

CULTURE SHAPES CHARACTER

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Abstract

In this article, the writer aimed to find out how the culture shapes character. The library research was used as the design of this study with the sources from personal and online library. The process of collecting the data is in many ways, the first was searching thesis and browsing some literatures. The other sources were books, articles and journals which have the same variable. Collecting and combining some theories was the last step. The result of this research is culture is one of many factors that influence a person's character. Culture affects perception, and perceptions drives behavior. Thus, the culture has a direct impact on our character. Moreover, our environment, which has cultural influences, shapes our character.

Keywords: culture, character, shapes,

Abstrak

Dalam artikel ini penulis bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana budaya membentuk karakter. Penelitian perpustakaan digunakan sebagai desain penelitian ini dengan sumber dari perpustakaan pribadi dan online. Proses pengumpulan data dalam banyak hal, yang pertama mencari tesis dan mencari beberapa literatur. Sumber lainnya adalah buku, artikel dan jurnal yang memiliki variabel yang sama. Mengumpulkan dan menggabungkan beberapa teori adalah langkah terakhir. Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah Budaya adalah salah satu dari banyak faktor yang mempengaruhi karakter seseorang. Budaya mempengaruhi persepsi, dan persepsi mendorong perilaku. Dengan demikian, budaya memiliki dampak langsung pada karakter kita. Selain itu, lingkungan kita, yang memiliki pengaruh budaya, membentuk karakter kita.

Kata kunci: budaya, karakter, bentuk

INTRODUCTION

Culture is closely linked with life. It is not an add-on, an ornament that we as human beings can use. It is what makes us human. Without culture, there would be no humans. Culture is made up of traditions, beliefs, and ways of life and thinks from the most spiritual to the most material. It gives us meaning, a way of leading our lives. Human beings are creators of culture and, at the same time, culture is what makes us human.

Cultural development is a historical process. Our ancestors learnt many things from their predecessors. With the passage of time they also added to it from their own experience and gave up those which they did not consider useful. We in turn have learnt many things from our ancestors. As time goes we continue to add new thoughts, new ideas to those already existent and sometimes we give up some which we don't consider useful any more. Culture is a way of life. The food you eat, the clothes you wear, the language you speak in and the God you worship all are aspects of culture. In very simple terms, we can say that culture is the embodiment of the way in which we think and do things. Culture thus refers to a human-made environment which includes all the material and non-material products of group life that are transmitted from one generation to the next. There is a general agreement among social scientists that culture consists of explicit and implicit patterns of behaviour acquired by human beings. These may be transmitted through symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment as artefacts. Culture is the expression of our nature in our modes of living and thinking.

The great majority of our conscious behavior is acquired through learning and interacting with other members of our culture. Even those responses to our purely biological needs (that is, eating, coughing, defecating) are frequently influenced by our cultures. For example, all people share a biological need for food. Unless a minimum number of calories is consumed, starvation will occur. Therefore, all people eat. But what we eat, how often, we eat, how much we eat, with whom we eat, and according to what set of rules are regulated, at least in part, by our culture. (Spencer, 2012:8).

Hofstede (1991:8) makes the important point that although certain aspects of culture are physically visible, their meaning is invisible: 'their cultural meaning ... lies precisely and only in the way these practices are interpreted by the insiders.' For example, a gesture such as the 'ring gesture' (thumb and forefinger touching) may be interpreted as conveying agreement, approval or acceptance in the USA, the UK and Canada, but as an insult or obscene gesture in several Mediterranean countries. Similarly, choice of clothing can be interpreted differently by different groups of people, in terms of indications of wealth, ostentation, appropriateness, and so on.

The relationship between culture and an individual's character is powerful, though of course not deterministic. But for younger people, whose patterns of behavior are still malleable, daily life in a poor neighborhood is characterized by a constant struggle for dominance between different these cultural pressures. Anderson (1994) describes this as the "Code of the Streets", with locals referring to "street" or "decent" behavior standards that profoundly affect such work habits, school and family.

The culture of a neighborhood plays a large role in launching patterns of behavior that evolve into more lasting, habits such as saving money and getting homework done, or clever and generous. If reinforced, habits become entrenched and the core of what we call character.

