events (e.g., decisions to use busing and then to drop busing to schools)
- Desire to understand the historical roots of an educational policy
- You may even decide that past events have not been presented accurately so you decide to write up your new interpretation (which must be based on some evidence).

**Information in documents, records, photographs, relics, and interviews.**

- Documents and records include, for example, written or printed materials such as diplomas, cartoons, diaries, memoirs, newspapers, photos, yearbooks, memos, periodicals, reports, files, attendance records, census reports, budgets, maps, and tests.



- Oral history is another very useful type of information. An oral history is what you obtain when you interview a person who has had direct or indirect experience with or knowledge of the chosen topic.
- Relics are also used and include, for example, articles of clothing, buildings, books, architectural plans, desks, or any other object that might provide useful information about the past.

Historical information exists in libraries and the National Archives. However, historical documents can be found in other places such as local courthouses and school board central offices as well as individual schools. Conducting an oral history with a person who has experience with the topic of interest is also a good source of information. A primary source is an original, first hand record or account or artifact that has survived from the past; it has direct involvement with the event being investigated. A secondary source is an account of the past created after the event or created from primary sources. External criticism refers to determining the authenticity, validity, or trustworthiness of the source (to see if the source is what it claims to be); internal criticism refers to the determination of the reliability or accuracy of the information contained in the source; it is important for determining what a good interpretation is of the information contained in the source. Positive criticism is a strategy for internal criticism and it refers to making sure that you understand the meaning conveyed in the source. Historical interpretation is often difficult because of vagueness or uncertainty of the meaning of words and phrases, and because of the tendency called presentism which refers to the assumption that present-day connotations of terms also existed in the past. These problems make positive criticism (understanding the meaning conveyed in the source) difficult. Negative criticism refers to establishing the reliability or authenticity and accuracy of the content of documents and other sources of information. You must determine if the content in the document or source is accurate; this determination is achieved by using the following three heuristics:

Corroboration - comparing documents to each other to see if they provide the same information and lead to the same conclusions.

Sourcing – identifying the author, date of creation, place of creation, or other information that identifies the source.

Contextualization – identifying when and where the event took place and the context in which it took place.

Synthesis is the selection, organization, and analysis of the materials collected. The materials must have met the tests of internal and external criticism. During data synthesis and report preparation, the researcher must be careful to avoid the following four methodological problems:

#### **1. Confusing correlation and causation.**

This is generally not a problem as long as the historical researcher focuses on generating ideographic knowledge rather than nomothetic knowledge.

Ideographic knowledge is knowledge of the local and particular; nomothetic knowledge is knowledge of general relationships or scientific laws.

2. Defining and interpreting key words, terms, and phrases (i.e., the issues of vagueness and presentism must be addressed).

3. Differentiating between how people should behave and evidence indicating how they did in fact behave.

4. Maintaining a distinction between intent and consequences. This can be difficult because the events took place in the past. You cannot assume that the consequences observed in the past were necessarily intended by the historical actors.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

In order to do original historical work, you need to get a handle on the historiography of a certain topic, in order to find out:

1. What has been written?
2. How it has been written, and
3. Where there is a need/room for more work.

Once you have identified a topic, you need to find secondary sources to trace out this historiography, and primary sources to use for your research.

A quick definition of historiography is “the history of the history” on a given topic. In a historiographical review essay the author traces the history of how that history was written

- which historians wrote it

- how those historians did that history (what methodology they used – what kinds of sources they used, what questions they asked, what their orientation was)

- how the ways they did that history changed over time

So in a historiographical review a historian traces at least three things

1. What the “history” on a given topic is – what historians argue happened and why it happened
2. How this “history” (historians’ arguments) changed over time
3. What influences there were on the historians – how their environment (the broader social, political, economic setting in which they wrote) changed and how the historical profession (methodology, sources, etc. changed)

A. Historiographical review focuses on secondary sources (although it may discuss the primary sources that historians used for the secondary sources it is examining). Students are expected to read widely throughout the year and make several formal presentations. While the ultimate aim of the course is to equip students with the basic intellectual tools to undertake historical research in their own area of interest, not all authors studied will make explicit reference to Asia or Africa. Upon completion of the course, students will: be equipped with the intellectual tools necessary to conduct research in their own areas of historical interest; be able to demonstrate a basic knowledge of different historical research methodologies and approaches and an awareness of how historians have used certain kinds of historical materials to understand the history of the period and place under examination and to substantiate their arguments in order to assess other historical work critically; have the ability to relate the outcomes listed above orally and in writing in an effective manner. Some of the topics and themes covered are:

The History of History;  
Historical Facts and Historical Fictions;  
Sources and their Limits;  
The Archives;  
History from Below;  
Oral History;  
History as Text;  
History in Numbers;  
Images and Visual Culture;  
Political History;  
Social History:  
Central Concepts;  
Cultural History;  
Body History;  
Gender and History;  
'Race', Nation, Community;  
Empire and Colonies;  
Orientalism and Occidentalism;  
'Impacts' and 'Responses';  
World History or Global History?

Historical methods of research Content Introduction Definition of research What is a historical method of research Stages of historical methods of research conducting Sources of historical methods of research plan of historical methods of research Characteristics of Historical Methods of Research Methods of using in historical methods of research Values of historical methods of research Advantages and disadvantages of historical methods research Conclusion References.

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