
**EFFECTIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: A TOOL
FOR ACHIEVING NIGERIAN NATIONAL MOTTO**

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Abstract

Nigeria, as a sovereign nation, has carefully and purposefully created a national motto to serve as a guide towards living peacefully in unity in spite of our cultural heterogeneity and ethnic diversity that can engender and galvanise meaningful development in Nigeria. This, therefore, presupposes that every responsible Nigerian citizen, be it a child or adult, should direct his or her actions or activities towards promoting and enhancing unity and faith, peace and progress to the survival and continuity of a geographical entity called Nigeria. Consequently, in achieving, promoting and sustaining the Nigerian National Motto, it is instructive to inculcate those ideals or values inherent in the national motto early enough via effective Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigerian children who are considered as leaders of tomorrow. It is on that premise, that this paper examined the significance of inculcating and promoting unity and faith, peace and progress among Nigerian children at the early childhood stage. It further explores developmentally appropriate strategies that could be used in inculcating and promoting the cherished values as

contained in the Nigerian National Motto in the course of the children interactions at the ECE centres.

Keywords: Early childhood education, Nigerian national motto, Strategies, Nation and ECE centres

Introduction

Shortly after the much awaited liberation from the shackles of colonialism, the composition of Nigeria and her political desire to remain as one indivisible geographical entity became inevitable. Consequently, certain efforts were made by Nigerian leaders to ensure that our independence was justified to the entire world, hence the creation of national symbols. Every country that is growth and development-driven is much bothered on how and what goes on in the country. This might have necessitated the creation and utilisation of a guiding principle that will be used as a reference in our actions and inactions in the country shortly after Nigerian Independence, hence the creation of Nigerian national motto that reads thus: “Unity and faith, peace and progress” which is a components of the National Coat of Arms that came into being officially in 1975 after our liberation from the hands of the British Colonialists. The national motto, according to Odusina (2013) and Asiyanbola (2016) contains some values that are of inestimable value to the growth, progress and utter development of Nigeria if strictly adhere to by all and sundry in the country.

It is important to emphasise that Nigerian national motto bears values that are expected to be internalized and inculcated in every citizen in the country in order to make Nigeria great among the comity of nations. It has been established in literature that some children and youth in Nigeria have lost the cherished values in Nigeria which has snowballed into myriads of socio-political and economic problems being evidenced in the country for some time now. Consequently upon the above, the auspicious period that these values can be effectively inculcated in the children is the early childhood period of every child. Okewole and Osinowo (2018) reported that this period has been scientifically proved to be a period

when and where children's brains are more receptive than any other stages of human life. A period when the brain of human develops faster than any other stages of human development and existence. Therefore, it becomes imperative to use Early Childhood Education as a tool of inculcating, enhancing and promoting the values of Nigerian national motto. Hence, the general objective of this paper is to explore how Early Childhood Education can be used to promote, maintain and sustain the Nigeria National Motto. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. examine the strategies that can be used in inculcating, promoting and sustaining the values inherent in the Nigeria National Motto through effective Early Childhood Education.
- ii. advance benefits accruable from early inculcation and promotion of the values embedded in the Nigeria National Motto.

Concept of Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Education (ECE) could be described as education given to children right from conception to age eight. Okewole (2018) viewed ECE. as an education designed to promote social, physical, intellectual, cultural, emotional and moral development. Research has shown that every society has one way or the other to impart early childhood education to the children as reflected in how children behave at their early stage. Early Childhood Education has been given recognition by the federal government of Nigeria as contained in the National Policy on Education (NPE) (2014) Section 2 Articles 14 and 15 stipulate that Early Child Care Development and Education (ECCDE) is the care, protection, stimulation and learning promoted in children from age 0-4 years in a crèche or nursery.

The purpose of Early Childhood Education are to: effect a smooth transition from the home to the school; prepare the child for the primary level of education; provide adequate care, supervision and security for the children while their parents are at work; inculcate social, moral norms and values; inculcate in the child the spirit of

enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, arts music and the use of toys etc.; develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit; stimulate in the child food habits; and teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms etc through play.

