HISTORICAL RESEARCH

Unit Structure:

6.0 Objectives
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6.2 Meaning
6.3 The purpose of Historical Research
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6.5 Scope of Historical Research in Education
6.6 Approaches to the study of History
6.7 Steps in Historical Research
6.8 Problems and Weaknesses to be avoided in Historical Research.
6.9 Criteria of Evaluating Historical Research.

6.0 OBJECTIVES:

After reading this unit the student will be able to:

- Define the meaning of historical research, its purposesnand characteristics, scope and approaches to the study of history.
- Explain the steps of historical research.
- State the Weaknesses to be avoided in Historical Research.

6.1 INTRODUCTION:

History usually refers simply to an account of the past of human societies. It is the study of what “can be known…(to the historian)… through the surviving record.” Gottschalk referred to this as ‘history as record’, He further stated that “The process of critically examining and analyzing the records and survivals of the past is … called historical method. The imaginative reconstruction of the past from the data derived by that process is called historiography (the writing of history)”.
6.2 MEANING:

Historical research has been defined as the systematic and objective location, evaluation and synthesis of evidence in order to establish facts and draw conclusions about past events. It involves a critical inquiry of a previous age with the aim of reconstructing a faithful representation of the past. In historical research, the investigator studies documents and other sources that contain facts concerning the research theme with the objective of achieving better understanding of present policies, practices, problems and institutions. An attempt is made to examine past events or combinations of events and establish facts in order to arrive at conclusions concerning past events or predict future events. Historical research is a type of analytical research. Its common methodological characteristics include (i) identifying a research topic that addresses past events, (ii) review of primary and secondary data, (iii) systematic collection and objective evaluation of data related to past occurrences with the help of techniques of criticism for historical searches and evaluation of the information and (iv) synthesis and explanation of findings in order to test hypotheses concerning causes, effects or trends of these events that may help to explain present events and anticipate future events. Historical studies attempt to provide information and understanding of past historical, legal and policy events. The historical method consists of the techniques and guidelines by which historians use historical sources and other evidences to research and then to write history.

6.3 THE PURPOSE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH:

Conducting historical research in education can serve several purposes as follows:

1. It enables educationists to find out solutions to contemporary problems which have their roots in the past. i.e. it serves the purpose of bringing about reforms in education. The work of a historical researcher sometimes sensitizes educators to unjust or misguided practices in the past which may have unknowingly continued into the present and require reform. A historical researcher studies the past with a detached perspective and without any ego-involvement with the past practices. Hence it could be easier for educationists to identify misguided practices thus enabling them to bring about reforms.

2. It throws light on present trends and can help in predicting future trends. If we understand how an educationist or a group of
educationists acted in the past, we can predict how they will act in future. Similarly, studying the past enables a researcher to understand the factors / causes affecting present trends. In order to make such future predictions reliable and trustworthy, the historical researcher needs to identify and clearly describe in which ways the past differs from the present context and how the present social, economic and political situations and policies could have an impact on the present and the future.

3. It enables a researcher to re-evaluate data in relation to selected hypotheses, theories and generalizations that are presently held about the past.
4. It emphasizes and analyzes the relative importance and the effect of the various interactions in the prevailing cultures.
5. It enables us to understand how and why educational theories and practices developed.

6.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH

These are as follows:

1. It is not a mere accumulation of facts and data or even a portrayal of past events.
2. It is a flowing, vibrant report of past events which involves an analysis and explanation of these occurrences with the objective of recapturing the nuances, personalities and ideas that influenced these events.
3. 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, i.e. the process of data collection and analysis are done simultaneously are not two distinct phases of research.
4. It deals with discovery of data that already exists and does not involve creation of data using structured tools.
5. It is analytical in that it uses logical induction.
6. It has a variety of foci such as issues, events, movements and concepts.
7. It records and evaluates the accomplishments of individuals, agencies or institutions
6.5 SCOPE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

1. General educational history of specific periods such as (a) ancient India, (b) during British rule, (c) Independent India etc.

2. History of specific levels of education (a) primary education, (b) secondary education, (c) tertiary education etc. in India.

3. History of specific types of education such as (a) adult education, (b) distance education, (c) disadvantaged education, (d) women’s education in India.

4. Historical study of specific educational institutions such as (i) University of Mumbai, (ii) Aligarh Muslim University and so on.

