CULTURE PRESERVATION THROUGH MUSIC IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF EHUME OBOWO COMMUNITY IN IMO STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract
Every Nation, tribe and race have different cultures; and culture represents the way of life of a people. Culture is the many influences of a people in a community which had to do with their knowledge, character, social life and behaviour. It is also seen as the beliefs and customs and social organisations of a people. This means that every society represents a culture that defines who they are; such is the case with Ehume Obowo Community in Imo State. Culture is very important if the existence of the people will last, and as a result, the preservation of such culture therefore becomes very paramount. Studies have shown that preservation of anything good must start from the foundation; hence the culture of a people is best done through music in Early Childhood Education. This study investigated the importance of culture in the life of the people of Ehume Obowo and how it is preserved through Education in early childhood. This research adopted observation and literature study. And conclusions were drawn following the findings. The study showed that the culture of a people is their life and its preservation is of greater importance, and it is best preserved through music in early childhood education.
Keywords: Culture, Music, Ehume Obowo, Early Childhood, Childhood Education.

Introduction

Culture is an important part of every people, nature and race. No Nation, community, kindred even family ever exists without culture. Most times people call it principle, norms, beliefs and even custom. Whatever it is called, it is an important part of everyday living of a people. This importance becomes more significant only when it is preserved and passed onto generations for its continuity. More so, important matters are preserved by serious minded people through education, either formal or informal. Informal education takes place through speech and observation, which parents or group of people's passes down to their children each time they are with them, practically or orally. Formal education on the other hand takes place in a learning institution, which could be home or school, where an individual (mother or teacher) teaches a pupil or group of pupils following the curriculum handed down by the institution. These two forms of education are applied in the preservation of culture. However, if the culture must really be preserved, it must start from the cradle and this is where and why children come in and is involved. A successful preservation of a norm or culture can by a family, kindred, community and Nation done from the cradle. Early childhood education is an important and most effective means of culture preservation, and this can easily be done through music since children love inclines them to music.

Clarification of Terms

Culture

Culture as has earlier been noted is an important part of everyone's life. In fact, anyone who has nothing to stand for falls for everything. The world is changing in everything and if culture changes as civilisation and people are demanding, then the only means of knowing who people are would be lost (Esimone (2013). Culture makes people and defines who they are. Advanced Learner's Dictionary in Esimone (2013:2) defines "culture as the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organisation of a particular country or group". Cultures tell who people are, their norms, behaviours, language, dressing, even the food they eat tells about a particular people. Such items are referred to as cultural heritage. It is passed down from generation to generation and this symbolises the flag of a people that should be continuously be remembered through preservation. Culture helps us understand our ancestral values and differentiates uniquely from other parts of the world, and this obviously brings meaning to our daily lives. When children are in a particular community, they are trained and nurtured in the cultures and traditions of that community in which they grow into adulthood to preserve and spread by their daily living.

Ehume Obowo

Ehume Obowo is one of the communities found in Obowo Local Government Area in Imo State. According to Utoh, a non-governmental body, it is one of the three clans that embodied the former Etiti local Government Area of Okigwe zone in Imo State. It is located between Owerri, Mbaise of Imo State and Umuahia of Abia State. It is one of the fourteen communities that make up Obowo town. (Umuariam, Umuosochie, Avutu, Ehume, Umunachi, Umulogho, Umungwa, Alike, Achara, Amanze, Amuzi, Odenkume, Umuokeh and Okwuohia); it is situated between Avutu and Umunachi. It is a small community but very rich in culture historically. The history of Ehume Obowo span from the 18th century.

