



Perceived Impact of Child Labor on Pupils' School Attendance and Performance

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Abstract

Given the alarming number of out-of-school children engaged in child labor in Nigeria and considering the consequences, this study sought to determine the impact of child labor on pupils' school attendance and performance. A descriptive survey, using a convenience sampling technique, collected rationalistic data regarding Nigerian teachers' perceptions (N=100). Findings reveal child labor negatively impacts pupils' school attendance and performance. Implications and recommendations are discussed.

Keywords: child labor, school attendance, performance, teacher, pupils

Introduction

Statistics in Nigeria show that there are about 15 million out-of-school children under the age of 14 who are involved in child labor [International Labour Organization (ILO), 2020]. This statistic is quite alarming and negates Goal Four of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which Nigeria and other nations adopted. This goal seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning (UN, 2015) in member countries. In Nigeria, child labor seems so widespread that it has been accepted by many as part of normal life (Omokhodion et al., 2006). This practice of child labor is an aberration which takes away the

innocence of millions of children and remains a threat to the future of the country. Children engaged in child labor are often exploited and involved in different forms of work beyond their carrying capacity in the private, semi-formal, and informal sectors (Baji, 2021; Okafor, 2020). Frequently, this exploitation deprives these children of their childhood and basic education.

Basic education is one of three levels of education in Nigeria; the other two include the secondary and tertiary levels. Nwune et al. (2022) describe this basic level of education along three levels: lower basic 1-3 (formerly known as primary 1-3), middle basic 4-6 (formerly known as primary 4-6), and upper basic 7-9 (formerly called junior secondary 1-3). This basic level of education is vital for children because it is the foundation upon which other levels build. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) describes the objectives of basic education to include inculcating permanent literacy and numeracy; improving the ability to communicate effectively; establishing a basis for scientific and reflective thinking; providing citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society; developing character and sound attitude and morals in the child; supporting the child's ability to adapt to a changing environment; nurturing individual capacities to develop manipulative skills; enabling effective functioning in the society and providing the child with basic tools for further educational advancement. Notwithstanding the aforementioned well-crafted objectives of basic education, the realization of these objectives may not be possible in Nigeria if school-age children continue to stay out of school and remain subjected to child labor.

Child Labor

Child labor has been conceptualized differently by several researchers. For example, Sauya (2019) sees child labor as any action perpetrated against a child by the parents, caregivers or any human that leads to the physical, emotional, and spiritual mistreatment of the child. Similarly, Oni (2018) defines child labor as the work undertaken by children below the appropriate legal minimum working age or that interferes with a child's school attendance and affects their academic performance. This work could be hazardous, and thus, the action jeopardizes the health, safety, and morals of children. This implies any form of work performed by a child that poses a challenge to their well-being can be tagged child labor. Furthermore, Baji (2021) defines child labor as any work that a child under the age of fourteen years is engaged and affects their right to attend school. From the foregoing, it is understood that child labor exploits a child by depriving them of their childhood, interfering with their ability to attend regular schools, and is mentally, physically, socially, and morally harmful. It is often perceived to be detrimental to the health, education, and overall development of children.

Child labor can occur in different forms and at different places. For example, Okafor (2020) found that in Nigeria, child labor occurs in the forms of hawking (peddling goods), begging, factory and farm work among others, and emerges in organized private, semi-formal, and informal sectors. In the semi-formal sector, especially in the construction and agricultural industries, contractors and farm managers engage children in exploitative work. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2007) classifies the various forms of child labor activities in the informal sector in urban areas to include children working in public places such as streets and markets; street vendors in mobile or stationary positions; young beggars who work alone or with parents or relatives; and shoe shiners, car washers, food hawkers and head loaders (a load carried

on the head) in the market. Regardless of the nature of the work, child labor is beyond the mental, emotional, and physical abilities of a child, and deprives them of their basic rights to rightful living.