5. History of the role of the teacher in ancient India.

6. History of specific components of education such as (a) curriculum, (b) text-books, (c) teaching-learning methods, (d) aims and objectives of education, (e) teacher-student relationships, (f) evaluation process and so on.

7. History of national education policies in India.

8. History of admission processes in professional / technical courses (medicine, engineering, management) in India.


10. Historical biographies of major contributors to education such as Mahatma Gandhi, Maharshi Karve, Maharshi Phule, Shri Aurobindo, Gurudev Tagore and so on.

11. History of educational administration.


13. History of educational legislation in India.


15. History of contemporary problems in India.

16. Historical study of the relationship between politics and education in India.

17. Historical study of the impact of the British rule in India.

18. Comparative history of education in India and some other country / countries.

19. Historical study of the system of state-sponsored inspection in India.
20. Historical study of education in specific Indian states such as Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan etc.

In other words, historical research in education may be concerned with an individual, a group, an idea a movement or an institution.

If a historical study focuses on an entire country / society / system, i.e. if it is broad in scope, it is said to be a macro-level historical research. On the other hand, if its focus is narrow and includes a selective set of people or events of interest, it is said to be a micro-level historical research.

6.6 APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF HISTORY:

According to Monaghan and Hartman, there are four major approaches to the study of the past:

a. **Qualitative Approach**: This is what most laypersons think of as history: the search for a story inferred from a range of written or printed evidence. The resultant history is organised chronologically and presented as a factual tale: a tale of a person who created reading textbooks, such as a biography of William Holmes McGuffey (Sullivan, 1994) or the Lindley Murray family (Monaghan, 1998) in the Western context. The sources of qualitative history range from manuscripts such as account books, school records, marginalia, letters, diaries and memoirs to imprints such as textbooks, children’s books, journals, and other books of the period under consideration.

b. **Quantitative Approach**: Here, rather than relying on “history by quotation,” as the former approach has been negatively called, researchers intentionally look for evidence that lends itself to being counted and that is therefore presumed to have superior validity and generalisability. Researchers have sought to estimate the popularity of a particular textbook by tabulating the numbers printed, based on copyright records. The assumption is that broader questions such as the relationship between education and political system in India or between textbooks and their influence on children can thus be addressed more authoritatively.

c. **Content Analysis**: Here the text itself is the focus of examination. This approach uses published works as its data (in the case of history of textbooks, these might be readers, or examples of the changing contents of school textbooks in
successive editions) and subjects them to a careful analysis that usually includes both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Content analysis has been particularly useful in investigating constructs such as race, caste, etc.

d. Oral History: Qualitative, quantitative, and content approaches use written or printed text as their database. In contrast, the fourth approach, oral history, turns to living memory. For instance, oral historians interested in women’s education could ask their respondents about their early experiences and efforts in women’s education.

These four approaches are not, of course, mutually exclusive. Indeed, historians avail themselves of as many of these as their question, topic, and time period permit. This integration is possible because the nature of historical research cuts across a variety of approaches, all of which commence with the recognition of a topic and the framing of a question. In other words, a historical study may be quantitative in nature, qualitative in nature or a combination of the approaches.

Its purpose can be mainly descriptive, aiming to understand some specific development in a particular period of time in a particular culture; or it could be explanatory, trying to test and accept/reject widely held assumptions.

A historical investigation is conducted with objectivity and the desire to minimize bias, distortion and prejudice. Thus, it is similar to descriptive method of research in this aspect. Besides, it aims at describing all aspects of the particular situation under study (or all that is accessible) in its search for the truth. Thus, it is holistic, comprehensive in nature and is similar to the interpretive approach. Though it is not empirical in nature (does not collect data through direct observation or experimentation), it does make use of reports (all the available written and/or oral material), it definitely qualifies to be a scientific activity. This is because it requires scholarship to conduct a systematic and objective study and evaluation and synthesis of evidence so as to arrive at conclusions. In other words, historical research is scientific in nature.

Moreover, any competent researcher in other types of empirical studies reviews the related literature so as to find out prior researches and theoretical work done on a particular topic. This requires studying journals, books, encyclopedias, unpublished theses and so on. This is followed by interpretation of their significance.
These steps are common to empirical research and historical research. i.e. to some extent, every researcher makes use of the historical method in his/her research.

