Philosophical Method of Educational Research

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Abstract: Education is an interdisciplinary field. The field of educational research has developed through contributions from different disciplines like Philosophy, Psychology, History, Sociology, Economics, Biology, and Mathematics etc. These disciplines have influenced educational research in terms of theorisation as well as methods adopted in the pursuit of knowledge. On the basis of contributions from different disciplines to methods of research, we classify them broadly into two methods those are qualitative methods and quantitative methods. Philosophical research is a qualitative type of research. Qualitative research is the collection of extensive narrative data on many variables over an extended period, in a naturalistic setting to gain insight not possible using other types of research. Merriam (1988) sets forth six assumptions of qualitative research: it is descriptive; it involves fieldwork; it is concerned primarily with process rather than outcomes or products; it is inductive in that researchers build abstractions, concepts, theory, and hypotheses from details; the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis; and it is primarily interested in meaning- how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world. The purpose of this paper is to explore how the idea of method now shapes the self-understanding in terms of which many educational researchers make sense of their work. It does so by comparing the modern 'methodical' approach to educational research with the premodern style of philosophical theorising it has largely replaced. On the basis of this comparison it shows how some important questions about the future of educational research begin to emerge in philosophical method.

Keywords: Philosophy, Research, Philosophical Method and Educational Research.

I. INTRODUCTION

Philosophical research describes what should be. It is normative in nature. C. Sheshadri, characterizes philosophical research by level and depth of critical analysis, the probing into the basic assumptions, concept elucidations, synthesis of views, justification of normative assumptions and prescriptions. According to him, philosophical research requires semantic clarity and meaningfulness, consistency and rigour of thought, consciousness of assumptions and methodological awareness.

Philosophical research is a qualitative type of research. Qualitative research is the collection of extensive narrative data on many variables over an extended period, in a naturalistic setting to gain insight not possible using other types of research. Merriam (1988) sets forth six assumptions of qualitative research: it is descriptive; it involves fieldwork; it is concerned primarily with process rather than outcomes or products; it is inductive in that researchers build abstractions, concepts, theory, and hypotheses from details; the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis; and it is primarily interested in meaning- how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world.

II. PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD

Philosophical method (or philosophical methodology) is the study of how to do philosophy. The basic concern of this type of research is reflection and clarification of assumption and meaning. Philosophical research helps in understanding the area in its totality and developing clarity. C. Rai defines a philosophical method as a means or instrument of attaining a philosophical end, i.e., categorical and comprehensive knowledge of fundamental notions. Philosophizing may begin with some simple doubts about accepted beliefs.

The initial impulse to philosophize may arise from suspicion, for example, that we do not fully understand, and have not fully justified, even our most basic beliefs about the world. Philosophers offer definitions and explanations in solution to problems; they argue for those solutions; and then other philosophers provide counter arguments, expecting to eventually come up with better solutions. This exchange and resulting revision of views is called dialectic. Dialectic is simply philosophical conversation amongst people who do not always agree with each other about everything.

Doing philosophy is about the journey, the process, as much as it is about the destination, the conclusion. Its method differs from other disciplines, in which the experts can agree about most of the fundamentals.

Nature of philosophical method

C. Rai discusses nature of philosophical methods as put forth by different schools and scholars:

- Philosophical methods are methods of rational inquiry.
Philosophical method is method of determining the meaning of ideas and of clarifying them. (Pragmatism)

Philosophical method is a method of settling philosophical disputes. (William James)

Philosophical method is a method of rightly conducting the reason and seeking truth in the sciences. (Descartes)

Philosophical method is a method of philosophizing or achieving sound knowledge. (Gilbert)

Philosophical methods are regulated by the aim to attain clarity and certainty. Clearness, distinctness, comprehensiveness, and thoroughness are the requisite of every philosophical method.

Steps of Philosophical research

Vashishtha, U. C., suggested these steps to be following commonly in a philosophical research:

1. **Identification of research problem**
   The process of philosophical study starts with the identification of appropriate theme for study. Some popular areas of philosophical research in education are:
   - Educational philosophy of any personality.
   - Educational implications of any philosophy.
   - Comparison of one philosophy with the other.
   - Finding a philosophy in a particular system.
   - Analytic study of a particular philosophy/idea or thinker.
   - Critical analysis of philosophical system/practice or act.
   - Understanding philosophy and philosophical issues of a subject.
   - Building/synthesizing a concept or philosophy.

