

## **Child Labour and its Implications on Students' Academic Performance in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

The paper explained the concept of child labour and the nature of child labour in Nigeria. It also explained the causes of child labour which include; cultural tradition of fostering, poverty and lack of occupational opportunities. The paper highlighted the effect of child labour on academic performance such as children's cognitive development including literacy, numeracy and acquisition of knowledge necessary for normal life are Jeopardized by child labour. Children's emotional development including self-esteem, family attachment, feeling of love and acceptance are often negatively affected. It also talked about the Legal framework for child labour in Nigeria, such as the Child's Right Act (CRA) which codifies the rights of children in Nigeria and must be adopted and implemented by each state to become law in its territory. Conclusively, the paper suggested some majors to be taken on child labour, that schools should be built in rural and urban communities and wide orientation and awareness programme about the evil of child labour practices as well as the value of educating children should be embarked upon by the government and non-governmental organizations.

**Keywords:** *Child labour, Implications and Academic Performance*

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## Introduction

In the year 2020, Nigeria made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour. The Nigerian Government continued to support the National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism which helps end use and recruitment of child soldiers by identifying and formally separating children from armed groups, including 209 boys and 6 girls in year 2020 ( Kajjo 2020).

In addition, Abubakar (2016) stated that Nigerian Government hired over 400 new labour inspectors and enacted the National Social Behavioral Change Communication Strategy for Elimination of Child Labour in Nigeria. However, children in Nigeria are subjected to the worst forms of child labour, including in quarrying granite, artisanal mining, commercial sexual exploitation, and use in armed conflict, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. The Child's Right Act has been adopted by only 25 out of Nigeria's 36 states, leaving the remaining 11 states in northern Nigeria with legal statutes that do not meet international standards for the prohibition of child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and illicit activities. In addition, the minimum age for work in the Labour Act does not apply to children who are self-employed or working in the informal economy. Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Nigeria. Data on some of these indicators are not available from the sources used in this report.

**Table 1: Statistics on Children's Work and Education**

Children	Age	Percentage
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	47.5
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	76.6
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	39.9
Primary Completion Rate (%)	Unavailable	

*Primary completion rate was unavailable from UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021. (6) Source for all other data: International Labour Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 5 (MICS 5), 2016–2017.*

## **Nature of Child Labour in Nigeria**

Ettang (2020) considered child labour as a form of child abuse where parents and others adults force children into slavery over work, exploitation or deprivation of their rights to normal and happy childhood which is detrimental of their physical, mental, psychological, spiritual and social development. Also Abubakar (2018) defined child labour as employment of young people in works for selfish gains in a way that deprive them of their fundamental human rights, food, health and education.

In 2021, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that 24.6 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 14 in Nigeria were working. In 2018, the United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) reported that approximately 24 percent (12 million) of all children under the ages of 16 worked. Child Labour is predominantly found in the formal sector, in rural areas, children are found working in agriculture and family farm in cottage industries and mechanical workshop, children work as apprentices in various craft or trades such as weaving, tailoring, hairdressing and auto repair. In urban areas and towns children work on streets as vendors, car washers, beggars, head load carriers, feet washers and bus conductors.

In 2018, the United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) reported that in Lagos alone there were about 100,000 boys and girls living and working on the streets. In Northern Nigeria children known as "Almajirais" are found on the street begging, children in prostitution and trafficking are reported in Nigeria. Trafficking children are employed in agriculture and heading as domestic servants, drug peddlers, hawkers, petty traders, beggars, car washers and bus conductors.

**Table 2: Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity**

<b>Sector/Industry</b>	<b>Activity</b>
<b>Agriculture</b>	Production of manioc/cassava, cocoa, rice, and tobacco Fishing, activities unknown Herding livestock
<b>Industry</b>	Mining and quarrying of granite and gravel Artisanal gold mining and processing Harvesting sand Construction, including making bricks and carrying construction materials
<b>Services</b>	Domestic work Collecting money on public buses, washing cars, and automotive repair Street work, including vending, begging, and scavenging
<b>Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labour</b>	Commercial sexual exploitation, including use in the production of pornography, sometimes as a result of human trafficking Forced labour in begging; domestic work; street vending; textile manufacturing; mining and quarrying gravel, granite, and gold; and labour in agriculture, including in cocoa, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking
	Recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict and in non-conflict support roles, sometimes as a result of human trafficking

According to Ettang (2020), rapid population growth in Nigeria is driving the “informal” education sector, with several million boys in the north going to Quranic schools known as “Almajiri.” The Almajiri system includes a component of child labour, with some teachers tasking older children with menial jobs and other children coerced into forced begging. Furthermore, these children are highly vulnerable to recruitment by Boko Haram and ISIS West Africa (ISIS-WA), which continued to forcibly recruit and use child soldiers in combat and support roles, and as suicide bombers and concubines. US Department of state (2020) reported that government does not officially recognize these schools, and students attending Almajiri schools are officially considered out of school. In April 2020, the Northern Governors’ Forum of Nigeria unanimously agreed to return all Almajiri children to their respective states of origin across the region to stem the spread of COVID-19 and, as of July

2020, more than 40,000 children had been reunited with their families. (U.S Embassy-Abuja 2018).