However, it should be mentioned here that historical researcher in education “discovers” already existing data from a wide range of historical sources such as documents, relics, autobiographies, diaries or photographs. On the other hand, in other types of educational studies, the researcher “creates” data through observations, measurement through tests and experimentation. To this extent, historical research differs from descriptive and experimental researches.

Check Your Progress - I

Q.1 Define the following
(a) Characteristics of historical research in education.
(b) Purposes of historical research.

Q.2 (a) Give examples of research topics in historical research
(b) Explain the approaches to historical research.

6.7 STEPS IN HISTORICAL RESEARCH:

The essential steps involved in conducting a historical research are as follows:

A. Identify a topic/subject and define the problems/questions to be investigated.
B. Search for sources of data.
C. Evaluate the historical sources.
D. Analyze, synthesize and summarize interpreting the data / information.

E. Write the research report.

Since most historical studies are largely qualitative in nature, the search for sources of data, evaluating, analyzing, synthesizing and summarizing information and interpreting the findings may not always be discreet, separate, sequential steps i.e. the sequence of steps in historical research is flexible.

Let us now look at each of these steps in details.

A. **Identify a Topic and Define the Problem**

According to Borg, “In historical research, it is especially important that the student carefully defines his problem and appraises its appropriateness before committing himself too fully. Many problems are not adaptable to historical research methods and cannot be adequately treated using this approach. Other problems have little or no chance of producing significant results either because of the lack of pertinent data or because the problem is a trivial one.”

Beach has classified the problems that prompt historical inquiry into five types:

1. Current social issues are the most popular source of historical problems in education. e.g. Rural education, adult and continuing education, positive discrimination in education etc.

2. Histories of specific individuals, histories of specific educational institutions and histories of educational movement. These studies are often conducted with “the simple desire to acquire knowledge about previously unexamined phenomena”.

3. A historical study of interpreting ideas or events that previously had seemed unrelated. For example, history of educational financing and history of aims of education in India may be unrelated. But a person reviewing these two researches separately may detect some relationship between the two histories and design a study to understand this relationship.

4. A historical study aimed at synthesizing old data or merge them with new historical facts discovered by the researcher.
5. A historical inquiry involving reinterpretation of past events that have been studied by other historical researchers. This is known as revisionist history.

On the other hand, in order to identify a significant research problem, Gottschalk recommends that four questions should be asked:

(i) Where do the events take place?
(ii) Who are the persons involved?
(iii) When do the events occur?
(iv) What kinds of human activity are involved?

The scope of the study can be determined on the basis of the extent of emphasis placed on the four questions identified by Gottschalk i.e. the geographical area included, the number of persons involved, the time span included and the number and kinds of human activities involved often, the exact scope and delimitation of a study is decided by a researcher only after the relevant material has been obtained. The selection of a topic in historical research depends on several personal factors of the researcher such as his/her motivation, interest, historical knowledge and curiosity, ability to interpret historical facts and so on. If the problem selected involves understanding an event, an institution, a person, a past period, more clearly, it should be taken up for a research.

The topic selected should be defined in terms of the types of written materials and other resources available to you.

This should be followed by formulating a specific and testable hypothesis or a series of research questions, if required. This will provide a clear focus and direction to data collection, analysis and interpretation. i.e. it provides a structure to the study.

According to Borg, without hypotheses, historical research often becomes little more than an aimless gathering of facts.

B. Search for Sources of Data

Historical research is not empirical in that it does not include direct observation of events or persons. Here, the researcher interprets past events on the basis of traces they have left. He uses the evidence of past acts and thoughts. Thus, through he/she does not use his/her own observation but on other people’s observations. The
researcher’s job here is to test the truthfulness of the reports of other people’s observations. These observations are obtained from several sources of historical data. Let us now try to discuss various sources of historical data.

**Sources of Historical Data**

These sources are broadly classified into two types:

(a) **Primary Sources:** Gottschalk defines a primary data source as “the testimony of any eyewitness, or of a witness by any other of the senses, or of a mechanical device like the Dictaphone – that is, of one who … was present at the events of which he tells. A primary source must thus have been produced by a contemporary of the events it narrates.” In other words, primary sources are tangible materials that provide a description of an historical event and were produced shortly after the event happened. They have a direct physical relationship to the event being studied. Examples of primary sources include new paper report, letters, public documents, court decisions, personal diaries, autobiographies, artifacts and eyewitness’s verbal accounts. These primary sources of data can be divided into two broad categories as follows:

(i) The remains or relics of a given historical period. These could include photographs, coins, skeletons, fossils, tools, weapons, utensils, furniture, buildings and pieces of art and culture (**object d’art**). Though these were not originally meant for transmitting information to future generations they could prove very useful sources in providing reliable and sound evidence about the past. Most of these relics provide non-verbal information.