2. **Review of related literature**
   Keeping in view the theme identified and the preliminary questions raised therein, the researcher collect all possible data relevant to the theme from the available literature. The sources may be of literary nature, such as write-ups or opinions of the, philosophers concerned and commentaries on the relevant philosophical works appearing in the forms of books, journals, transcriptions, recordings, research reports, etc.

3. **Reading and discussion**
   An intensive reading of the selected literature makes the researcher able to comprehend the ideology and to develop his/her own line of thought. A cycle of discussion and re-discussion with experts and colleagues in the concerned field is next step to fill the lacunae between grasped facts.

4. **Thinking and contemplating**
   Philosophical researches need comprehensive and critical thinking and contemplating. A deep speculative thinking on the collected data enables the researcher to find connection and differences between various ideas. Further contemplation clears the doubts and corrects the existing knowledge.

   In the next step, the data is interpreted keeping in view the main questions raised in a specific context. Interpretation may follow different processes like summarization, description, comparison, appraisal, cross-examination, etc. of different ideas or concepts in the context of major questions under consideration. There is every possibility of reflecting our subjectivity in the process. Essentially, a researcher studies others ideas from his/her own point of view. However, conscious efforts must be made to detach ourselves as much as possible and interpret the ideas of others without being influenced by our personal biases.

   The last stage of the work may be identified with reporting of the study. In the report, a logical sequence is maintained between the different heads of classification and appropriate conclusions are drawn towards the end of the presentation. At this stage, care is to be taken for clarity and precision of presentation. Moreover, appropriate references with quotations as well as emphasis on necessary points of presentation are to be cited carefully in the report.

Tools of the philosophical research

Mind is the major tool for philosophical research. Curiosity, sensitivity, passion, ability to think and reason, and arguing are the virtues of the researcher concerned with this type of research. It is essential for him or her to be holistic and impartial in approach.

Ideals of philosophical methodology

Any philosophical method must be regulated by the aim to attain clarity and certainty. Emphasis on starting point rather than on conclusions is necessary for true philosophical methods. According to C. Rai, there are some rules, which any philosophical enquiry must observe:

1. **Presupposition less:** Any philosophical enquiry should be free from presuppositions. Freedom from presuppositions means that no determination concerning the particular subject matter of a branch of knowledge should be accepted in advance of investigation. However, it is also true that no method can be wholly divorced from certain presuppositions in the actual content of thought. Therefore, there is no danger in accepting those important presuppositions without which the inquiry itself would be...
impossible and meaningless. These include the existence of a conscious being, doubt or wonder or curiosity of the inquirer, a concept of truth and error, and the required activity of thought.

2. **Reflection:** Rational reflection distinguishes philosophy from all non-theoretical and theoretical sciences. Reflection is necessary for the sake of correct and clear thinking. Philosophy should reflect over its own problems, methods, starting-points and conclusions. This reflection must be critical, comprehensive and evaluative.

3. **Self-correction:** Every philosophical method should be self-corrective also. Since, if they are not self-corrective they need other methods for their correction.

4. **Progression and regression:** Since reason admits both progressive and regressive directions, philosophical way of thinking must be progressive and regressive. However, it is not possible that the same method can be both progressive and regressive simultaneously. Therefore, two types of method, viz. progressive method as well as regressive method should be followed in philosophy.

5. **Comprehensiveness:** All methods applied in philosophy must be comprehensive so that no method excludes anything arbitrarily.

6. **Meta inquiry:** Philosophy is an inquiry about some inquiry that is it is a Meta inquiry. It is the duty of philosophy to evaluate and criticize other inquiries.

7. **Practical and evaluative:** Philosophy is concerned with purposes and values. As evaluative thinking, philosophy has to weight facts, theories, alternatives and ideals.

8. **Speculation and criticism:** Speculation is needed in philosophy because it is that aspect of human thought, which strives to extend the boundaries of understanding beyond its previously established limits. Philosophy proceeds by criticizing received opinions.

