

Elements of culture research paper sample

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Different cultures across the world possess unique cultures. For instance, the Chinese culture is different from the Indian culture or the African culture based on their language, mode of dressing, values, and beliefs. For instance, the Indian culture refers to the way of life of India which includes the Indian language, religion, dance, music and food. This paper entails a broad discussion of the term culture and the elements of culture.

Culture refers to an integrated system of learned behaviour patterns that are characteristic of members of any given society (Featherstone, 15). From a sociological perspective, the term culture connotes the ways of acting, way of thinking as well as the material objects that together shape a people's way of life. The term culture emerged as a key tenet in anthropology to connote human phenomena that cannot be attributed to generic inheritance. Culture encompasses shared beliefs, norms, values, religion, languages and traditions of any given community that are passed on from one generation of a community to its next generation. There are several key characteristics of culture. First of all, culture is learned. Culture is learned from numerous sources such as proverbs, folk tales, poetry, art, music and mass media. Culture is also learnt through interaction, observation and imitation of societal occurrence. Secondly, culture is shared by a group of people. When an action is commonly shared, believed or practiced by a group of people, it is then classified as culture. Culture is cumulative meaning that culture is often passed from one generation to another generation. A fourth characteristic of culture is that culture is dynamic. Culture often keeps on changing as new knowledge and traditions are added as old traditions fade with time (Tomlinson, 5). Culture is also ideational meaning that culture

forms classic patterns of conduct that must be followed by members of any given community. As such, culture forms the guidelines that must be followed by societal members for them to gain social acceptance. Culture is also distinct. It is widely accepted that culture is formed by several mutually interdependent cultures. From the above understanding, one can therefore argue that cultures often vary resulting to different cultures across the world such as the Indian culture, African traditional culture as well as the American just to mention a few.

Cultures and societies are often in the process of changing. There are several key elements that constitute as the culture of a particular people. These include: language, values, beliefs, norms, traditions and religions. Language is the most essential element of culture. Language refers to the human capacity for acquiring and using complex systems of communication. The term is derived from a Latin word *lingua* and old French word *langage* (American Heritage Dictionary, 1123). A shared language is often the main uniting factor in a given culture.

Language helps a given people to establish cultural identity and a sense of unity. If a language is spoken throughout a political region, a spirit of nationalism often grows. Language also allows people within a culture to communicate. There are more than 3000 spoken languages across the world today. If more than a single language is spoken in an area, but one language seems to be favored, conflict is bound to occur. For instance, in Canada where both French and English are spoken, French Canadians pressurized the Canadian government to recognize both English and French as official languages.

Like other elements of culture, language is also diffused in many ways. First language may follow trade routes or be invented as a result of the interaction of different cultures. For instance, the Swahili language developed in East Africa as a trade language between Bantu-speaking African tribes and Arabic traders. Different languages can also blend to form a new language. For instance, Louisiana Creole resulted from the blending of French, African and North American people's languages in Louisiana. Language is also diffused through migration. For instance, during the colonization period, European colonialists brought with them the Spanish, English, Portuguese, French and Italian languages to different parts of Africa, Australia, Asia and America.

Religion basically refers to a person's belief in a supernatural power or powers. Religions establish beliefs and values of a group by defining how people worship the supernatural being. It also tells members of a society how to behave towards each other. Traditional religions are categorized in three ways namely monotheistic, polytheistic and animistic. Monotheism is a belief in one god such as Judaism, Islam and Christianity while polytheism is a belief in many gods such as the Hindu religion. Animism, on the other hand, refers to a belief in divine forces in nature. Religions spread across the world through converts and diffusion. The three major world religions include Judaism, Islam, Christianity and Hinduism.

Arts and literature also form a crucial element of culture. All cultures in the world have different and varied ways of expressing themselves creatively. All cultures have unique performing arts that include dance, theatre, music and film. All cultures have unique musical instruments and styles of music. For

instance, traditional African cultures have different types of instruments such as drums, flutes and horns. Visual arts are also a common feature of culture. They include architecture, sculptures and paintings that reflect the available materials. A culture's architecture encompasses numerous expressions over time and space that retains a degree of continuity from one generation to another. These may include well planned cities and houses. For instance, the Egyptian culture is well known for its Egyptian sculptures that are part of the Seven Wonders of the World. The Indian culture is also well known for its Hindustani classical music and the Taj Mahal. Oral and written literature such as folk tales, stories and poems also illustrate certain aspects of culture such as behaviors and attitudes. Culture is often transmitted through stories, histories, jokes, legends and myths. Traditional sports and celebrations also form part of a society's culture. For instance, the annual snake boat race in India is performed during Onam celebrations on the Pamaba River.