Benin City, the capital of Edo State, is a major human trafficking hub in Africa, but increased enforcement efforts may have caused some human trafficking rings to shift their focus to other areas of southern Nigeria. Girls from Nigeria are sent to North Africa and Europe for forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation (Kelly, Annie and Lorenzo 2016). Children from West African countries experience forced labour in Nigeria, including in granite and gold mines (U.S Embassy-Abuja 2018).

According to Kajjo (2020), despite notable military advances and proclamations of Boko Haram's defeat by government forces, the group remained a security threat, with escalating attacks by both Boko Haram and ISIS-WA forcing people out of Nigeria's north-eastern regions and new attacks occurring in the Northwest region. These attacks include a December kidnapping of more than 300 schoolboys from Kankara, a city in the northwest state of Katsina. These attacks have contributed to the displacement of more than 2 million people, of which 56 percent were children. (Human Rights Watch. Nigeria - World Report 2020).

Although free and compulsory education is federally mandated by the Education Act, little enforcement of compulsory education laws occurs at the state level. School fees are often charged in practice, and the cost of materials can be prohibitive for families (Amaefule 2016). When families experience economic hardship, the enrolment of boys is typically prioritized over the enrolment of girls. Other barriers to education include a lack of trained teachers, sexual harassment, inadequate sanitation facilities, poor infrastructure, and fear of abduction or attack by Boko Haram while at school, particularly for girls in the north-eastern part of the country (Oduah 2018).

Although there are no nationwide studies providing definitive information regarding the correlation between lack of identity documents and education, some children are not able to attend public schools because they lack birth certificates or other formal forms of identification. This is most common in the north-eastern region and rural areas. (U.S Embassy-Abuja 2018). Poverty is the main reason that many children do not attend school, and some parents are unable to afford fees, uniforms, and materials. In addition to the lack of funds, parents also need the children's assistance in household chores and with caring for younger siblings.

According to the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute of Statistics country report, Nigeria (2021), gross primary school enrolment declined in Nigeria approximately 86.2 percent in 2010 to 70.3 percent in 2018. Dropout rates for both male and female in primary school remained high around 10 to 15 percent between 2007 for each level of education. Only 64 percent of students in primary school completed and only 45.5 percent continued in the Junior secondary school.

In the North, girls are often withdrawing from school because of marriage, domestic agricultural and commercial activities such as trading and street vending. According to the International Labour Organization (2021), Nigeria has 12 million child workers.

### **Causes of Child Labour**

According to Nwaubani (2017), child traffickers take advantage of a cultural tradition of "fostering" where a poor usually rural family sends a child to live with a family in an urban area for education and employment purposes. In most cases children in these situations do not receive any formal education, instead they force to serve as domestic servant, street hawkers or engage in other activities and many of them are vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse by their guardians. There are also credible reports that poor families send their daughters into

forced marriage as a means of supplementing their income. Akinwotu (2016), attributed the problem of child labour in most parts of Nigeria to poverty, he stated that adverse economic environment cause neglect of children by parents. He also discovered that parent who cannot make the payment of school fees often engaged children in works that would bring money to support and sustain the family.

Oduah (2018), shared the above view when he stated that lack of occupational opportunities is a major causes of child labour which inhibits the development of children. He further stated that the rigid and uninspiring approach to education as well as underfunding as well as irrelevant curriculum which is remote from children lives contribute to child labour and students drop out from school. The tradition and entrenched social pattern also play a part in propelling children into hazardous labour. Auwal (2016), noticed that ignorance on the part of parents and others members of the societies lead to child neglect and exploitation.

Abubakar (2018), stated that parental profession and occupation has great influence on children and their education. He reported that children in developing countries tend to be of economic value as a result they become desirable assets for struggling parents. The International Labour Organization (ILO) report (2018), was of the view that many children seek employment simply because there was no access for them to school, lack of means of schooling as well as distance to school were said to be other reasons. Where these reasons are not tenable, the report stated further that schools in many developing countries suffered from problem such as overcrowding, poor sanitation, poor motivated teachers which account for the withdrawal of children from school and their retention at home to trade, hawk and farm.