Causes of Child Labor

Various factors lead to a child's subjection to labor. For example, Webbink et al. (2013) posit that the engagement of children in labor activities can be a result of the resources related to family income, parental job or education, structural characteristics (such as family size), availability of educational resources, the level of urbanization, and the prevalent cultural values in the society. Similarly, Mutai (2010) suggests poverty is associated with school dropouts. Children drop out of school to engage in raising money for survival. Furthermore, in examining the magnitude of child labor in Kenya, Moyi (2010), reports that the economic status of a household determines whether or not a child engages in child labor. Data indicate poorer households show a greater probability to send children to work as compared to wealthy households.

Cole (2014) indicates that the failure to secure gainful employment by school graduates creates a negative attitude towards education. When this negative attitude becomes prevalent among parents, they could turn their children away from school to work even at an early stage since they now perceive school to be a waste of time and resources. This can cause those children in school to drop out. Considering the lesser marginal cost, the utility value of education becomes undermined by parents, preferring child labor. Amar et al. (2008) highlight cultural values as one of the causes of child labor. Additionally, child labor is supported in some cultures as a way for the child to contribute to the family economy or a means for the child to learn vital habits for the future. For Mukherjee and Das (2018), the educational levels of parents determine the engagement of their children in child labor. Parents with greater educational levels have fewer tendencies to engage their children in manual labor. Similarly, family size can also determine the number of children who attend school and those who work.

Impacts of Child Labor

Child labor demonstrates both short-term and long-term impacts on children. Labor affects key areas of their lives such as health, education adequacy, work opportunities as an adult, and stability within the family unit. Amar et al. (2008) describe child labor as a serious societal issue that hinders children's physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and moral development. Another effect of child labor is children's poor attendance and participation in school (Oni, 2018). As a result of engaging in child labor, students are forced to choose work over school, thus making their attendance at school and participation in school activities suffer, invariably affecting their academic performance (Fry et al., 2018; Omeneogor & Igunbor, 2019).

School attendance is a significant aspect that makes for the effective education of learners. Bagaya (2019) asserts regular school attendance is a commitment to classroom time and activities beginning with enrollment to finalization of a full academic program. The number of times a pupil attends class, as recorded by the teacher, is known as school attendance. Busingye (2017) states school attendance is a vital and administrative record requirement used by school

authorities and parents to monitor and control annual school attendance. School attendance means regular attendance at school. It involves pupils regularly participating in classes and educational activities as part of their formal education. Consistent attendance at school plays a vital role in keeping children abreast with the curricular content that supports their holistic development. Oghuvbu (2010) describes how through regular school attendance, learners access consistent educational support for their academic performance.

Academic performance constitutes the extent to which pupils, teachers, and school personnel meet their educational goals. Borah (2016) discusses academic performance as expressed by numbers. The pupils' scores in classes represent learners' progress in their school subjects, courses, and curriculum content. These scores are usually expressed in the form of marks, percentages, or other examinations. The scores are used not only to determine learners' progress, but also teacher's effectiveness, and the standard of education. Sauya (2019) describes academic performance as the outcome of education. These outcomes indicate the extent to which learners achieve their educational goals. It may also describe a person's strong achievements in a given academic area. Positive academic performance indicates that pupils are doing well in their classes. However, poor performance suggests that there may be challenges affecting the child's understanding and mastery of learning materials. One such challenge could be pupils' engagement in child labor, which gives them very little or no time for their education. The resulting consequence of this engagement could be a declining academic performance for the children. From the foregoing, it can be hypothesized that pupils' engagement in child labor is likely to impact their attendance at school and, invariably, undermine their academic performance. Therefore, it is important to examine the impact of child labor on school attendance and performance. The following questions guide the current study:

1. What are the causes of child labor among pupils in a school district in Nigeria?
2. What is the perceived impact of child labor on the school attendance of pupils in a school district in Nigeria?
3. What is the perceived impact of child labor on the academic performance of pupils in a school district in Nigeria?

Method Design

The current study utilizes a descriptive survey research design. According to Asenahabi (2019), the descriptive survey research design is a numeric representation of a sample describing attitudes, opinions, or trends of a population. This design is deemed appropriate for this study since the researchers collected data which describe the opinions of the given sample of the population on the perceived impact of child labor on school attendance and academic performance of pupils in a school district in Nigeria.