Based on that statement, the writer formulates an objective as “how does culture shapes character?”

The result of the research is expected to contribute some areas like: to be a reference for the next researcher in educational psychology specially and psycholinguistics study generally, to be a reference for learners of educational psychology, and to be a reference for educators in applying psycholinguistic study.

1. Culture

Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behavior (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 3). Culture serves to give an identity to a group, ensures survival and enhances the feeling of belonging. It is a powerful human tool for survival, but it is a fragile phenomenon. It is constantly changing and easily lost because it exists only in our minds. Culture is very much about groups, when a group of people are to exist together, they need a set of rules, or social norms that helps everyone know what to do in various circumstances, from arguing with one another to dealing with outsiders.

Banks & McGee (1989) stated that most social scientists today view culture as consisting primarily of the symbolic, ideational, and intangible aspects of human societies. The essence of a culture is not its artifacts, tools, or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. It is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies; it is not material objects and other tangible aspects of human societies. People within a culture usually interpret the meaning of symbols, artifacts, and behaviors in the same or in similar ways.

Matsumoto (1996: 16)

‘... the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next.’

Farooq (2011) writes Culture is the totality of learned and socially transmitted behaviors. It is shared and practicing in all societies of the world. Basic Elements of culture includes ideas, beliefs, values, customs which make it a whole configuration. Culture is transmitted form one generation to another.

Our culture defines our standards of personal space. The distance we maintain during communication is largely impacted by the culture we belong to. Our gestures, overall body language, and the degree of physical contact made during communication is affected by our cultural norm. Our faith and morals which are a part of our culture, affect how we behave. Our morals influence our feelings such as shame and pride, and our faith defines what we perceive as right or wrong, thus affecting our behavior.

2. Elements of Culture

Each culture has basic elements of culture for a group. To be accepted as a part of the group, we tend to follow what the group decides for us. Influenced by the norms or rules laid out by our culture, we act in accordance with them. Our culture defines people's expectations from us. In the attempt to fulfill them, we shape our behavior and personality to suit our culture.

There are some basic elements explained by the expert, below the writer try to resume its.

a. Value and Belief

The first, and perhaps most crucial, elements of culture we will discuss are its values and beliefs. Values are a culture's standard for discerning what is good and just in society. Values are deeply embedded and critical for transmitting and teaching a culture's beliefs. Beliefs are the tenets or convictions that people hold to be true. These beliefs are responsible for the spiritual fulfillment of needs and wants. Muslims believe in God, Holly Prophet, The Day of Judgment, recitation of Holly Quran, Hajj etc. Individuals in a society have specific beliefs, but they also share collective values. To illustrate the difference, Americans commonly believe in the American Dream—that anyone who works hard enough will be successful and wealthy. Underlying this belief is the American value that wealth is good and important.

Values help shape a society by suggesting what is good and bad, beautiful and ugly, sought or avoided. Values often suggest how people should behave, but they don't accurately reflect how people do behave. Values portray an ideal culture, the standards society would like to embrace and live up to. Anything getting importance in our daily life becomes our values. The origin of values is not biological but it is social production while living in society the values develop. Values depend upon the culture. Culture varies from society to society and thus values are different in every social situation. Values are what we like and what we say will in our society values are the good idea and thinking of a person.

Farooq (2012) stated that some values are hereditary which we gain from our elders, books and parents. The culture is full of values and can transmit from one generation to another. When a natural object get a meaning it becomes a value.

b. Norms

The visible and invisible rules of conduct through which societies are structured, or what sociologists call norms. Norms define how to behave in accordance with what a society has defined as good, right, and important, and most members of the society adhere to them.