(ii) Those objects that have a direct physical relationship with the events being reconstructed. This includes documents such as laws, files, letters, manuscripts, government resolutions, charters, memoranda, wills, news-papers, magazines, journals, films, government or other official publications, maps, charts, log-books, catalogues, research reports, record of minutes of meetings, recording, inscriptions, transcriptions and so on.

(b) **Secondary Sources:** A secondary source is one in which the eyewitness or the participant i.e. the person describing the event was not actually present but who obtained his/her descriptions or narrations from another person or source. This another person may or may not be a primary source. Secondary sources, thus, do not
have a direct physical relationship with the event being studied. They include data which are not original. Examples of secondary sources include textbooks, biographies, encyclopedias, reference books, replicas of art objects and paintings and so on. It is possible that secondary sources contain errors due to passing of information from one source to another. These errors could get multiplied when the information passes through many sources thereby resulting in an error of great magnitude in the final data. Thus, wherever possible, the researcher should try to use primary sources of data. However, that does not reduce the value of secondary sources.

In conclusion, the various sources of historical information—both primary and secondary can be summarized as follows:

**Sources of Historical Information**

- **Documents (written / printed)**
  - diaries
  - memoirs
  - notebooks
  - yearbooks
  - memos
  - lagbooks
  - laws
  - Court testimony
  - Committee reports
  - Government

- **Quantitative Records**
  - School budgets
  - Student attendance records
  - Staff attendance records
  - Student’s marks
  - Financial statements

- **Oral Records (Spoken words)**
  - Ballads
  - Tales
  - Saga
  - Oral interviews of eyewitnesses and participants
  - Census records

- **Relics (Physical or Visual objects)**
  - School Buildings
  - School Furniture
  - Textbooks
  - Pictures
  - Drawings
  - Architectural Plans
  - Instructional Aids

It must be mentioned here that the branch of historical research using all or some types of oral records is known as **oral history**.

It should also be mentioned here that some objects can be classified as documents or relics depending on the how they are used in a historical study. For example, in a research study on how a historical figure (a politician, a freedom fighter or a social reformer) is presented in textbooks of different periods, the textbook will be classified as a document as the emphasis here is on analyzing its content—matter given in a verbal form. On the other hand, in a research study on printing methods in the past, the textbook can be used as a relic as the focus here is not on analyzing its contents but on its physical, outward characteristics or features.
Searching for Historical Data

The procedure of searching for historical data should be systematic and pre-planned. The researcher should know what information he needs so as to identify important sources of data and provide a direction to his search for relevant data. Using his knowledge, imagination and resourcefulness, he needs to explore the kinds of data required, persons involved, institutions involved. This will help him to identify the kinds of records he require and whom he should interview. Since a historical research is mainly qualitative in nature all the primary and secondary sources cannot be identified in advance. It is possible that as one collects some data, analyzes and interprets it, the need for further pertinent data may arise depending on the interpretive framework. This will enable him to identify other primary or secondary sources of data.

The search for sources of data begins with wide reading of preliminary sources including published bibliographies, biographies, atlas, specialized chronologies, dictionaries of quotations and terms. Good university and college libraries tend to have a great deal of such preliminary materials. This will enable a researcher to identify valuable secondary sources on the topic being studied such books on history relating to one’s topic. For extensive materials on a subject, the researcher may need to go to a large research library or a library with extensive holdings on a specific subject. Such secondary materials could include other historian’s conclusions and interpretations, historical information, references to other secondary and primary sources. The historical researcher needs to evaluate the secondary sources for their validity and authenticity. Now the researcher should turn his attention to the primary sources. These are usually available in the institution or the archives especially if the source concerns data pertaining to distant past or data pertaining to events in which the chief witnesses are either dead or inaccessible. In case of data concerning the recent past, the researcher can contact witnesses or participants themselves in order to interview them and/or study the documents possessed by them.

