

“Not Story but (Hi)story”: Innovation and Technology in the Collection of Historical Data

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ABSTRACT

The processes of teaching and learning History as a field of discipline from time immemorial had been “greeted with nothing less than misconception” as it is largely believed that this academic discipline is mostly concerned with telling of the stories of Kingdoms, Chiefdoms, and the reign of their kings, chiefs and other strong personalities in the society. Whereas, the discipline is saddled with the responsibility of collection of Historical data, interpretation and indeed the justification of the repeat or otherwise of such occurrences. This presentation is therefore positioned to look at the relevance of history in the 21st century Africa and indeed to further establish the importance of innovation (changes) that has occurred in the teaching of History in the modern time. This article therefore establish the relevance of Historical discourse and indeed the importance as well as the usage of modern technology for the collection of data

Keywords: Historical Discourse, Innovation, Technology, Historical Data, Relevance

Introduction

From time immemorial, the subject ‘History’ has been erroneously taken to be the study of the reign of Kings and the Heroic acts of mortals and gods. Whereas, the subject ‘History’ according to J. Bury is Science...’no more, no less’. By this statement, it therefore implies that the study and subject of History as a course tilts more towards Science that it is believed to be the recap of the deeds of humans and gods. As such, history, as both an arts and science course deals with the events of human societies, recounting causes of actions, reaction as well as there in-action, in doing so, it collects, collates and interprets data and that helps it perch its tents more towards the sciences than the arts where its functions are said to be the telling of ‘stories’ than educating the general public for action and knowledge

What then is History?

History is a narration of the events which have happened among mankind, including an account of the rise and fall of nations, as well as of other great changes which have affected the political and social condition of the human race.—John J. Anderson. 1876. *A Manual of General History*

The concept of History has been misunderstood severally, where it is mostly regarded as the study of kings and kingdoms, chiefs and chiefdoms and the sorts. Whereas, history is the study of ‘important past’ of human and human society, which is capable of directing the actions of such societies in the present.

In a more likely manner, history is seen by Akinjogbin as an organised critical study of such past activities of human beings as had produced significant effects on subsequent course of events. He went further to put that it is not just studying the past, or the record of unimportant past, but the record of such events that are of importance to human existence and wellbeing.¹ The position of Akinjogbin is such a critical one in the manner that it further point that the study in itself is critical and entails serious and rigorous analysis as the historian himself tries to make a distinction of what is most important and or otherwise.

¹ Akinjogbin...in Ajetunmobi, R.O.

Therefore, the quality of the outcome of the work hinges on the critical analytical power of the historian to bring life, meaning and indeed importance to such matters as he deems important for knowledge.

More, the Encyclopaedia Britannica defines history as a discipline that studies the chronological records of events (as affecting a nation or people) based on critical examination of source materials and usually presenting an explanation of source materials and usually presenting an explanation of their causes (and consequences on human society and on subsequent human society actions and reactions)

Against this background, history has gone farther beyond the provision of explanations of causes of events to expatiating and incorporating courses or events, consequences and implications. The nature of history therefore is one that allows the historian adopt various methods and styles including the scientific styles/ methods to achieve his intentions.

Importance of History in the 21st Century

Historians do not perform heart transplants, improve highway design, or arrest criminals. In a society that quite correctly expects education to serve useful purposes, the functions of history can seem more difficult to define than those of engineering or medicine. History is in fact very useful, actually indispensable, but the products of historical study are less tangible, sometimes less immediate, than those that stem from some other disciplines.

Understanding People and Societies

In the first place, history offers a storehouse of information about how people and societies behave. Understanding the operations of people and societies is difficult, though a number of disciplines make the attempt. An exclusive reliance on current data would needlessly handicap our efforts. How can we evaluate war if the nation is at peace unless we use historical materials? Therefore, the place of history comes to play.

But even these recourses depend on historical information, except for in limited, often artificial cases in which experiments can be devised to determine how people act.

Major aspects of a society's operation, like mass elections, missionary activities, or military alliances, cannot be set up as precise experiments. Consequently, history must serve, however imperfectly, as our laboratory, and data from the past must serve as our most vital evidence in the unavoidable quest to figure out why our complex species behaves as it does in societal settings. This, fundamentally, is why we cannot stay away from history: it offers the only extensive evidential

Understand Change

The second reason history is inescapable as a subject of serious concern follows closely on the earlier one. It is no gain say that the past causes the present, and so the future. Any time we try to know why something happened whether a shift in political party dominance, a major change in the society, or a war somewhere, we have to look for factors that took shape earlier.

Sometimes fairly recent history will suffice to explain a major development, but often we need to look further back to identify the causes of change. Only through studying history can we grasp how things change; only through history can we begin to comprehend the factors that cause change; and only through history can we understand what elements of an institution or a society persist despite change.

History is indispensable to understanding why certain changes occur. In many ways, historical analysis is a more challenging kind of exploration than genetic experimentation. Historians have in fact greatly contributed in recent decades to the understanding of trends (or patterns of change) in certain areas and to the grasp of dimensions of addiction as an evolving social problem.