Participants

The sample for this study is comprised of 100 public primary school teachers. A simple random sampling technique was used to select ten schools out of the 37 public primary schools in the

study area. A simple random sampling technique was also used to select ten teachers each from the ten schools sampled for the study to constitute 100 teachers.

Measures

The instrument for data collection was a researcher-structured questionnaire titled: “Perceived Impact of Child Labor on School Attendance and Academic Performance” (PICLSAAP). The instrument was structured by the researcher from the review of related literature, consultation with experts and guided by the specific purposes of the study. PICLSAAP contained 24 items spread across three Clusters (I-III) to elicit information on the perceived impact of child labor on school attendance and the academic performance of pupils. Cluster I contained six (6) items on the causes of child labor. Cluster II which focused on the impact of child labor on school attendance of pupils contained five (5) items. Cluster III contained seven (7) items on the impact of child labor on the academic performance of pupils. The items were rated on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1, respectively.

The instrument was subjected to face validation by relevant experts. The researcher presented the title, purpose of the study, and research questions with a copy of the instrument to the three experts and requested them to examine and scrutinize the items in terms of relevance, suitability, clarity of instruction, and content coverage. The experts suggested that some grammatical errors be corrected and more items be developed. The researcher incorporated the suggestions and inputs of the experts on the final draft of the instrument for this study.

The Cronbach alpha method was used to establish the reliability of the instrument. This was done first by administering the questionnaire to a similar group of 20 public primary school teachers. The internal consistencies of the items in the clusters were determined using Cronbach alpha statistics. The alpha coefficients obtained were 0.77, 0.74, and 0.76 for clusters I, II, and III, respectively. These alpha values indicate that the instrument was adequate and reliable to be used for collecting data for the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The direct/on-site approach to data collection was adopted to collect data for this study. The researchers administered the instrument to the respondents and requested them to make responses as applicable and ask relevant questions for clarification on the items. The instrument was administered and retrieved the same day by the researchers. A total of 100 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and successfully retrieved. The copies of the questionnaire properly filled and successfully retrieved were used for data analysis. To analyze the collected data, the mean rating was used. The decision rule for the research questions is that a mean rating above the weighted mean was taken as agreement and any mean rating that falls below was taken to indicate disagreement.

Results

Research Question One: What are the causes of child labor among pupils in a school district in Nigeria?

Table 1

Mean Responses on the Causes of Child Labour among Pupils

S/N	Causes of child labor among pupils include:	SA	A	D	SD	N	$\bar{X}$	DECISION
1.	Poverty and the inability of parents to afford school fees	47	25	10	18	100	3.01	Agreed
2.	Family size which includes the number of children	13	63	13	11	100	2.78	Disagreed
3.	High rate of unemployment among graduates	14	42	35	9	100	2.61	Disagreed
4.	Parents' perception and attitudes towards primary education	29	58	11	2	100	3.14	Agreed
5.	Parents' level of education	17	44	32	7	100	2.71	Disagreed
6.	Cultural and religious beliefs of parents towards child labor	20	43	20	17	100	2.66	Disagreed
Weighted Mean					2.81			

Using the weighted mean (2.8), the findings in Table 1 show that most respondents agree that child labor in a school district in Nigeria is related to poverty and parents' inability to afford the school fees for their children, and additionally, parents' perception and attitudes towards primary education. On the other hand, most of the respondents disagree that family size, unemployment rates, parents' level of education, and cultural beliefs are related to causes of child labor among pupils in the research area.

Research Question Two: What is the perceived impact of child labor on the school attendance of pupils in a school district in Nigeria?