Values are a vital element of culture as social behaviour is caused by ideologies and dominant values (Leung & Bond, 1989). According to Schwartz and Bardi (269), values refer to desirable transsituational goals that serve as guiding principles in people's lives. Values are also defined as shared abstract ideas of what is right, good and desirable in a society (Knafo et al, 179). Values can be classified either as personal values or cultural values. Personal values provide an internal reference for what is beneficial, desirable, constructive, good or important. Values generate behaviour and help in solving shared human problems for survival. This is achieved by comparing and ranking values and using the results which provide responses to questions as to why people do what they do and in which order they

choose to do them.

Every society has a given set of norms that form a crucial part of their culture. These include taboos and rituals. Social norms are group-held beliefs about how members of the society should conduct themselves in a given situation. As such, social norms help to maintain order and to organize groups (Haung and Wu 131). Social norms can be enforced formally through sanctions or informally through non-verbal cues and body language. They enable one to assess what behaviors are deemed vital for the survival of a group (Hackman, 234). Norms can develop where groups outline and behavioral expectations. For instance, people naturally drive on the right-hand side of the road in the US. For instance, “ Women should be subservient to men” is a norm about the desirable behaviour of women and men. Rituals, rites and taboos form part of societal norms. Rituals are sets of actions often repeated in specific circumstances and with specific meaning. They may be used in societal occasions such as rites of passage such as initiation, birth and death rites. For instance, the traditional African societies perform different rituals during funerals, birth celebrations and initiation ceremonies.

A society’s form of government is a crucial element of its culture. Members of a society often form governments to provide for their common needs, maintain law and order within the society as well as protect their society from outside threats. A society’s form of government instills law and order by setting societal norms and laws that govern the interaction of the members. A government can be democratic where persons take part in the daily running of their businesses. The form of government can also be dictatorial

where the ruler holds absolute power and dictates how the affairs of the society will be carried out. The monarchical form of government, on the other hand, refers to a government ruled by kings and queens who inherit the throne from their ancestors. For instance, the traditional African societies had various forms of government. The Buganda kingdom in ancient Uganda, for instance, was led by tribal kings known as Kabakas. The forms of government also ensure that societal laws are amended, made and implemented.

Beliefs are commonly expressed as disagreements or agreements with world views. Schwitzgebel (45) defines a belief as a psychological state in which an individual holds a proposition to be true. It is a state or tradition of mind in which confidence and deep trust is vested in some person or an individual's conviction or opinion. Beliefs are commonly divided into two namely dispositional and core beliefs. Core beliefs are those beliefs that are actively thought about while dispositional beliefs are those beliefs that may be ascribed to somebody who has not thought about the subject (Bell et al. 72).

A key element of culture is social organization. Every society has its own social structure in which its members are organized into small units that meet basic needs. The family unit is the most important unit of social organization. The family unit can be either a nuclear family comprised of the husband, wife and children or extended family that includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins as well as members of the nuclear family. Social organization also includes social classes that rank people in order of status, depending on what is important to the culture such as money, education or jobs. The role each member of the society plays gives an overall notion of

the social structure. This can also include customary gender-based or age-based roles. For instance, women play a crucial role in the society such as weaning children.

Culture serves various functions to both the individual as well as a society. Culture regulates the conduct of an individual and prepares him/her for a group life. Culture also provides solutions for complicated situations by providing a set of behavior during difficult periods. Culture helps in shaping the personality of an individual by providing opportunities for the development of personality.

Culture plays a key role in keeping social relationships intact by shaping the personality of individual societal members. Culture also satisfies the moral and religious interests. From the above discussion, it is evident that culture is a necessary prerequisite for social cohesion. The elements of culture thus make a given culture unique.

Works Cited

Featherstone, Mike. *Localism, Globalism and Cultural Identity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996.

Tomlison, John. *Globalization and Culture*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Bell, Vaughan, Halligan Peter W. and Ellis, H. D. " A Cognitive Neuroscience of Belief". In Halligan, Peter W.; Aylward, Mansel. *The Power of Belief: Psychological Influence on Illness, Disability, and Medicine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Hackman, Richard J. " Group influences on individuals in organizations." In M. D. Dunnette & L. M. Hough (Eds.). *Handbook of industrial and organizational*

psychology (Vol. 3). Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press. (1992).

Haung, Peter, Wu, Ho-Mou. " More Order without More Law: A Theory of Social Norms and Organizational Cultures". 1994

Schwitzgebel, Eric. " Belief", in Zalta, Edward, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Stanford, CA: The Metaphysics Research Lab, (2006).

Schwartz, Shalom H. & Bardi, Anat. " Influences of adaptation to communist rule on value priorities in Eastern Europe", Political Psychology, 18, (1997) pp. 385-410.

Leung, K., & Bond, M. H. " Society." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 55, (1989) 1009-1015. 52.