Strategies of inculcating and Promoting Nigeria National Motto through Early Childhood Education

Given the capability of children's brains to accommodate events exposed to at early stage, it becomes imperative to explore avenues available in Early Childhood Education. Therefore, to inculcate the national values as such as; unity and faith, peace and progress in Nigeria children, the following strategies can be utilized: Collaborative task strategy, Assigning responsibility strategy, Conflict resolution strategy, Self-confidence strategy, Promotion and appreciation strategy and Drama/simulation strategy

(a) Collaborative Task Strategy

At the early childhood period, research have shown that children love being together to share things in common. Their gregarious nature can be harnessed to foster unity among them at the early stage. This is a convenient spot for the E.C.E to stimulate the children on the need to work together in order to achieve the desired results. Okewole and Osinowo (2018) observed that the gregariousness often exhibited by the children could be harnessed and utilized to the maximum in promoting unity. Besides, tasks that are developmentally appropriate which can bring the children together in solving problems given to them will encourage cooperation among them thereby bringing about the desired unity that is being accentuated by the National Motto (Henrique and Ibrahim, 2008). Collaborative efforts from the children will make them learn how to listen to other people's views, aggregate the different views of others and learn to tolerate one another which directly or indirectly snowball into peaceful co-existence which unity stands for. Various academic activities or tasks could be given at regular periods of time which require group or collaborative efforts of the members of

the group. The groups formed today are expected to be disbanded and new ones are created with new members with different disposition. This strategy is considered efficacious in promoting unity among the members of the group and/or the class as a whole. It is the experience garnered and acquired from the various interactions emanating from the given task by the children that will make them believe and cherish the fact that working together to achieve a certain thing is paramount to the survival and progress of a group or society at large. Besides, that the group is able to accomplish the task given successfully will galvanize positive self-confidence and thus boost their ego with the mentality that they can do all things if concerted efforts are harnessed.

(b) Assigning Responsibility Strategy

Having faith in one's ability and capability could be fostered by assigning individual child to a task which will make the child to express himself or herself. Such task or responsibility to children will make them to develop sense of belonging and thus begin to exert certain influence which in turn make him to have faith in his/her ability to perform certain task. It is when a child is given a responsibility to carry out, one may not know the potential such child possesses. However, the expected tasks must be developmentally appropriate to the mental age and not chronological age of the child. Odusote (2013) and Odusina (2013) asserted that assigning responsibility strategy emphasises on providing task to individual child and that such assignment should be developmentally appropriate to the level of the child's mental age. Doing such task will elicit and enhance self-confidence that will promote faith in the child's ability. The task assigning strategy could be on cognitive, affective or psychomotor activity. However, where the task is unsuccessfully carried the ECE educator or handler should promptly provide timely assistance so as to boost the child's self-confidence, morale and faith in his/her ability otherwise the child may discourage and lose self-confidence in himself or herself. With this task done successfully, the spirit of self-confidence and faith in one's ability to resolve issue is being inculcated directly or indirectly in Nigerian child.

(c) Conflict Resolution Strategy

This is another strategy that could be used in promoting Nigeria National Motto in the pursuit of national peace and progress. These virtues are inevitable in any society that craves for meaningful development. Where two or more people are gathered, there is every proclivity that divergent views may result in dispute among the people. This therefore means that children are not immune against such occurrence. If this happens, the E.C.E educators or handlers can as well make use of conflict resolution strategy to reconcile the aggrieved parties. The essence of the strategy is to ensure peaceful co-existence among people. Therefore, children's handlers should emphasise the need for the children to be friendly with people, avoid fighting or quarrelling with other people if the children really mean to be successful in the near future. The value of peaceful co-existence with other people will usher in progress in one's life. This strategy allows other techniques to be used such as playlets that will show the evil effects of violence and why peace is essential to making progress. The exposure of children to watching films or playlet promoting peace that may be animated to catch the full attention of the children will invariably inculcate the desired values of peace and progress in the children as there cannot be progress in the absence of peace. The two values as expressed in the Nigeria National Motto "peace and progress" are inseparable. If children are taught these values wherever they find themselves, the society will be peaceful and progressive.

(d) Self-confidence Strategy

This is yet another strategy that E.C.E educators or teachers can use for children to promote virtues of unity and faith, peace and progress as enunciated in the Nigeria National Motto. At the early childhood stage, it is important and imperative to start inculcating and developing self-confidence in Nigerian child at tender years of their growth and development. To do this effectively, self-confidence strategy is more appropriately by allowing the children to develop that sense of self-confidence. Okewole (2018) and Opeibi (2019) observed that when children are allowed to express themselves

and thus motivate them in their various activities that they successfully accomplished, their self-esteem and/or self-confidence is galvanised to do better in subsequent activities. Self-confidence strategy instills in children absolute early confidence that makes them to do any task successfully. The task in the strategy is individual rather than group task. The strategy recognizes the principle of individualism that presupposes that every child does things at his/her ability. When all these are done, it will enhance and stimulate faith and progress in the lives of the children thus helping in achieving and sustaining the Nigeria national motto.

