Historical Research

Chapter 7

Islamic Azad University-Najafabad
Saeedeh Shafiee
2015
What is Historical Research?

- The systematic collection and evaluation of data to describe, explain, and understand actions or events that occurred sometime in the past.
- There is no manipulation or control of variables as in experimental research.
- An attempt is made to reconstruct what happened during a certain period of time as completely and accurately as possible.
The Purposes of Historical Research

- To make people aware of what has happened in the past in order to:
  - Learn from past failures and successes
  - Apply them to present-day problems
  - Make predictions
  - Test hypotheses concerning relationships or trends
  - Understand present educational practices and policies more fully
Steps Involved in Historical Research

- Defining the Problem
- Locating relevant sources
  - Documents
  - Numerical records
  - Oral statements
  - Relics
- Summarizing information obtained from historical sources
- Evaluation of historical sources
  - Internal criticism
  - External criticism
Categories of Sources

- **Documents** are written or printed materials that have been produced in some form or another.
- **Numerical records** can be considered as a separate type of source in and of themselves or as a subcategory of documents.
- **Oral Statements** are stories or other forms of oral expression that leave a record for future generations.
- **Relics** are any objects whose physical or visual characteristics can provide some information about the past.
Primary vs. Secondary Sources

- A primary source is one prepared by an individual who was a participant in or a direct witness to the event being described.
- A secondary source is a document prepared by an individual who was not a direct witness to an event, but who obtained a description of the event from someone else.
- **Internal criticism**
  - Accuracy, trustworthiness and veracity of materials
  - Is the source the result of pressure, bias or vanity?

- **External criticism**
  - Authenticity and genuineness of data
  - Is the source a forgery, a counterfeit or a hoax?
Data Analysis in Historical Research

- Historical researchers use the following methods to make sense out of large amounts of data:
  - Theoretical model leading to a content analysis
  - Use of patterns or themes
  - Coding system
  - Quantitative data to validate interpretations
Advantages and Disadvantages of Historical Research

- **Advantages**
  - Permits investigation of topics and questions that can be studied in no other fashion
  - Can make use of more categories of evidence than most other methods (with the exception of case studies and ethnographic studies)

- **Disadvantages**
  - Cannot control for threats to internal validity
  - Limitations are imposed due to the content analysis
  - Researchers cannot ensure representation of the sample