However, it is not possible for a historical researcher to examine all the material available. Selecting the best sources of data is important in a historical study. In a historical study the complete “population” of available data can never be obtained or known. Hence the sample of materials examined must always be a purposive one. What it represents and what it fails to represent should be considered. The researcher needs to identify and use a sample that should be representative enough for wider generalization.
c) **Evaluation of the Historical Sources**

The data of historical sources is subject to two types of evaluation. These two types are: (i) external evaluation or criticism and (ii) internal evaluation or criticism. Let us now look at these in detail.

(i) **External Criticism of Data:**

This is sometimes also known as lower criticism of data. External criticism regards the issue of authenticity of the data from the psychological attitude of the researcher in that it is primarily concerned with the question, is the source of data genuine? External criticism seeks to determine whether the document or the artifact that the researcher is studying is genuinely valid primary data. It is possible to get counterfeit documents or artifacts. External criticism of the sources of data is of paramount importance in establishing the credibility of the research. Although, theoretically, the main purpose of external criticism is the establishment of historical truth, in reality its actual operation is chiefly restricted to the negative role i.e. to identity and expose forgeries, frauds, hoaxes desertions and counterfeits. In order to identify such forgeries, researcher needs to look at problems pertaining to plagiarism, alterations of document, insertions, deletions or unintentional omissions. This will reveal whether the historical source of data is authentic or not. Establishing authenticity of documents may involve carbondating, handwriting analysis, identification of ink and paper, vocabulary usage, signatures, script, spelling, names of places and writing style and other considerations. In other words, it examines the document and its external features rather than the statements it contains. It tries to determine whether (a) the information it contains was available at the time the document was written? (b) this information is consistent with what is known about the author or the period from another source?

In other words, external criticism is aimed at answering questions about the nature of the historical source such as who wrote it? Where? When? Under which circumstances? Is it original? Is it genuine? and so on.

ii) **Internal Criticism of Data:**

Having established the authenticity of the source of historical data, the researcher now focuses his/her attention on the accuracy and wroth of the data contained in the document. Internal criticism
is concerned with the meaning of the written material. It is also known as higher criticism of data. It deals answering questions such as what does it mean? What was the author attempting to say? What thought was the author trying to convey? Is it possible that people would act in the way described in the document? Is it possible that events described occurred so quickly? What inferences or interpretations could be extracted from these words? Do the financial data / figures mentioned in the document seem reasonable for that period in the past? What does the decision of a court mean? What do the words of the decision convey regarding the intent and the will of the count? Is there any (unintended) misinformation given in the document? Is there any evidence of deception? and so on here, the researcher needs to be very cautious so that he does not reject a statement only because the event described in the document appears to be improbable.

In addition to answering these questions, internal criticism should also include establishing the credibility of the author of the document. According to Travers, the following questions could be answered so as to establish the author’s credibility: Was he a trained or untrained observer of the event? i.e. How competent was he? What was his relationship to the event? To what extent was he under pressure, from fear or vanity resulting in distortion or omission of facts? What was the intent of the writer of the document? To what extent was he an expert at recording the particular event? Were the habits of the author such that they might interfere with the accuracy of recording? Was he too antagonistic or too sympathetic to give a true picture? How long after the event did he record his testimony? Was he able to remember accurately? Is he in agreement with other independent witnesses?

These questions need to be answered for two reasons:

i) Perceptions are individualized and selective. Even if eyewitnesses are competent and truthful, they could still record different descriptions of the events they witnessed or experienced.

ii) Research studies in Psychology indicate that eye witnesses can be very unreliable, especially if they are emotionally aroused or under stress at the time of the event. (e.g. at the time of demolition of Babri Masjid or at the time of Gujarat riots in 2002.)
This brings us to the question of bias especially when life histories or communal situations are being studied. According to Plummer, there are three possible sources of bias as follows:

**Source One : The Life History Informant**

- Is misinformation (unintended) given?
- Has there been evasion?
- Is there evidence of direct lying and deception?
- Is a ‘front’ being presented?
- What may the informant ‘take for granted’ and hence not reveal?
- How far is the informant ‘pleasing you’?
- How much has been forgotten?
- How much may be self-deception?