**Kinds of philosophical method**

There is no single philosophical method of solving philosophical problems. C. Rai explains the reason behind it, “there is a close relationship among the mental attitude of a thinker, his conception of philosophy, his philosophical method and the philosophical system. Therefore, it is inadequate to say that every philosopher should accept and apply the same philosophical method. Every method has its own contribution in greater or smaller degrees in the different field of investigation.”

According to Rai, philosophical methods can be broadly divided into two types:

- **Philosophical method as a way of thinking:** Examples of this type are Dialectic, Analysis, Logico-Mathematical method, Intuitive method, Pragmatic method, Critical or Transcendental method and Phenomenological method.

- **Philosophical method as a way of demonstrating:** Explanatory, Synthetic and Analytic, Enigmatic, Aphoristic, Mystical, Etymological, Analogical, Poetical, etc. come under this class.

Different conceptions of sources, different nature of problems, different sources of knowledge and the subjective factors imply acceptance of different philosophical methods. C. Rai conducted her doctoral dissertation on philosophical methods of research. Broadly, she classifies philosophical methods into following types:

- Dialectic method
- Logico-mathematical and critical methods
- Pragmatic method
- Phenomenological method
- Analysis

**Dialectic method**

Dialectic means a method, which proceeds with the help of contradiction and opposition. It is a method of conversation. In Dialectic method, knowledge of opposite is also required. This method includes questions and answers. Sophist introduced dialectics as special debating exercise. Later Socrates used this method to unfold ultimate truths by question and answer. Plato also believed that dialectic enables people to ask question more scientifically. This method recognizes no authority and it aims at achieving two qualities i.e., consistency and agreement. Dialectic method brings to light that knowledge which the mind already possesses.

**Logico mathematical and critical methods**

Mathematics has had a great influence on philosophic thoughts. Philosophers wanted to construct philosophy too as the system of certain and self-evident truths. Such a system was possible only by adopting mathematical method. In mathematical method, one begins with self-evident principle. Clearness, strictness, sharpness, impartiality and universal validity of mathematics attracted philosophers to use this method for thinking. This method always includes logical method i.e. deduction and therefore it can be called “Logico-mathematical” method. According to Descartes, mathematical method consists in discovering the difference between the clear and distinct apprehension of the understanding or reason and the obscure ideas of the sense and imagination. It selects simple, clear, self-evident and innate ideas of reason and deduces other truths from them.
Pragmatic method

Peirce, was the first who coined the term “pragmatism”. This is a logical method of ascertaining the meaning of intellectual concepts by reference to practical consequences. Pragmatic method is a middle way between rational and empirical methods. In Peirce’s opinion, meaning of any concept is totality of practical anticipation towards which it leads. This method does not imply any ontology or metaphysics. It reflects the practical experimental outlook of life.

Phenomenological method

Phenomenology originated with the profound and creative criticism of British Empiricism and this was inaugurated by Brentano and Husserl. Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first person point of view. Phenomenology is the exploration and description of phenomena, where a phenomenon refers to a thing or experience which human being experience. This method requires following reductions:

- Exclusion of all subjectivity because it needs purely objective standpoint.
- Exclusion of all theoretical knowledge.
- Exclusion of all traditions.
- Exclusion of all preconceptions and presuppositions.

Analysis

Analysis is a very dominant philosophical tendency. It involves "breaking down" (i.e. analyzing) philosophical issues. Analysis may be explained as an understanding of fundamental concepts, other related concepts, and interrelationship between these concepts. According to Foley (1996), “While analysis is characteristic of the analytic tradition in philosophy, what is to be analyzed often varies. Some philosophers focus on analyzing linguistic phenomena, such as sentences, while others focus on psychological phenomena, such as sense data. However, arguably the most prominent analysis is of concepts or propositions, which is known as conceptual analysis.”

According to Sheshadri, as critical analysis, philosophy of education becomes a meta-level activity of clarification and criticism of concepts, theories, and arguments appearing in the primary, on-going activity of „education”. The pre-dominant mode today in philosophy (and in philosophy of education) is the critical, analytical mode.

