

Cultural literacy

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Cultural Literacy

Several authors define Cultural Literacy differently. However, all the definitions converge on the fact that it is the ability to understand and appreciate the similarities and differences in the customs, values and beliefs of one's own culture and that of others as put by Stigler (2000) in Metiri Group in Cooperation with NCREL. In other words, cultural literacy is seen as the ability to converse fluently in the figurative language (such as idioms, allusions, proverbs and informal content) which creates and constitutes a culture.

From the two definitions above, it can be clearly seen that cultural literacy is very important. Firstly, it multiplies access to practices, ideas and people that can make positive contributions to our societies. Secondly, it helps us understand ourselves more deeply. The knowledge of the language makes one understand and use values and beliefs of a particular culture in the manner that the norms of that society demand as seen in the use of idioms, proverb and allusions. On the other hand, knowledge of the languages of other cultures will also help individuals understand the beliefs and values of those cultures. For instance, the knowledge of English has made people whose primary language is not English to learn more about the English Culture starting with their origin, values, beliefs and use of technology. In this way, people are able to operate machines, use computers and other technologies by using the English language or so. The knowledge of the language makes these people understand themselves better in their society and rate themselves about who they are in the face of other cultures. They

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become aware of their own implicit beliefs and therefore adopt those that are legitimate.

Again, cultural literacy has also unveiled shortfalls in certain cultural beliefs and values. Because of the knowledge of western cultures, many people, who initially got stuck in their very primitive cultural beliefs and values are now taking new lifestyles. For example, the Masai of East Africa are currently abandoning Nomadic Pastoralism and adopting legitimate agriculture; several Africans are switching on to intensive farming from their crude shifting cultivation; Polygamy is dying slowly; family sizes are changing; gender disparities are being adjusted; eating habits are also taking new shapes; new transport systems and other technologies are replacing the primitive ones. In short, all the primitive ideologies are being replaced by globally accepted ones.

The world at large will become a global village with one dominant culture. As acculturation keeps on taking place from one's society to another, the weaker and implicit cultures are dying, and in their place, new or dominant cultures are emerging such that in the final analysis, all will speak with one voice and act with one action at a point in time.