**Source Two : The Social Scientist Research**

- Could any of the following be shaping the outcome?
  (a) Attitudes of researcher: age, gender, class, race etc.
  (b) Demeanour of researcher: dress, speech, body language etc.
  (c) Personality of researcher: anxiety, need for approval, hostility, warmth etc.
  (d) Attitudes researcher: religion, politics, tolerance, general assumptions
  (e) Scientific role of researcher: theory held etc. (researcher expectancy)

**Source Three : The Interaction**

The joint act needs to be examined. Is bias coming from

- The physical setting – ‘social’ space
- The prior interaction?
- Non-verbal communication?
- Vocal behavior?

Often, internal and external criticism are interdependent and complementary processes. The internal and external criticism of data require a high level of scholarship.
D. Analysis, Synthesis, Summarizing and Interpretation of Data:

We have seen how data can be located and evaluated. Let us now look at how to collect and control the data so that the greatest return from the innumerable hours spent in archives, document rooms and libraries can be reaped. The research should not only learn how to take notes but also learn how to organize the various notes, note cards, bibliography cards and memoranda so as to derive useful and meaningful facts for interpretation. Hence before beginning historical research, the researcher should have a specific and systematic plan for the acquisition, organization, storage and retrieval of the data. Following are some suggestions that may help you in systematizing your research efforts.

(i) **Note cards and Bibliography Cards:**

It would be convenient for you to prepare bibliography cards of size 3×5 inches for taking down bibliographical notes. A bibliography card is valuable not only for gathering and recording of information but also for locating it again at a future date, if necessary, without going back to the library again and again. Such a card contains the essential information concerning a bibliographical source. Keep plenty of such cards with you when you go to the library so that you can report very valuable references encountered unexpectedly. You can also note down the document’s relation to your research. A sample of a bibliographic reference card could be as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial No.</th>
<th>__________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of the Document</td>
<td>____________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of the Journal</td>
<td>____________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vol. _____ No. _____ Month _____ Year _____ Page No.(s) _____</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Place of publication, Name of Publisher, Edition, Year, Page (in case of a book): ____________________________

Library where information is obtained: ____________________________

Call No. ____________________

Source of bibliographic information: ____________________________

How is it related to the research topic: ____________________________

Additional Comments, if any: ____________________________
You can ideally have two copies of such a bibliographic card. One copy can be arranged according to the authors’ names alphabetically whereas the other copy can be arranged as per serial number of the card.

On the other hand, a note card can be of size 4×6 or 5×7 inches for substantive notes. It is advisable to place only one item of information on each card. Each card can be given a code so as to indicate the place / question / theme / period / person to which the note relates. These cards then can be arranged as per the question, theme, period, place or person under study so as to make analysis easier. In other words, note cards can be kept in multiple copies. (e.g. in triplicate or quadruplicate) depending on the ultimate analysis of the data. Given here is a sample note card.

| Main Heading : __________________________ | Card No. |
| Sub – Heading : __________________________ |          |
|                                               |          |
| Source : Author : _______ Year : _______ pp._________ |
| Title : __________ Bibliography card No. __________ |

In this card, one can mention the bibliography card no. which can be referred to for further information it required. The reverse of the card can be used if the space is found to be insufficient for necessary information.

(ii) Summary of Quantitative Data :

Usually historical studies are chiefly qualitative in nature since the data obtained includes verbal and / or symbolic material from an institution, society or culture’s past. However, when the study involves quantitative data pertaining to the past events, you need to think carefully about the relevance of the data to your research. This is because recording and analysis of quantitative data is time-consuming and sometimes expensive. Examples of quantitative data in historical research include records of students’ and teachers’ attendance rates, examination results, financial
information such as budgets, income and expenditure statements, salaries, fees and so on. Content analysis is one of the methods involving quantitative data. The basic goal of content analysis is to take a verbal, non-quantitative document and transform it into quantitative data.

(iii) **Interpretation of Historical Data:**

Once the researcher establishes the validity and authenticity of data, interpretation of the facts in the light of the topic of research is necessary. This step requires caution, imagination, ingenuity, insight and scholarliness. The scientific status of his study depends on these characteristics. The researcher needs to be aware of his/her biases, values, prejudices and interest as these could influence the analysis and interpretation of the data as well as the perceptions of the researcher. He needs to make sense out of the multitude of data gathered which generally involves a synthesis of data in relation to a hypothesis or question or theory rather than mere accumulation or summarization. In doing so, he/she should avoid biases and unduly projecting his/her own personality onto the data. The data should be fitted into a logically parsimonious structure. The researcher should be clear about the interpretative framework so as to become sensitive towards bias in other historical researchers’ interpretations who have conducted research on the same or similar topics.