Utoh further asserts that Obowo is historically traceable to a man who married two wives and each had two sons, and their sons had seven sons each and they settled in a place named after him as Obowo. Each of these sons founded each of their communities after their names and Ehume happened to be referred to as the first born son of Obowo and is popularly called "Opara Obowo". Ehume is very rich in culture like in every other community and tribe in Nigeria. Utoh observed that the culture inherent in Ehume is same in all the communities (Sons of Obowo) in Obowo hence, the following are seen as their cultural festivals: *Iwa-Akwa*,(Cloth-tying) festival, *Ekpo* (Masquerade), *Egbe-Nkwu*, (Palm-Frunt) festival, *Iri-iji* (New Yam) festivals. *Iwa-Akwa* festival is done to show the young men of a particular age are due to be regarded as men, as they can marry, attend the meeting of the aged in the community, they can be giving responsibilities and have them account for it; to show this can take place,

they must partake in *Iwa-Akwa*. And this festival is a big occasion associated with a lot of music and merriment. All the festivals mentioned above are carried out on high performance of music, they are enduring cultures that needed to be preserved; and children in early childhood seem to be the best people to pass the culture onto. The children need to be taught their culture early in their life; and this, can be easily done through the instrument of music both at home and in school.

Importance of Culture

Culture is as important as life, that's how serious it is. It is the only way of knowing and identifying of a people. The world is going with a notion 'everyone is the same', 'let us have the same opinion about everything'. This may be true in some sense because everyone is human, but everyone cannot be the same since everyone speaks different languages, come from different nations and background, speak different tribal languages, have different color and have different belief system, performs different kind of music, are known with a particular dressing and have a different way of life even have different ways they build their houses. So, the idea that we're the same and most have the same culture holds no water till the end of the world. Everyone is headed to a different direction and there is nothing anyone can do about it. Culture remains the only way to identify people. It orders people's social life, their conducts and everything about humans, that's how important culture is. It exists for posterity and it is transferred from generation to generation so that the younger children and generation can continue from where their ancestors stopped. The importance of culture cannot be over emphasised; culture helps us have valuable information about our roots, it gives us the leeway to know and understand our ancestors. Culture is like pages of a history book which tells us who we are and hence demands our utmost interest in its study.

Culture is important to us because it defines our evolutionary identity. It helps us understand our ancestral values and gives us the very meaning of life. It also makes us unique from other parts of the world. When born in a particular region, we grow up by learning our regional culture and the society shapes our lives to become what we are today. Traditional culture of a community keeps us bonded forever. Importance of preserving cultural heritage lies in the sense of belonging and unity that it offers. Cultural heritage and traditions serve to link us with our ancestors, which is valuable and should not be lost. The beliefs and laws laid down by the roots of our culture are meaningful and are for the betterment of our lives. Everything from marriage traditions to religious beliefs should be valued in any culture. Even though times are changing now and mixed cultures are in fashion, effort to not let go of regional cultures are constantly carried out.

The above quote explicitly reveals in clear terms the importance of culture and encourages its adherence in spite of the changes in the society. Culture indeed is very powerful. It has helped kept individuals, families, kindred, communities and even nations disciplined and which has always led to peaceful existence. The rules made in families and communities were for reasons and once followed religiously, the benefits

are unquantifiable. Knowledge is power; detailed understanding of ones culture is very powerful because such knowledge has always kept individuals safe and steadfast in the face of misunderstandings and misrepresentations. Culture teaches humans the importance of being responsible and hardworking members of the society. In the view of all the above, it is imperative therefore to state here that every culture is very important and should be upheld tenaciously by members of the people. No one should be given the right to attack and destroy our culture for that is our root and who we are and nobody should also disdain or dislike the culture he is born into for that's what defines who we are.

Early Childhood Education

Early childhood is the age before formal schooling. Early childhood starts from the womb, when the mother talks to the child while carrying him or her in her womb and after birth, the talking continues and from there to the school environment. It is seen as the age when the brain is very sharp to grasp rapidly and when the brain is at its fullest. Early childhood span from one year to five years of age in Nigeria as a Nation, and to other nations like the United States of America, it is extended to eight years of age. Early childhood is the age when self-esteem is built, talking matures and moral foundations are instilled in a child. At this age, the mother plays most of the roles in instilling all the above in a child since from the womb till the time the child enters the kindergarten class; the mother is with the child. Knowledge obviously is power, and mothers are the most wonderful creatures on earth. They remain the best and the most effective teachers in the world. While carrying the child in her womb, the mother sings and talks and the child is hearing her voice; and when the child is born, the mother's voice continues as the lone voice that communicates all the time to the child, while breastfeeding, cuddling the child, putting the child to sleep and so on; through this medium the child learns a lot of things.