Forms of Analysis

It is not easy to define the concept of analysis as a contemporary philosophical method. The term analysis has been used in many senses and these different types are not inter-exclusive; they rather overlap each other. Types of analysis include Experimental analysis, scientific analysis, Mathematical analysis, Speculative analysis, Directional analysis, Psychological analysis, Formal analysis, Clarificatory analysis, Conceptual analysis, Linguistic analysis, Definitional analysis etc. Some main types of analysis as described by C. Rai are briefly discussed as under:

i) Speculative or Reflective Analysis

Speculative investigation is reflective analysis of knowledge and truth. In the opinion of Joachim, “nothing but reflective and critical analysis can unlock the secrets of its being or can reveal it as reality is.”

Directional Analysis

In directional analysis, direction of analysis is given and determined by the “purpose” of investigation.

Formal Analysis

In formal analysis we analyze some external thing, whatever it may be, whether language or object. Its notable feature is that it analyses things “abstractly” or “isolate”, i.e., without its relation to anything. Therefore, we may say that formal analysis is an abstract mental process.

ii) Destructive Analysis and Constructive Analysis

In this type of analysis, a thinker may first refute his opponent’s view by destructive use of analysis, and then try to establish his thesis by constructive analysis. Plato’s analysis is generally taken as destructive analysis, but it also, perhaps indirectly functions constructively. Aristotle’s analysis is always considered as an example of constructive analysis.

iii) Conceptual Analysis and Verbal Analysis

Sometimes analysis is divided into two general classes according to its object of analysis. Analysis, which pertains to ideas or concepts or propositions, is designated as conceptual analysis and analysis that deals with terms, sentences and statements is called linguistic analysis. This latter type analysis is called, “verbal analysis” by Moore. Russell employed both types of analysis as complementary to each other. Conceptual analysis consists primarily in breaking down or analyzing concepts into their constituent parts in order to gain knowledge or a better understanding of a particular philosophical issue in which the concept is involved.

iv) Definitional Analysis

It means analysis which analyses concepts or terms or objects or rules or uses by way of giving their definition.
v) Linguistic Analysis

Linguistic analysis is analysis of language in both its semantic and syntactical aspects. Semantically, it analyses a complex word or sentence into simple reals and syntactically it discovers those linguistic interrelations among reals which form a complex concept.

vi) Critical Analysis

Critical analysis can be defined as the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. Generally, critical analysis involves following activities:

- Agreeing with, acceding to, defending or confirming a particular point of view.
- Proposing a new point of view.
- Conceding that an existing point of view has certain merits, but that it needs to be qualified in certain respects.
- Reformulating an existing point of view or statement of it so that the new version makes a better explanation.
- Dismissing a point of view on the grounds of its inadequacy, irrelevance, incoherence etc.
- Rejecting, rebutting or refuting another’s arguments on various reasoned grounds.
- Reconciling two positions which may seem at variance by appeal to some higher or deeper principle.

According to Moore, the aim of philosophical analysis is not to improve in any way our ordinary use of terms, which remains unchanged by what is done in philosophy. The central aim of analysis, for Moore, is the “clarification of concepts”, not the discovery of “new facts” about the world. Thus, “conceptual clarification” is the sole aim of Moore’s analysis and, secondly, these concepts are not of scientific terminology but of commonsense language.

III. CONCLUSION

Philosophical method of research is the study of how to do philosophy, it is basic concern is reflection and clarification of assumption and meaning. Philosophical research helps in understanding the area in its totality and developing clarity. C. Rai defines a philosophical method as a means or instrument of attaining a philosophical end, i.e., categorical and comprehensive knowledge of fundamental notions. Philosophizing may begin with some simple doubts about accepted beliefs. The initial impulse to philosophize may arise from suspicion, for example, that we do not fully understand, and have not fully justified, even our most basic beliefs about the world. Philosophers offer definitions and explanations in solution to problems, they argue for those solutions, and then other philosophers provide counter arguments, expecting to eventually come up with better solutions. This exchange and resulting revision of views is called dialectic. Dialectic is simply philosophical conversation amongst people who do not always agree with each other about everything. Doing philosophy is about the journey, the process, as much as it is about the destination, the conclusion. Its method differs from other disciplines, in which the experts can agree about most of the fundamentals.

IV. REFERENCES