Contributions to Moral Understanding

History provides a terrain for moral contemplation. Studying the (Hi)stories of individuals and situations in the past allows a student of history to test his or her own moral sense, to hone it against some of the real complexities individuals have faced in difficult settings. People who have weathered adversity not just in some work of fiction, but in real, historical circumstances can provide inspiration. "History teaching by example" is one phrase that describes this use of a study of the past a study not only of certifiable heroes, the great men

and women of history who successfully worked through moral dilemmas, but also of more ordinary people who provide lessons in courage, diligence, or constructive protest.

Identity Provision

History helps to provide identity, and this is one of the reasons all modern nations encourage its teaching in some form. Historical data include evidence about how families, groups, institutions and whole countries were formed and about how they have evolved while retaining cohesion. Many institutions, businesses, communities, and social units, such as ethnic groups use history for similar identity purposes

Data Collection and Usage in History

In one clear term, data in history means the source of history. Where in certain cases the data has received human adjustment (secondary) and in other cases, it is raw and without any human manipulations (primary). As a matter of illustration, for certain questions to be answered, there is the need for the historian to interact with certain figures and or human, this may include and but not limited to eye witnesses and or real actors in the situation.

Historical Research

The purpose of this type of research is to obtain a better understanding of the present situation through the evaluation of the past and therefore making an intelligent preparation for the future. This type of research is very useful in the following ways:

- (i) aids in avoiding past avoidable errors,
- (ii) builds on what is known and
- (iii) aids in predicting the future.

For instance, when we ponder over how to solve life's problems such as human behaviours, financial problems, scarcity of essential items, systems' failure etc and or others as earlier stated, we tend to look for answers to these problems elsewhere. We do this by prioritizing the problems according to their urgency, importance, ease of getting solutions and answers etc. Most of the processes are carried out unconsciously. The differences between this type of research and scientific or educational research is that the latter is deliberately and

systematically carried out following procedures that are acceptable to the scientific or educational community of experts. Variables are identified and isolated, controls are set up to isolate the effects of the variables under study. Whereas, in history, these variables are also identified and data is collected, collated and further interpreted by the historian whose job is to give meaning to the data (information collected)

Methods of Data Collection in History

Interview –eye witness or participants in an event may be interviewed for the purpose of clarity and giving the findings atom of concreteness of event and removing it from the stage of its fluidity.

Documents - The primary sources of data include documents, relics and other things that have direct physical relationships, or if it is an ancient or more recent historical object, the remains itself e.g. the *Olokun* bronze statue.

Secondary sources are materials that have been recorded or documented by someone who collected information from direct or indirect sources. Examples include bibliographies, references and other materials that have indirect contact with the main source.

History and the Sciences

Multi disciplinary approach to the study of history, since the time of Hume and Voltaire, has become steadily more useful to peoples and it has broadened its scope, and gained an eclectic use of new tools. It has learned to take all possible profit from social studies, statistics, sociology, economics, psychology and geography in presenting a complete and exact picture of the past. It has employed new ideas and tools in writing of the state, which is usually the greatest common denominator of society, and in delineating political movement. It has turned to the neglected field of industrial and business history with due attention to science and technology. In doing so, it has not forgotten that business cannot be interpreted solely by figures of process and profit, because ruined men weep and suddenly enriched men dance, the best historian here as elsewhere will look into human psychology and social psychology.

Diplomatic history has been revitalized. Social and intellectual history has been deepened. This narrative power in interdisciplinary approach is indispensable to the best of historical effort. Subjects in the humanities, pure and applied sciences are very useful today in the study of culture

history. Thus, such subjects like Biology, Geography, Archaeology, Ethnography, Mathematics, Linguistics, Anthropology, Law, Political Science and others are very useful in the study of history.

Historians have discovered, for example certain uniform tendencies governing movement of religious enthusiasm. The undertones are not unconnected with lust for power, position, prestige and wealth, apart from religious inspiration. It is believed in some quarters that history repeats itself in our time. Such believers opine that any bill to be passed in the House of Representatives brings about lobbying. The presence of lobby areas in West Africa hotels and government buildings support this. However, what is factual about this is the occurrence of similar event. In addition, multi-religious states are prone more to religious crisis.

Historical writing involves three elements. One is the element of factual inquiry and sifting (Science Research). This is the idea of strict use of highly exact principles to accumulate, observe and weight data. Thus, history can be said to be scientific in method. The second element is that of interpretation. A historian having accumulate his fact can discover their logical connection with each other, the laws which rule them, and their significance for the period studied and for our own time. It is through this medium that present generation can learn adequately from the mistakes of the past,

A scientific historian who studied revolutions would not merely accumulate a mass of data on these human upheavals; he would try to formulate some laws common to all. It is not uncommon in West Africa today for the intervention of military rule in civilian administration to be connected with mal-administration, injustices, tribalism, nepotism, self centeredness and economic decadence to the point that it has almost become a rule or law that the above mentioned factors would always cause military takeover of government. In consequence, the survival of civilian government would show evidence of good government.

Conclusion

In close therefore, this presentation has pointed that above the erroneous thought of history as a mere narration of events and speculations, than for the purpose of education and knowledge, history reiterates and informs.

Further, that history also helps in the areas and aspects of nation building and indeed for the purpose of building a formidable nations and above all that history is not about stories, but rather about important human events.

Also, that history tilt more to the science than it is to other diciplines in the arts and humanities and the social sciences.

And on the final note that history deals with relics to both interpret and understand human behaviours in the society.

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