Is There a Philosophical Research Method in Education?

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Abstract: *This work argued for the justification on the existence of philosophical research method in education. Research as the investigative study of materials and sources to find facts as solution to a particular problem for which it is done can only be valid when it is an activity, intellectual, tools-involved, purposeful and has findings. Philosophers like Akinpelu, Dewey and Ross tilted towards the fact that philosophical research method is in existence though not universal, that is why they even formulated steps as the method. By philosophical method we simply mean way of doing things of philosophy, which research has one; and reasons like scrutiny, peculiarity, Socratic method, Descartes' skepticism, logic, correspondence and philosophers' ways of research justify the existence of philosophical research method, only that it is not defined and imposed in a rigid manner because philosophy promotes individual critical thinking and autonomy, and frowns at conformity and indoctrination.*
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I.   Introduction

Generally, research, aims at finding solution to certain problems. Every field of study has peculiar method of research distinct from those in other fields, which gives exclusive outlook of the area. However, there are things common in almost all types of research but with slight or clear difference in some aspects.

Philosophy as the mother of all fields of study, and like all fields of study has provision for research though conducted in different pattern and format. As a field of special portrait and outlook, question often raises that does philosophy as a discipline has special method of research? In other words, is there a philosophical research method in education? Despite the intricacy, this question would be answered in the following paragraphs. In essence, to justify whether or not philosophy of education has a distinct method of research peculiar to the discipline, this is also different from other methods in other fields of study.

The Concept of Research

Research as an activity is defined by Wikipedia (2011) as the scientific search for knowledge, or any systematic investigation, to establish novel facts, solve new or existing problems, prove new ideas, or develop new theories. The source tried in defining research indeed, but succeeded in limiting it to scientific phenomena ignoring the many other approaches. Awotunde and Ugodulunwa, (2004) also consider educational research as scientific, aiming at finding solutions to educational problems based on a clearly identifiable procedure. It is like that as meant to solve educational problem, but not necessarily through scientific approach because there are abstract issues that cannot be investigated through scientific process.

Hence, research can be defined as the study of materials and sources to discover facts as solution to a burning problem.

Criteria for Research

Osuala, (2005) and Sambo, (2005) were of the opinion that for every task to be labeled research, it must satisfy the following conditions:
- Activity: It must be an activity, not just belief or any other sudden/instant phenomena.
- Intellect/Academic Concept: It must be academic, pursuit and conducted intellectually.
- Tools: Research must involve employing tools for successful conduct.
- Purpose/Problem: Every research must be conducted for a purpose, which is solving a particular problem. There must be a problem that calls for the research.
- Findings: Every research must have findings at the end, else it's something different but not research.

Some Philosophers' Verdict

According to Maina, (2011) many researches were conducted for long using philosophical steps in analysis, and even the preliminary levels passed through before arriving at the conclusion; which means for that long, philosophers have been dancing to philosophical tune while conducting research in philosophical problems

for suitable solutions. Therefore, it is obvious that there is philosophical research method in existence and operation, but one problem with this assertion is that the method in question is not clearly defined.

Akinpelu, (1981) like other philosophers, formulated steps of philosophical research but not authoritatively for fear of imposing a rigid format which ultimately halts individual creative imagination. Philosophers did not prescribe the steps they use in their research works for fear of imposition and authoritarianism. So, Akinpelu has his steps, and other philosophers also have but not stressed as the philosophical research method in strict sense to allow individuals to explore their potentialities and use their intellect too. Indeed, philosophy objects to imposition of anything, methods and procedure inclusive; but having no uniform and common method as in other fields of study leaves us in a dilemma of relativism in acceptability of our research works.

Dewey also proposed four (4) steps to be adopted in problem solving method as Akinpelu, (1981) cited. The steps are indication of a method in use or previously used by at least Dewey alone, which signifies that there is more than one philosophical research methods.

Ross, (2011) opines that philosophers conduct research in educational problems of course; and in it, they don't do empirical experiments, surveys, statistics, searches of educational literature, educational jargon and team work; but they do: reasoning and arguing, detecting fallacies/nonsense, distinguishing the apriori from the aposteriori, conceptual analysis, clear exposition and models of teaching practice like dialogue which are not found elsewhere. This signals that there are modalities of conducting research by philosophers in educational problems since there are marked things they do and don't in the research. But one thing to ask Ross is, who set the modalities followed by the philosophers? If it is coincidence that philosophers' methods look the same, then it is wonderful and difficult; and if there was a person that formulated the method, then, the philosophers too are conformed and the individual critical thinking principle is defeated.