Norms are often divided into two types, formal norms and informal norms. Formal norms, also called *mores* (MOOR-ays) and *laws*, refer to the standards of behavior considered the most important in any society. Informal norms, also called *folkways* and *customs*, refer to standards of behavior that are considered less important but still influence how we behave. Table manners are a common example of informal norms, as are such everyday behaviors as how we interact with an older people and how we ride in an elevator. People learn informal norms by observation, imitation, and general socialization. Some informal norms are taught directly “shake and kiss your grandparent hands” or “Use your right

hand”—while others are learned by observation, including observations of the consequences when someone else violates a norm.

c. Symbol and Language

Every culture is filled with symbols, or things that stand for something else and that often evoke various reactions and emotions. Some symbols are actually types of nonverbal communication, while other symbols are in fact material objects. Symbols such as gestures, signs, objects, signals, and words—help people understand the world. Symbols provide clues to understanding experiences. They convey recognizable meanings that are shared by societies.

While different cultures have varying systems of symbols, there is one that is common to all: language. Language is a symbolic system through which people communicate and through which culture is transmitted. Some languages contain a system of symbols used for written communication, while others rely only on spoken communication and nonverbal actions. Perhaps our most important set of symbols is language. Language, be it spoken, written, or gestured, is the basic means of communication between humans. It would be safe to say that language has evolved along with humans, originating with a combination of basic sounds, calls, and gestures to coherent speech, scripts, accents, and dialects. Language is crucial to communication and thus to any society’s culture. Children learn language from their culture just as they learn about shaking hands, about gestures, and about the significance of the flag and other symbols. Humans have a capacity for language that no other animal species possesses. Our capacity for language in turn helps make our complex culture possible.

Language is constantly evolving as societies create new ideas. In this age of technology, people have adapted almost instantly to new nouns such as “e-mail” and “Internet,” and verbs such as “downloading,” “texting,” and “blogging.” Twenty years ago, the general public would have considered these nonsense words.

Even while it constantly evolves, language continues to shape our reality. This insight was established in the 1920s by two linguists, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf. They believed that reality is culturally determined, and that any interpretation of reality is based on a society’s language. To prove this point, the sociologists argued that every language has words or expressions specific to that language. In the United States, for example, the number 13 is associated with bad luck. In Japan, however, the number four is considered unlucky, since it is pronounced similarly to the Japanese word for “death.” The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is based on the idea that people experience their world through their language, and that they therefore understand their world through the culture embedded in their language. The hypothesis, which has also been called linguistic relativity, states that language shapes thought (Swoyer:2003).

3. Characteristic of culture

Some general characteristics, which are common to different cultures throughout the world.

a. Culture is learned and acquired: Culture is acquired in the sense that there are certain behaviours which are acquired through heredity. Individuals inherit certain qualities from their parents but socio-cultural patterns are not inherited. These are learnt from family members, from the group and the society in which they live. It is thus apparent that the

culture of human beings is influenced by the physical and social environment through which they operate.

- b. Culture is shared: A thought or action may be called culture if it is shared and believed or practiced by a group of people. Because we share culture with other members of our group, we are able to act in socially appropriate ways as well as predict how others will act.
- c. Culture is cumulative: Different knowledge embodied in culture can be passed from one generation to another generation. More and more knowledge is added in the particular culture as the time passes by. Each may work out solution to problems in life that passes from one generation to another. This cycle remains as the particular culture goes with time.
- d. Culture changes: There is knowledge, thoughts or traditions that are lost as new cultural traits are added. There are possibilities of cultural changes within the particular culture as time passes. Because most cultures are in contact with other cultures, they exchange ideas and symbols.
- e. Culture is dynamic: No culture remains on the permanent state. Culture is changing constantly as new ideas and new techniques are added as time passes modifying or changing the old ways. This is the characteristics of culture that stems from the culture's cumulative quality.

4. Character

The etymology of character is quite telling. The word comes from the Greek *kharakter* for “engraved mark,” “symbol or imprint on the soul,” and “instrument for marking,” and can be traced further back to the words for “to engrave,” “pointed stake,” and “to scrape and scratch.”

Anciently, a character was the stamp or marking impressed into wax and clay, and as Trumbull (1894), it served as:

“another name for the signature, or monogram, or personal superscription, or trade-mark, of the potter, the painter, the sculptor, the writer, or any other artist or artisan, or inventor, as indicative of the personality of the maker, or of the distinctive individuality of the article marked. It is the visible token by which a thing is distinguished from every other thing with which it might otherwise be confounded.”