Furthermore, Most people have the opinion that education starts on the school environment, that's not true, education starts with the mother while the baby is still in the womb, when each day the mother speaks to the baby in her womb, talking to the baby in real communion and singing for the baby every now and then till the baby is born; as the baby daily hears the voice of the mother while in the womb, the mothers voice turns out to be the first the baby recognises when born. And each time that voice sings and talks to the baby, the reassurance that the baby is in a safe hand is taking in by the baby, hence the mother becomes the first point of instruction and teaching the child receives in life.

Education is also as important as life. Every day living is about education. Every human being learns directly or indirectly, formally or informally, with or without the spoken word all the time, the only difference is what is learnt and the result of it. Researchers have argued that change is the evidence that learning has taken place and

learning comes through education. Walker (1998:32), opines that the quest to gain understanding or what it means to be human in all its illogicality, unpredictability, and irrationality and in all its uniquely varied cultural ways of doing and thinking is education. Early childhood education therefore according to Esimone (2013:5) is a system of making children acquire knowledge that can stir up creativity, acquisition of skills and inquisitiveness in them and at the same time, create in them the understanding of who they are and what is expected of them. Esimone simplified it by saying "it is a means the system of life expected of the children to live is inculcated in them".

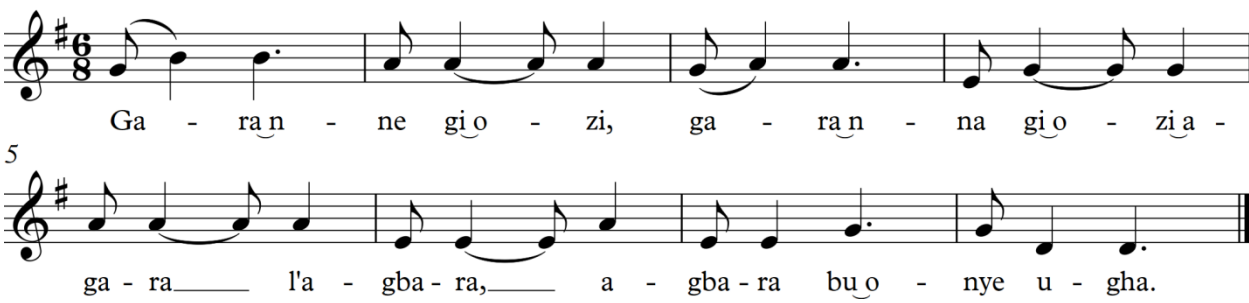
Culture Preservation through Music in Early Childhood Education

Education is a means through which knowledge is disseminated and has been described by the researcher as the means through which culture preservation can be done. However using music (the singing voice and in most of the time musical instruments) as an instructional material in teaching children in early childhood has positive impact on their knowledge acquisition capability. Children learn easily and readily when music is the medium or means of teaching and learning whether at home or in school; even on Television or Radio, especially Television because it is said that what the child sees coupled with an accompanying song or music, works magic to achieving the educational goal set out for the children. Paget (2006), opined that 60% of the teaching assignment can be done in 5% of the time through music.

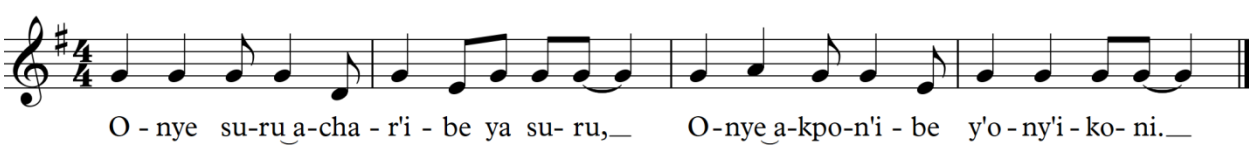
In Ehume Obowo, the norms and cultures of the people are passed down to their generations through moonlight storytelling, group music for children, daily family devotions and instructions in the schools through music. The children learn from their families the culture of respect for the elders, dress codes, hard work and the rest before going to school where the major aspects of the knowledge is taught them. Idolor (2002) made it clear that norms and values of the society are taught children to foster self-usefulness and facilitate the performance of expected roles in the wider society. There are so many songs that parents use in teaching their children their culture and songs teachers can use in teaching the children their culture.