Facebook, (2011) another philosopher declares that there are common features of the methods that philosophers follow, which are: doubt, formulating a problem, offering a solution to the problem, arguments in support of the given solution and dialectic. These steps as claimed by the scholar are followed by philosophers in conducting a research, and it seems to be true but the whole thing is based on one formulate the problem worthy of research, not one recognize and identify the problem. However, it stresses the existence of philosophical research method, no matter.

Philosophical Research Method
Conceptual Analysis

Having seen what the concept "research" stands to be, there is need to briefly analyze the concept "philosophical method" before going ahead to justify it.

When we say "philosophical", we simply mean "of philosophy", and by this we mean biased to philosophy. Since philosophy deals with abstract study of the fundamental nature of reality, whatever we call "philosophical" is having the same taste. Therefore, we can have as many philosophical concepts as anything since they reflect their link to and with philosophy. If philosophy is regarded as just a field of study, then, there are concepts "of philosophy" — philosophical, just as there are psychological, sociological, biological, mathematical, historical and the rest; and any concept with such a prefix is of it and biased to it.

Method is simply "way of", "procedure of" and orderliness of doing something. Everything, academic or otherwise is done through a certain way, which is a prerequisite. Intellectually, to be precise, every discipline has its ways and procedures of doing things peculiar to the field. Therefore, when we say method, we mean the steps, ways, procedures and orders one must follow to do something successfully.

In short, when we say philosophical method we mean philosophical way of doing something. Hence, philosophical research method is obviously "philosophical way of doing research". Alternatively, way and procedure of conducting research in philosophy.

Justification

To answer our question at hand that "is there a philosophical research method in education?" There should be some bases of whatever is the answer as justifications.

With skepticism, the writers are of the opinion that no matter and however, there is a philosophical research method because of the following reasons.

- Blackburn, (2005) said philosophy has its own methods which are subject to its scrutiny. These "methods" are in different spheres and of different purposes; by implication, research inclusive. Categorically, we are safe to conclude that there is a philosophical research method since the philosophy as a discipline has its own methods in almost all aspects, and research is one of them.
- Socratic Method is also evidence that the philosophical research method has been in existence for the past long. The Socratic method of systematic questioning till truth is arrived at is clearly a method of finding a

fact using questioning as a research tool. Though, Socrates had not written anything, but his thoughts as claimed and written by this disciple Plato have flavour of his method of research (Akinpelu, 2005).

- Descartes as a philosopher also invented the theory of skepticism, which calls for following certain steps to find out, verify and justify a fact. This indicates that there are for long certain ways of finding a fact by philosophers as research method.

- Logic is a tool for doing philosophy which was founded by Aristotle. According to Maina, (2008) logic is inevitable because philosophy is an area of investigation that proceeds through a process of arguments and counter arguments. If logic is used necessarily in investigation since some twenty four centuries ago, then, it is apparent that no matter what, there is a philosophical research method.

- Every discipline has a peculiar way of investigating and finding its facts of knowledge, so also philosophy, philosophical methods are employed to solve philosophical problems using philosophical tools. As we cannot use sociological or historical research method in chemistry, so another subjects methods cannot work in philosophical research, and there are series of research conducted in philosophy — certainly through philosophical method. It is for this that all research topics in philosophy are purely abstract, so philosophical method is the only relevant way for the research.

- We have different types of research, in different formats and styles. For example, there is a MLA, APA and Turabian; the process and context produce the name, distinct from others. In other words, the activity gives birth to the name of a method, so the activity "philosophical research method" gave birth to the name "philosophical research method", which means there is.

- In philosophy, precisely of education, the research conducted by philosophers comes in a peculiar method to philosophy alone, since no method if not philosophical can give the desired outcome in philosophical research of course. This is to tell that the method used by philosophers in their research is philosophical, in existence for long, in use and proved useful. If otherwise, then, we will ask question as what method have they been using?

In sum, there is philosophical research method, no matter the situation, design, number, universality or otherwise.

II. Conclusion

It can logically be concluded that there is indeed a philosophical research method which is different in some features from other methods but is not strictly fixed, absolute and universal. It is not defined in a rigid and dogmatic air because doing that means restricting individuals to a "normative" and formal standard, while philosophy promotes individuality, freedom, autonomy, critical thinking, initiative, originality and self-reliance; at the same time discourages conformity and indoctrination.

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