### **Effect of Child Labour on Academic Performance**

The United Nations International Children Emergency Fund reported (UNICEF, 2020), stated that child labour affect:



- a. Children's physical development including their overall health coordination, strength, vision and hearing are impaired.
- b. Children's cognitive development including literacy, numeracy and acquisition of knowledge necessary for normal life are Jeopardize by child labour.
- c. Children's emotional development including self-esteem, family attachment, feeling of love and acceptance are often negatively affected.
- d. Children's social and moral development including a sense of group identity, the ability to co-operate with others and capacity to distinguish right from wrong are usually affected.

Amaefule (2018) observed that child labour especially hawking exposes the female child to a lot of danger such as theft, raping, fornication, drunkenness, unwanted pregnancies and general diseases. He further stated that child labour will contributes to children academic backwardness as in ordinate desire for money.

#### **Legal framework for child labour in Nigeria**

The Child's Right Act (CRA) codifies the rights of children in Nigeria and must be adopted and implemented by each state to become law in its territory. However, only 25 of the 36 states have adopted and implemented the CRA, leaving the 11 remaining states in northern Nigeria with legal statutes that do not meet international standards for the prohibition of child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. In these 11 states, laws prohibiting child trafficking do not criminalize both domestic and international trafficking or trafficking for the purpose of forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation; the offering of a child for prostitution is not criminally prohibited; and there is no prohibition against the use of children in illicit activities (Ettang 2020).

Furthermore, Ogunniyi (2019) the CRA upholds certain portions of the Labour Act that are not in compliance with international child labour standards. This includes Section 59, which sets the minimum employment age at age 12 in contradiction to the CRA, which only permits children under age 18 to engage in light work for family members. The minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, which may encourage children to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. (Human Rights Watch. Nigeria - World Report 2020).

Although the Labour Act forbids the employment of youth under age 18 in work that is dangerous to their health, safety, or morals, it does not establish the types of hazardous activity that are prohibited to children under age 18. The National Steering Committee for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour developed a report in 2013 that identified hazardous child labour in Nigeria; however, the government has yet to determine by law or regulation the types of hazardous work prohibited for children.

The Labour Act also permits children of any age to do light work in agriculture and domestic work if they are working with a family member, which does not meet international standards. Furthermore, the minimum age protections in the Labour Act do not apply to children who are self-employed or working in the informal economy. Lastly, children are not excluded from the Terrorism Prevention Act's penalty of life imprisonment for assisting in acts of terrorism. (ILO2018).

In early 2020, through the Accelerating Action for the Elimination of Child Labour in Supply Chains in Africa Project, a review was conducted to amend the Labour Standard Bill to include preventive measures against child labour, a federal-level declaration of the minimum age for employment, regulations for the conditions of work for children within the legal working age, and a review of penalty measures for engagement in child labour for

persons and corporations. The new Labour Standard Bill is still waiting to be passed into law. (U.S Embassy-Abuja 2019).

### **Suggested Measures on Child Labour**

Since education is considered expensive, it needs to be subsidized by the government of today, the government itself cannot shoulder the cost of education all alone her effort should be philanthropic individuals.

Schools should be built in rural and urban communities and a wide orientation and awareness programme about the evil of child labour practices as well as the value of educating children should be embarked upon by the government and non-governmental organization.

According to the United Nations International Child Emergency Fund (UNICEF 2020), some actions that are urgently needed against child labour are:

- a. Provision of free and compulsory education: Government must budget the necessary resources for this purpose with donors ensuring resources from existing development and budget.
- b. Education system must teach useful skills that are relevant to children and their parents circumstances, get girls into school, raise the quality and status of teachers and for the family, school bill should be removed, the cost of books supplies, uniform, transportation and other cost that impact disproportionately on the poor.
- c. Wider legal protection: Law on child labour and education should be consistent in purpose and implement in a mutually supportive way, such legislation must encompass the vast majority of child work in the informal sector of economy.

d. There should be birth registration of all children: registration is said to be essential to permit the exercise of the right of the child, such as access to education, health care and other services as well as to provide the necessary amenities.

e. That there should be free trade as part of the solution to eradicating child labour, this is because a free trade regime promotes development worldwide, as country develops the incidence of child labour decrease substantially.

### **Conclusion**

As part of effect to address child labour problem in the country, the government of Nigeria and International Programme on elimination of child labour with funding support of the United States Department of Labour (USDOL), have launched a country programme and established a National Steering Committee that includes Representative from the government, labour industries and Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs). The Steering Committee was responsible for developing and overseeing implementation of a National Plan of Action on child labour. United Nations International Child Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has established series of programme for street children in Nigeria and launched a collaborative project with (ILO-IPEC) especially aiding the Almajirai.

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