Table 2

Mean Responses on the Perceived Impact of Child Labor on the School Attendance of Pupils

S/N	Perceived impact of child labor on school attendance of pupils include:	SA	A	D	SD	N	$\bar{X}$	DECISION
7.	Boosts pupils' punctuality at school	-	-	65	35	100	1.65	Disagreed
8.	Leads to a poor attendance rate	47	49	2	2	100	3.41	Agreed
9.	Child labor leads to truancy among pupils	42	36	22	-	100	3.20	Agreed

10.	Child labor increased rates of dropout	53	44	-	3	100	3.47	Agreed
11.	Leads to a poor enrollment rate	67	33	-	-	100	3.67	Agreed
Weighted Mean		3.08						

Based on the weighted mean (3.08), the findings in Table 2 show that most respondents agreed that child labor exerted a detrimental impact on children's school attendance including decreased school attendance, truancy, increased dropout rates, and poor enrollment at school among pupils in a school district in Nigeria. However, all the respondents disagree that child labor positively affects the punctuality of a child at school.

Research Question Three: What is the perceived impact of child labor on the academic performance of pupils in a school district in Nigeria?

Table 3

Mean Responses on the Perceived Impact of Child Labor on the Academic Performance of Pupils

S/N	Perceived impact of child labor on the academic performance of pupils includes:	SA	A	D	SD	N	$\bar{X}$	DECISION
12.	Child labor results in a decline in academic achievement	46	51	-	3	100	3.40	Agreed
13.	Leads to poor learning outcome	19	56	14	11	100	2.83	Disagreed
14.	Child labor boosts pupils' cognitive development	6	42	34	18	100	2.36	Disagreed
15.	Child labor results in low retentive skills and ability	51	47	-	2	100	3.47	Agreed
16.	Child labor improves pupils' active participation in the classroom	-	4	57	39	100	1.65	Disagreed
17.	Child labor makes for the incompleteness of homework leading to low grades	34	46	5	15	100	2.99	Agreed
18.	Victims of child labor repeat class frequently	35	55	6	4	100	3.21	Agreed
Weighted Mean		2.84						

Judging by the weighted mean (2.84), the findings in Table 3 show that most respondents agreed that child labor exerted a detrimental impact on the academic performance of pupils in a school district in Nigeria. These negative impacts include poor academic performance, diminished learning outcomes, low retention capacity, incompleteness of homework, and repetition of classes. On the other hand, the respondents disagree that child labor boosts pupils' cognitive development or improves their active participation in the classroom.

Discussion

The current study investigated the impact of child labor on pupils' school attendance and performance. The current findings reveal that participants perceive poverty and parents' perceptions and attitudes towards education relate to causes of child labor among primary school pupils in a school district in Nigeria. The current findings relate to Webbink et al. (2013) and Moyi (2010) who stated that the causes of child labor can be attributed to family income, the job or the education of the parents and the economic status of a household. The findings of this study could be attributed to the high tendency of poor households to engage their children in child labor as compared to wealthy households. This engagement, according to these households, would be for the children to help gather resources needed to sustain the household and keep it afloat in the harsh economic situations the family may be facing.

Similarly, the findings of the current study reveal that child labor negatively impacts the school attendance of pupils in a school district in Nigeria. This finding could be attributed to the distraction that the engagement in child labor activities presents to pupils. The findings of this study are congruent with Omeneogor and Igunbor (2019) which indicate less time spent on homework heightens the likelihood of children dropping out of school, decreases the likelihood of entering school education, diverts interest away from academic concerns and increases children's poor school attendance among others. The study's findings also concur with Busingye (2017) which reveal that children exposed to labor activities show high levels of poor school attendance.

Also, the findings revealed child labor negatively impacts the overall academic performance of primary school pupils in a school district in Nigeria. The engagement in child labor occupied the students and failed to give them time for their schoolwork, thus their time in child labor contributed to their poor school performance. The findings of this study agree with Baji (2021) which indicate a significant negative relationship between child labor and the academic performance of students in Niger State. The findings also relate to the findings of Fry et al. (2018) who found that child labor impacts negatively on the performance of basic education students and leads to high drop-out rates from school.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it was concluded that child labor negatively impacts pupils' attendance at school and their overall academic performance. Engaging pupils in child labor activities exposes them to so many distractions that keep them away from their academics, thus affecting their performance in the long run as they soon begin to lose interest in school. It is critical that government at all levels, educational authorities, and policymakers implement policies such as those proposed by the United Nations and establish structures that will eradicate child labor and, subsequently, improve pupils' attendance at school, and therefore, their academic performance.

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