(e) Simulation Strategy

This is another efficacious strategy that can instill and enhance the valuable national motto in the Nigerian children at a tender age through the use of Early Childhood Education (Okewole, 2018). Through this strategy, children can be asked to represent or model what each of these values that are embedded in the Nigerian national motto: Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress. The children can model these virtues several times to bring out their meanings, appreciate and imbibe these values in their daily life activities. If this strategy is used regularly by ECE handlers or educators the children will realise, as they continue to grow and develop that Nigeria as a nation needs to be united in spite of cultural diversity in the country. Faith which is an embodiment of belief in one's potential that will lead to maximum utilization of one's natural gift or talent that is capable of ushering growth and development in the country that translates into progress which can only be achieved in an atmosphere of peace and conviviality (Okewole, 2018). It must be stated here that the children must be made to understand the essence of the simulation of these virtues in the Nigerian national motto and thus encourage them to imbibe the virtues and demonstrate such in their centres, schools or home at all times.

(f) Promotion and Appreciation Strategy

This strategy covers both academic and non-academic dimensions in making the children be committed to their learning activities

which invariably will lead to progress. Children should be made to understand that there could be no promotion and appreciation without outstanding performance. Therefore promotion comes after outstanding performance and the performer is thus appreciated.. When this happens, children are expected to be motivated in terms of promotion or appreciation. This will make them to appreciate the dignity of labour. At the early life, children are ready to learn anything imparted in them. Therefore, anything done that is commonly commendable or worthwhile should be appreciated so that such feat can be later repeated in a better way or be emulated by others. This will foster progress in the lives of the children having realized that anything done well will be appreciated or promotion. In the classroom or ECE centres where these children are kept, motivation could be given for punctuality or well-behaved child or most-peace-loving child or best academic child or awards for best perfect, etc. This will encourage others to be of good behaviour, maintain good relationship, peaceful and be more studious in their academic endeavours which are encapsulated in the Nigeria national motto. This will engender progress in the lives of the children. It may also promote healthy competition among the children into who gets the prize(s) at the end of the year.

Benefits of Imparting Values of National Motto through Early Childhood Education

Going by the neurological and physiological growth and development of children, it is therefore developmentally appropriate to impart values that Nigeria as a nation cherished which are apparently expressed in her national motto as contained in the national Coat of Arms which are: Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress. The inculcation of these virtues in the lives of these children will serve as a solid foundation for their subsequent development which in no small measure may serve as determinants to the height at which they will reach in life. If children are exposed early enough to all the cherished national values, this will invariably enable them to be responsible and fit into the vision and mission of Nigeria. The more the children learn to be united at their tender

age the better for the nation.

Myriads of task that could engineer faith and self-confidence in the children abound in Early Childhood Education. These tasks will instill faith in their abilities to resolve any issues. This will, in turn, make the children to be self-confident and self-reliance in tackling mind-set, the children will appreciate the fact that there is no issue without solution if backed by strong determination. It has been established in literature that any learning materials/content adequately learnt by the children tend to be permanent in their memories. Therefore, the teaching and learning of these cherished values of faith and unity, peace and progress will be of value to the children even as they grow to understand and appreciate better that those values really mean to the existence of progressive, united and strong nation.

Early Childhood Education can also serve as an instrument of promoting the Nigerian National Motto by exposing the children to some of the activities that are in the E.C.E. curriculum as prepared and approved by Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) which emphasize these values of unity and faith, peace and progress. These curricular contents can be passed to the children in form of play and other developmentally appropriate strategies. The teaching of these values should not be delayed until children get to secondary or post-secondary level. Concepts that dovetail into the values embedded in the national motto can be broken down into various tasks that the children can learn at their early period of life and this remain permanent in them. This in turn, will make the children to be responsible citizens in the future.

Imparting national motto values into children at early stage of life will make the children have positive outlook of life. At the early stage, children learn how to be hardworking, focused, progressive and have faith in one's ability will make them to be responsible citizens which Nigeria motto stands for. It is the early exposure of children to these values that can ensure effective citizenship which the nation craves for. All that the ECE centres need doing is to ensure that those values as contained in the national motto are incorporated into the learning activities of the children and appropriate methods or strategies are employed in the process of imparting them.

Concluding Remarks

Having considered strategies and benefits we can derive from using Early Childhood Education as a tool to impart and inculcate the values of national motto into the children at the early stage of human existence, it is hoped that children will become responsible citizens having acquired ECE will serve as a bedrock and a solid foundation of developing unity and faith, peace and progress. Appropriate methods and strategies be employed in laying and promoting the values of Nigerian national motto with a view to having responsible children and youth that are potentially promising leaders of tomorrow.

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