Some of these songs are below:

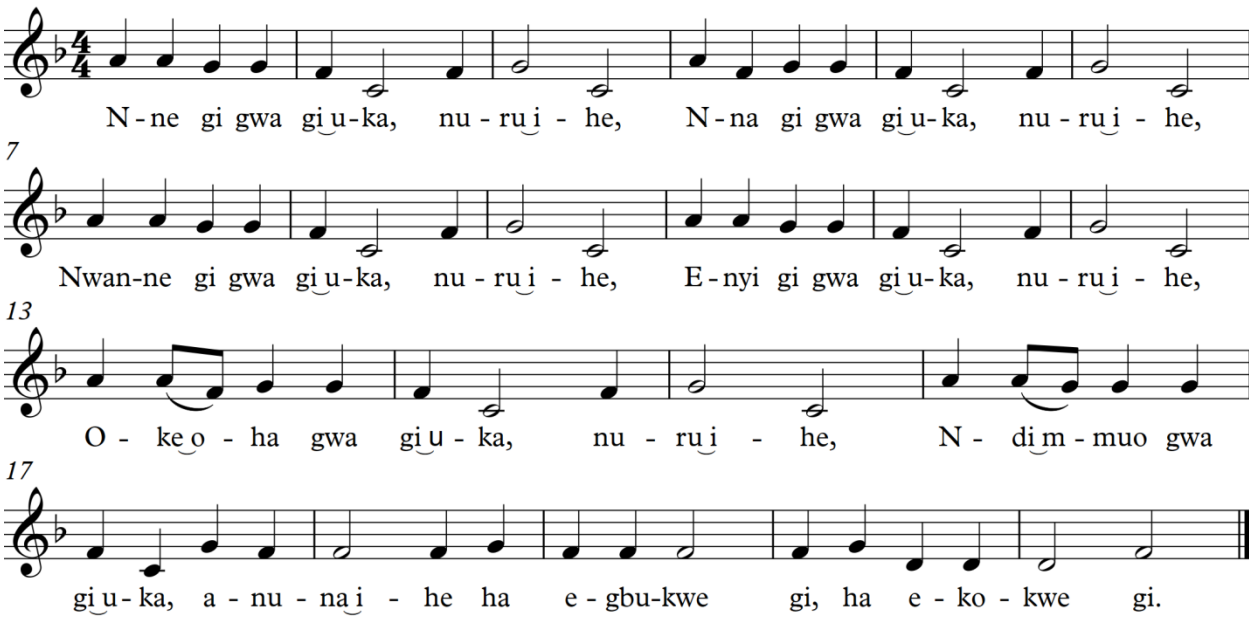
Gaara Nne Gi Ozi
(Run An Errand For Your Mother)



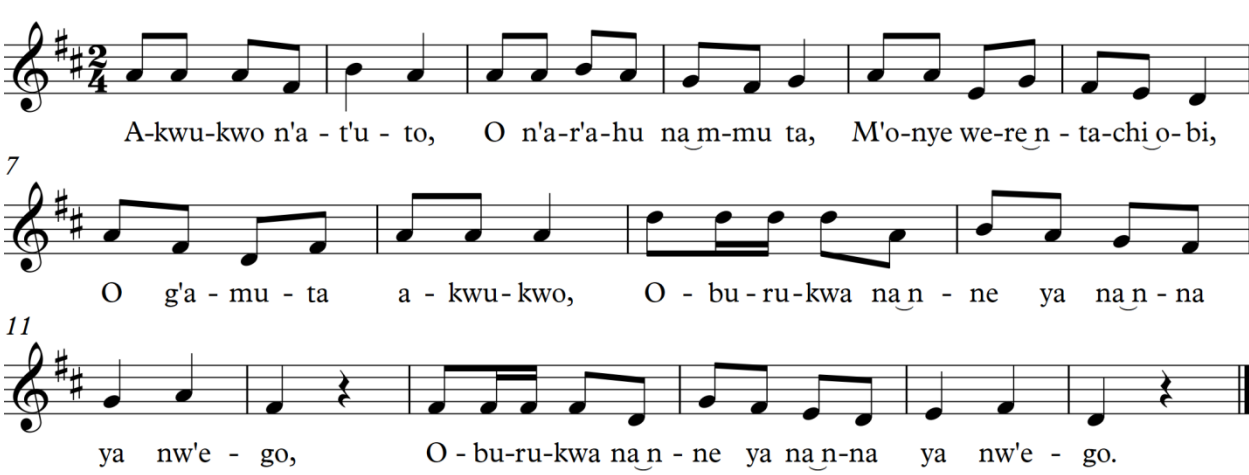
Onye Suru Achara
(Let Each One Cut His Grass)