Brett and Kate (2013) define that character is synonymous merely with personal tastes, temperaments, and preferences. Things like how you dress, your favorite music, or whether you are introverted or extroverted have little to nothing to do with character. Rather, character is defined in how your habits, motives, thoughts, and so on relate to morality, particularly as it concerns *integrity*. Character was defined as “your moral self,” the “crown of a moral life,” and referred to as a “moral structure,” something you built through virtuous behavior. Cain (2012) notes, “the ideal self was serious, disciplined, and honorable. What counted was not so much the impression one made in public as how one behaved in private. the attributes of a **Character**: Citizenship, Duty, Work, Golden Deeds, Honor, Reputation, Morals, Manners, Integrity.

Furthermore, Josephson (2011) writes that character is both formed and revealed by how one deals with everyday situations as well as extraordinary pressures and temptations. Like a well-made tower, character is built stone by stone, decision by decision.

Bruce in Brett and Kate (2013) states that:

“Character is nature and nurture. It is nature cultured and disciplined, so that natural tendencies are brought under the sway of the moral motive. His natural individuality marks off a man from his fellows by clear and specific differences. But this individuality may be non-moral. To produce character it must be brought under discipline, and organized into the structure of a true moral being...

Above all, [character] includes a choice, a *settled habit* or *bent of will*, so that it can be seen in its outcome in conduct. Character takes up the raw material of nature and temperament, and it weaves these into the strong, well-knit texture of a fully moralized manhood.”

Hunter (2001) laid out the 3 qualities of true character:

a. moral discipline

The one quality most associated with character in the nineteenth century was self-mastery – the dominion of an individual over his impulses and desires, so that he was in control of them, and not the other way around. A man of self-mastery embodies the kingship of self-control and can direct his will and make his own choices, rather than being a slave to his base impulses.

b. moral attachment

The pursuit of character does not have as its sole end the cultivation of self. character has always been about something greater than self and included the self as part of a community. Moral attachment means being committed to a set of higher ideals and to acting, and if need be, sacrificing, for the greater good of one’s community.

c. moral autonomy

Character cannot develop in an environment in which ethical decisions are forced upon the individual. Character is a product of judgment, discretion, and choice – born from a man’s free agency. A decision that is coerced cannot be a moral decision, and thus cannot be a decision of character.

METHOD

The method which is used on this research was descriptive study. The process of collecting the data is in many ways, the first was searching thesis and browsing some literatures. The other sources were books, articles and journals which have the same variable. Collecting and combining the some theories was the last step. From those ways it can find the result or the data. So, we can conclude how does culture shapes character. The technique which is used in this research was

observation and survey through the existing library and the data which was gotten was described and combine to the existing the theory. The data supported from personal and online library.

Discussion

The brain's hard-wiring may have a significant influence on character development. But it is also true that the "culture" of a neighborhood play a critical role. By culture we mean the prevailing social norms, influential networks, and the behaviors expected by one's family and friends (butler, 2014).

The **culture** you belong to has a prominent role in how you interact with people. You can easily notice the difference when people meet for the first time. Even though you can say your character plays the biggest part in the interaction, also the place where you've been growing up is actually influencing your approach to others. The way we treat people we think can't help or hurt us, like housekeepers, waiters, and secretaries, tells more about our character than how we treat people we think are important. How we behave when we think no one is looking or when we don't think we will get caught more accurately portrays our character

There are many things that engrave our character upon the clay of our lives, and shape our character for better and for worse into a unique set of scratches and grooves. Our character begins to be shaped from the very time we are born and is influenced by where we grow up, how we are raised, the examples our parents provide, religious and academic education, and so on. Our character can be dramatically altered by a life-changing tragedy – the contraction of a disease, a severe accident, the death of a parent, child, or spouse. Such events may turn a man bitter or cynical, or may cause him to discover energies of soul and feelings of hope and compassion hitherto unimagined. A man's character can also be greatly formed by a call to take upon himself a mantle of leadership during a crisis or emergency – an event that tests and exercises his physical and mental abilities.

Many people feel like character is something that can only be built during dramatic tests and crises. But it is truly in the constant, habitual, hurried, routine acts of common life that that swarm of little judgments is made such as form the character.” We would do well to remember that we are being made every minute, and we cannot help it, as we walk and talk, eat and drink, marry and are given in marriage, work and play, go out and come in.”

