

2.0 Culture

We have always known culture as the way of life of a people. Culture is a universal phenomenon as every society has its own cultural stock to which its members subscribe to, identify with and are identified by. In Nigeria with different tribes and ethnic groups, each of these groups has its own culture with regards to family life, marriage, belief system, religion and custom, among others.

2.1 What is Culture?

The main approaches to the culture definition are general. The essence of a sociological approach to the study of culture definition is, firstly, the disclosure of societal relationships and regularities of the functioning of and development of culture and, secondly, to identify its social functions. Culture in sociology is regarded primarily as a collective and ubiquitous concept. Culture is a term that has many different meanings. However, the following are various ways culture has been defined.

- Culture is the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterises an institution, organization, group or society.
- Culture has also been defined as an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behaviour that depends upon the capacity for symbolic thought and social learning.
- Culture is considered to be group-specific behaviour that is acquired, at least in part, from social influences. Here, group is considered to be the species-typical unit, whether it be a troop, lineage, subgroup, or so on.
- Culture is a community's customs, rituals and belief systems developed over time.
- Culture means the whole complex of traditional behavior which has been developed by the human race and is successively learned by each generation.
- Culture can also mean the forms of traditional behavior which are characteristic of a given society, or of a group of societies, or of a certain race, or of certain area, or of a certain period of time.
- Culture is the socially transmitted knowledge and behavior shared by some group of people.

2.2 Types of Culture?

There are two types of culture: material culture and non-material culture.

Material culture is that aspect of culture that we can see and handle e.g. chair, book, biro, table, clothes, bag, drums, etc.

Non-material culture is that aspect of culture that cannot be seen or touched e.g. values, customs, beliefs, folklore, etc.

2.3 Characteristics of Culture

1. Culture is universal.
2. Culture is not inborn; it is shared and learnt.
3. Culture is dynamic.
4. Culture is transferable from one generation to another.
5. Culture is overt and covert. It is divided into material and non-material aspects.
6. Culture is symbolic: It is based on the purposeful creation and usage of symbols; it is exclusive to humans.

2.4 Elements of Culture

1. Customs
2. Language
3. Symbols
4. Folkways
5. Mores
6. Norms
7. Values
8. Laws

2.5 Functions of Culture

1. Culture determines how people behave and live.
2. It differentiates one society from another.
3. It ensures and guarantees the continuity of society.
4. It aids uniformity among certain groups of people in the society.

2.6 Other Concepts in Culture

1. Ethnocentrism – this stands for the situation when a group or individual feels their material or non-material culture is better than others e.g. when a Yoruba man feels his dressing is better than those from other tribes.
2. Sub-culture – is a distinctive culture shared by a group within a larger society e.g. Igbo culture is a sub-culture to the general culture in the Nigerian society.
3. Cultural relativism – this is the uniqueness of the culture of a group which contains peculiar pattern of behaviour which may seem alien to people from other cultural background. For instance, the beating of grooms in the Fulani culture as a test of courage, fearlessness and masculinity falls into this group.
4. Culture shock - this is the psychological and social maladjustment at micro or macro level that is experienced for the first time when people encounter new cultural elements such as new things, new ideas, new concepts, seemingly strange beliefs and practices e.g. mini skirt, terrorism,

suicide bombers, exposure of women's breasts in the public, etc. are examples of cultural shock to some people in Nigeria.

3.0 Conclusion

The study of social problems and culture is very important for tertiary students because not only will it inform and expose them to the world around them, it will also help to shape their behaviour and comportsment within and outside the university environment. As future leaders, students will be exposed to the various social problems as listed in this course, their causes and probable solutions, and this approach prepares them to develop cognitive and creative skills at problem solving. Also with adequate knowledge of culture, students will be able to appreciate the theoretical aspects of the concept and how to apply these to the practical or material aspects of their particular cultural stock. Students are to read up and practice the following review questions below for further discussions in class.

4.0 Review Questions

1. Explain, what is "social" about social problem?
2. How would you distinguish between social and individual problems?
3. What social problems do you think is prominent in Nigeria? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Write an essay on corruption as a social problem in Nigeria. Identify its causes and possible solutions.
5. Do you agree that examination malpractice is a social problem? Give your reasons.
6. Which of the sociological perspectives do you think has the best interpretation of social problems in Nigeria?
7. Do you think that your culture is better than others? Explain.
8. Write extensively on the cultural life of your ethnic group.
9. Culture is not innate; it is learned. Discuss.
10. Is culture actually necessary? Support your position with practical examples.