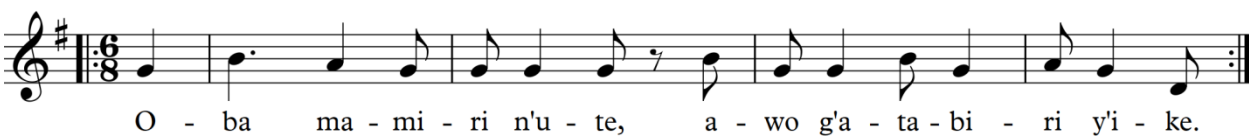
Nne Gi Gwa Gi Uka
(If Your Mother Advises You)



Akwukwo Na-ato Uto
(Education is Good)

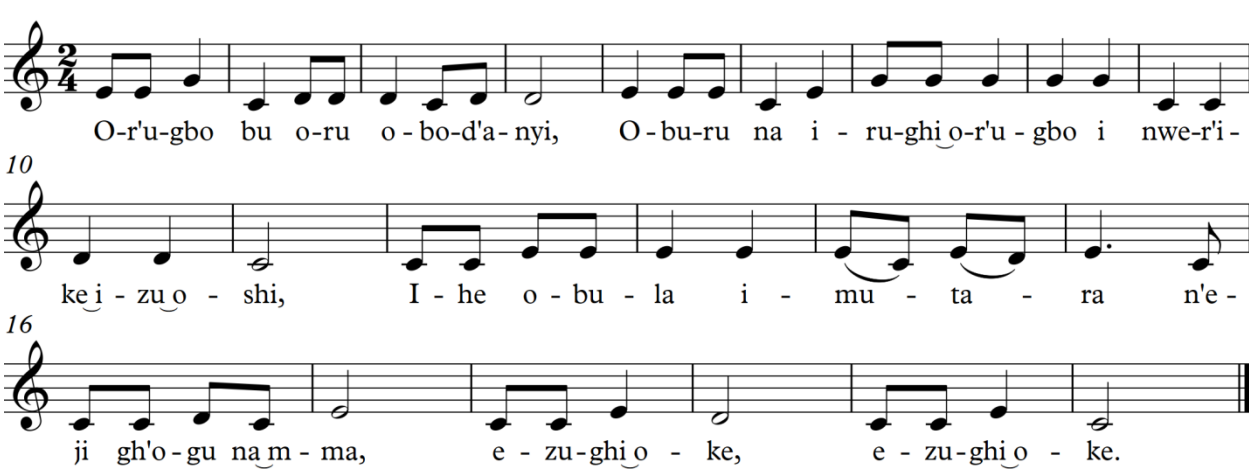


O Ba Mamiri N'ute
(A Bed-wetter)



Oru Ugbo
(Farm Work)
An Orlu Occupational Song

Arr. by R. C. Okafor



The above songs are some of the songs that teach children of respect, moral attitude and hard work which depicts the cultural heritage of Ehume Obowo people; and these songs reveals the lifestyle of Ehume Obowo indigenes. Till date the citizens respect their elders, they maintain disciple that produces moral character. They are very hardworking people anywhere they are found. Ehume Obowo as one of the

communities in the Eastern part of Nigeria (*Igbos*) depicts that highly industrious people of the Region who are known for hard work.

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