As we are faced with varying circumstances each day and judge and decide how to act, our actions become our habits, and our habits become our character as Speer in Brett and Kate (2013) explains:

“By means of the will man passes from an intellectual state into act and deed. And these activities of the mind are not merely isolated movements; they become links in a series of actions and acquire permanence. The agent throws himself into these acts; and *in the exercise of knowing and willing he becomes characterized by his own deeds*. The more frequently he does the act, the more easy and pleasurable does it become. And this blending of pleasure and volition creates that tendency or bias towards doing it that we denominate Habit. Therefore it is that we have spoken of character as a habit of will.”

Butler (2014) stated Neighborhood culture can shape an individual's character in at least three ways: first, the social norms of the community can be helpful or harmful to the development of habits that evolve into character. Second, the influence of one's immediate friends and peers seems often to be even especially potent. We see this in many critical areas, such as education. Being brought up in a tough neighborhood often means that a student who hands in homework regularly and wants to excel will face a daunting social price. Even students in more upwardly mobile neighborhoods can be held back by their friends, whose social impact seems to be even greater than the prevailing norm. Similarly, health-related behaviors that have long-term social and economic consequences, such as smoking, drug use or obesity, appear to be heavily influenced by the norms of a person's friends and social networks. Still, we have to be cautious about blaming friends for an individual's character formation – after all, to a significant degree one chooses one's own friends.

Beyond just friends, associations and social institutions are a third cultural influence. Gangs are an example, often enforcing behavior patterns as the price of protection. On the other hand, the peer pressure of tightly knit school sports teams or religious institutions can be a strong and positive cultural factor in building character. Anderson (1994) describes this as the "Code of the Streets", with locals referring to "street" or "decent" behavior standards that profoundly affect such work habits, school and family. Putnam (2012) explains that if the dominant social culture undervalues work, family stability and education it can serve to condemn young people with innate potential to a low-achieving social class.

People who belong to cultures that promote individualism tend to look at only the main aspects of a situation, while those of a culture that promotes collectivism tend to consider even the minor details. American culture which is predominantly individualistic, promotes giving freedom of choice to children since a young age. The Indonesian culture which promotes collectivism, rather encourages the parents/elders to make choices for their children. This is an example of how parenting is perceived in contrasting ways due to the differences in culture. Similarly, people of Eastern cultures perceive success as being a collective effort, while those of the American culture perceive it as the fruit of individual effort.

Our culture forms the framework for our thoughts and behavior. The ideas ingrained in our minds by our culture influence the way we perceive people and situations. For example, women from male-dominated societies perceive men to be superior. Women from cultures which dictate that their clothing should cover the entire body and even their faces, may think of a skirt or a low-cut dress, as provocative. It shows that our culture does play a role in the way our brain processes information and reacts to stimuli.

Culture affects perception, and perceptions drive behavior. Thus, the culture we belong to, has a direct impact on our behavior. Moreover, our environment, which has cultural influences, shapes our behavior.

CONCLUSION

Culture is one of many factors to influence a person's character/ personality. Through Culture we learn what is expected of us and act accordingly. The way we perceive the world can be affected by the lens our culture naturally views it by.

If we grew up in a relaxed culture, through this the lens perceived the world as a place for adventure and excitement but was also made aware of the ugly truths that some people's lives become. In other side if we had been raised in a different culture we know that we would contain within the same core aspects of our character and personality because anything that happens in life brings us exactly what we need to continue to grow. Maybe we wouldn't believe this if we was raised in a different culture that culture only affects the part of you that is on the surface of your being. Underneath, where all the mystery and essence of our soul reside is where the show of life really unfolds, our true self can take any form while perfectly reflecting exactly who we are.

How we perceive things is largely affected by our judgment skills, preconceived notions, attitude, and emotions. These factors are closely linked with our culture. In perceiving something as good or bad, our biases play a role and so does our way of thinking. In judging something as easy or difficult, our attitude and our motivation levels play a key role. Our culture determines the structure of our thinking, which influences our perceptions.

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