

Can we have beliefs
or knowledge which
are independent of
our culture? essay
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[Art & Culture](#)



Culture is “ mankind’s primary adaptive mechanism”. Essentially, culture is a shared store of values and beliefs common to a group of people. The prevalence of culture in the life of the individual leads to the question, “ Can we have beliefs or knowledge which are independent of our culture?” Two terms must first be defined: knowledge and beliefs. A belief may be defined as “ the ideas in which we have faith in and are emotionally linked to”. Knowledge may be defined as a “ justified true belief” . Essentially the question asks whether knowledge may be produced or acquired independently of culture. From my perspective, this differs from one area of knowledge to another and differs from one individual to the next.

The natural sciences are an area of knowledge which have significantly impacted our perception of the natural world. The natural sciences denote subjects such as physics, biology and chemistry. From my perspective, the natural sciences are an area of knowledge independent of culture. In order to reach this conclusion, I examined the scientific method. The scientific method is a method used to distinguish a science from a pseudo science (fake science). According to the traditional picture of the scientific method, science is divided into 5 steps known as inductivism.

1. observation
2. hypothesis
3. experiment
4. law
5. theory

A scientist would initially observe and classify data. He would proceed to look for pattern in the data and formulate a hypothesis. Following this, the scientist would make a predication. The scientist would test this predictions through experiments. If the experimental results confirm the hypothesis, a scientific law has been discovered. The scientific method limits the influence of bias and prejudice in the experimenter. It provides an objective, standardized approach to conducting an experiment and, in doing so, improves the scientist's results. By using a standardized approach in their investigations, scientists will stick to the facts and limit the impact of preconceived notions. This standardized approach, employed by scientific communities throughout the world, is unaffected by culture, language and religion. If two different people from two different areas of the world were to carry out the same experiment using the scientific method, they would be expected to obtain similar results. An example of the scientific method's universal application and acceptance was recently observed in Germany.

At an international workshop held in Germany in 2009 , 40 leading scientists from nine countries gave state-of-the-art presentations and discussed new methods of identifying timber origins. The workshop provided a platform for interdisciplinary exchange of information amongst scientist. The scientist ability to interact with one another and exchange thoughts displayed the scientific method's complete independence from culture and global acceptance. The scientific method proves that scientific knowledge can be obtained regardless of one's location, language or culture.

Having lived abroad for several years and having experienced several different cultures and education systems, I can testify to the statement that scientific knowledge is independent of culture. Local Singaporeans schools study the exact same properties of matter as Australian schools . Similarly, calculations for quantitative chemistry are no different from one school to the next, the formula for the number of moles was the same in my Singapore school as it is in my Australian school. The global applications of the scientific method displays the universality of science and its independence from culture.

Even in the sciences, however, there are cases where culture influences scientific discoveries and methods. Culture may effect the type of research carried out. Stem cell research is considered a moral taboo. The controversy stems from the embryo's death during the process of acquiring the stem cells. Many claim the embryo's death to be no different from murder and argue against the research on both moral and religious grounds. The social controversy results in a lack of funding towards the research and a resulting impediment on the results obtained. On the other hand, cancer inquiry is universally accepted, and a large number of social networks, organizations and fundraisers work to generate money and support for such researches . Certain cultures are less receptive to the idea of scientific progress. An extreme example would be North Korea. In North Korea, there is a general rejection of common scientific laws and an emphasis is placed upon scientific research favored by the government.

Literature delivers a creative record of all human experiences. The ability to read and analyze literary text expands our perspective of the world.

Literature may be defined as a “ written works, esp. those considered of superior or lasting artistic merit.” Like most other areas of knowledge, literature is influenced by culture. Often times, Literature reflects the values and beliefs of a cultural period. Literature informs the reader of what people feared, how people saw themselves and how people wanted to be seen. The fictional novel, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, portrays the colonization of East Africa from an African perspective. Achebe himself states that his priority when writing the book was to illustrate the complexities of African culture, “ African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless . . . , that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity”.

Through a poignant story of a tribal lord’s resistance to the imposition of western culture, Achebe is able to paint a life like picture of Igbo beliefs, society and cultural norms. He is able to translate the ideas and concepts the Igbo found sacred, such as their worship of the yam vegetable. Achebe wrote *Things Fall apart* under the heavy influence of culture, this influence is reflected in the values portrayed in the book. African values such as masculinity and fatherhood are heavily emphasized throughout the novel. Whether an individual accepts or rejects the values portrayed in the novel is dependent on culture(are the cultural values similar or dissimilar to those of the individual) .

Even in Literature , there are cases where knowledge is independent of culture. Certain science fiction novels completely disregard modern culture and attempt to create an imaginary universe. 1984 recounts the story of Winston Smith, a low ranking bureaucrat, and his life under a totalitarian super power. Although the novel was significantly influenced by power struggles and political views of the time it was not influenced by the culture of the time period.

To a large extent, culture influences what we consider acceptable in an environment. In a society, a dominant, rarely questioned culture exist. Individuals generally feel pressure to conform to the dominant cultural norms. An example of this would be the influence of culture on an individuals health beliefs. All cultures have systems of health beliefs used to explain the causes and treatments of illnesses. Most Western societies attribute disease to common microorganisms and advocate the usage of high-tech technology to diagnose and treat diseases. However, other cultures hold different views. Various cultures throughout the world believe disease to be caused by spiritual phenomenas and advocate spirituality as a form of remedy. In the USA, general practitioners have found that some sub-populations, such as the Vietnamese, reluctantly accept Western style medication. In Vietnamese culture, health is perceived as a balance between the hot and cold poles controlling bodily functions. As a result of this, Vietnamese rarely accept Western style health diagnosis and treatments. However, the extent of the influence of culture is also dependent on the individual, some individuals embrace their culture more so than others.

In conclusion culture plays a significant role in the way we acquire, learn and interpret knowledge and beliefs. The influence of culture on knowledge and beliefs is highly dependent on the area of knowledge. In addition , the acceptance of culture is dependent on the individual.