In historical research, ‘causes’ are in the form of antecedents or precipitating factors. They are not ‘causes’ in the strictly scientific sense. Such antecedents are always complex and hence the researcher should avoid over simplification while interpreting them. Past events are mainly in the form of human behaviour. Therefore ‘causes’ in historical research could be interpreted in terms of motives of the participants involved.

The researcher needs to identify the motives of the people involved in the event under study while interpreting the data. These motives may be multiple in nature and interact with each other. This makes interpretation of the data a difficult task. For example, a new government decides to change the prevalent textbooks. The motives here could be many such as its political ideology does not match the prevalent textbooks, it had a personal grudge against the authors of the prevalent textbooks or the ministers concerned wanted to derive personal glory out of his actions. These reasons may influence each other making the task of interpretation of data difficult.
Historical researchers can make use of concepts from other social and behavioural science disciplines in analyzing interpreting data. Some examples of such concepts may be bureaucracy, role, institution (from sociology), leadership, institutional effectiveness (from management), culture (from anthropology), motive, personality attitude etc. (from psychology) and so on.

The researcher also can make use of the concepts of historical time and historical space while interpreting the data.

The concept of historical time makes use of a chronology of events. i.e. the researcher needs to identify the chain of events (chronology) of substantive history and then try to understand the meaning of these events, the relationship among the events and the relationship of the events to the research topic. The researcher is studying more than one set of chronological data within the same time frame may gain increased insight into multiple events and their causes.

The concept of historical space deals with ‘where’ the event originated, spread or culminated. This could provide a different insight into the meaning of the data.

The historical researcher can also use analogy as a source of hypothesis or as a frame of reference for interpretation. i.e. He / she can draw parallels between one historical event and other events. Here, one has to be aware of similarities, differences as well as exceptions while comparing two historical events, otherwise, such an extrapolation will be unreliable. Also, it is risky to interpret an event by comparing with another event in another culture at another time.

iv) Making Inferences and Generalizations in Historical Research:

in order to identify and explain the ‘cause/s’ of a historical event, the research must be aware of his/ her assumptions which are then used in ascribing causation to subsequent events. Some examples of such assumption could include (i) history repeats itself, or (ii) historical events are unique. The researcher must make clear whether his / her analysis is based on the former assumption or the latter.

Some examples of ‘causes’ of historical events identified in prior researches include (i) strong ideology (eg. Maharshi Karve’s ideology of women’s education) (ii) actions of certain key persons (e.g. Mohamed Ali Jinnah’s actions for India’s partition), (iii)
Advances in Science in technology (e.g. use of computers in education), (iv) economic / geographical / psychological / sociological factors or a combination of all these (e.g. privatization of education) etc.

The historian’s objective is not only to establish facts but also to determine trends in the data and causes of events leading to generalizations i.e. he / she needs to synthesize and interpret and not merely summarize the data. These data, as in other types of researches, are obtained not from the entire population of persons, settings, events or objects pertaining to the topic, but from a small sample. Moreover, this sample is selected from the remains of the past. It cannot be selected from the entire population of documents or relics that existed during the period under study. Such remains may not be representative. This necessitates a very careful and cautious approach in locating consistency in different documents and relics while making generalizations. Also, the researcher should not rely on only one document pertaining to an individual from the past while making a generalization as it will not be known whether the individual held a particular opinion about an educational issue consistently or had changed it over a period of time. If he had changed his opinion, the researcher must find out when and how it was changed, under what conditions and what were the consequences. This makes it imperative that the researcher uses as many primary and secondary sources as possible on a topic. If the evidence is limited, he needs restrict the generalizability of his interpretations to that extent.

E) Writing the Research Report:

This task involves the highest level of scholarship. In a historical research, data collection is flexible. Besides, due to the relative lack of conclusive evidence on which valid generalizations can be established, the writing of historical research has to be a little freer so as to allow subjective interpretation of the data. (This by no means implies distortion of truth). Thus reports of historical research have no standard formats. The presentation of data analysis, interpretations and the findings depend on the nature of the problem.

There are several broad ways of reporting historical investigation as follows:

i) The researcher can report the historical facts as answers to different research questions. Answer to each question could be reported in a separate chapter.
ii) He/she can present the facts in a chronological order with each chapter pertaining to a specific historical period chronologically.

iii) Report can also written in a thematic manner where each chapter deals with a specific theme/topic.

iv) Chapters could also deal with each state of India or each district of an Indian state separately.

v) Chapter could also pertain to specific historical persons separately.

vi) The researcher can also combine two or more of these approaches while writing the research report.

In addition, the report should contain a chapter each on introduction, methodology, review of related literature, findings, the researcher’s interpretations and reflections on the interpretative process.

**Check Your Progress – II**

Q1. Explain how will you identify a research topic for studying the history of education?

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2. What are the different sources of historical data? How will you evaluate these sources?

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3. What care will you take in making inferences and generalizations in historical research?

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4. How will you organize writing the research report?

The researcher needs to demonstrate his / her scholarship and grasp of the topic, his / her insights into the topic, and the plausibility and clarity of interpretations. This requires creativity, ingenuity and imagination so as to make the research report adequate and comprehensive.

6.8 PROBLEMS AND WEAKNESSES TO BE AVOIDED IN HISTORICAL RESEARCH

Some of the weaknesses, problems and mistakes that need to be avoided in a historical research are as follows:

1. The problem of research should not be too broad.
2. It should be selected after ensuring that sources of data are existent, accessible and in a language known to the researcher.
3. Excessive use of easy-to-find secondary sources of data should be avoided. Though locating primary sources of data time-consuming and requires efforts, they are usually more trustworthy.
4. Adequate internal and external criticism of sources of historical data is very essential for establishing the authenticity and validity of the data. It is also necessary to ascertain whether statements concerning evidence by one participant have influenced opinions of other participant or witnesses.
5. The researcher needs to be aware of his/her own personal values, interests and biases. For this purpose, it is necessary for the researcher to quote statements alongwith the context in which they were made. Lifting them out of context shows the intention of persuading the readers. The researcher also needs to avoid both-extreme generosity or admiration as well as extreme criticism. The researcher needs to avoid reliance on beliefs such as “old is gold” “new is always better” or “change implies progress”. All such beliefs indicate researcher’s bias and personal values.
6. The researcher needs to ensure that the concepts borrowed from other disciplines are relevant to his/her topic.

7. He/She should avoid unwarranted causal inferences arising on account of (i) oversimplification (causes of historical event may be multiple, complex and interactive), (ii) Faulty interpretation of meanings of words, (iii) inability to distinguish between facts, opinions and situations, (iv) inability to identify and discard irrelevant or unimportant facts and (v) Faulty generalization based on inadequate evidence, faulty logic and reasoning in the analysis of data, use of wrong analogy and faulty comparison of events in unsimilar cultures.

8. The researcher needs to synthesize facts into meaningful chronological and thematic patterns.

9. The report should be written in a logical and scientific manner. It should avoid flowery or flippant language, emotional words, dull and colourless language or persuasive style.

10. The researcher should avoid projecting current problems onto historical events as this is likely to create distortions.

6.9 CRITERIA OF EVALUATING HISTORICAL RESEARCH:

Mouly has provided the following criteria of evaluating historical research:

1. **Problem:** Has the problem been clearly defined? It is difficult enough to conduct historical research adequately without adding to the confusion by starting out with a nebulous problem. Is the problem capable of solution? Is it within the competence of the investigator?

2. **Data:** Are data of a primary nature available in sufficient completeness to provide a solution, or has there been an overdependence on secondary or unverifiable sources?

3. **Analysis:** Has the dependability of the data been adequately established? Has the relevance of the data been adequately explored?

4. **Interpretation:** Does the author display adequate mastery of his data and insight into their relative significance? Does he display adequate historical perspective? Does he maintain his objective
or does he allow personal bias to distort the evidence? Are his hypotheses plausible? Have they been adequately tested? Does he take a sufficiently broad view of the total situation? Does he see the relationship between his data and other ‘historical facts’?

5. **Presentation:** Does the style of writing attract as well as inform? Does the report make a contribution on the basis of newly discovered data or new interpretation, or is it simply ‘uninspired back work”? Does it reflect scholarliness?

**Check your Progress III**

1. What care will you take to avoid weaknesses in conducting historical research?

2. State the criteria of evaluating historical research.

**Suggested Readings:**


