



The Role of Education in Child Labour Eradication in Akwa Ibom State: A Review of Literature

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Abstract

For many scholars and policymakers, education is a pragmatic tool for combatting child labour. This is, in part, because a child who is in school fulltime cannot be on the streets fulltime. More so, educational strategies are practical in that their success can be measured in terms of enrolment and attendance rates. Using evidence from studies conducted in developing nations, including Nigeria, this paper argues that despite enrolment and attendance statistics, which are usually quite impressive in initial stages of implementation, unless educational strategies are combined with other non-educational strategies, they will not effectively address the problem of child labour.

Keywords: Child Labour, Education, Developing Nations, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

The incidence of child labour in the developing world, particularly Africa given its long and intractable development crises, is worrisome. Recent statistics reveal that 32% or 48 million child labourers are from Sub-Saharan Africa, 16 million of whom are below the age of fifteen (ILO Report, 1996). The situation in Nigeria, according to the United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) State of the World's Children Report (2005), is equally concerning. This report shows that 39% of Nigerian children between the ages of five and fourteen are involved in some form of child labour.

The child labour epidemic has generated great concern, particularly among scholars and policy makers, given its implications for long-term socio-economic development. As Patrinos & Pscharopoulous (1995) point out, child labour inhibits genuine development, creates social problems with serious consequences, and thus thwarts the social development of the nation (Grootaert & Kanbur, 1995). The ultimate goal of such development is, according to the Report of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (7th Ordinary Session (2005), to improve and enhance the quality of all people's life, including children.

It is important to note that everywhere that child labour has been successfully addressed, government has led the formulation of new policies and the implementation of new programmes (Brown, Deardoff, & Stern, 2001). Consequently, governments, especially in developing nations, have been encouraged to adopt, adapt and implement various educational policies in their fight against child labour.

For many scholars and policymakers, education is a pragmatic, “full proof” and tested tool for eradicating and/or controlling child labour in any society (Bhalotra, 2003; Doftori, 2004; Cigno & Rosati, 2006). The attractiveness of educational policies is not unconnected from the fact that education physically removes the child labourer from “the streets” and offers measurable indicators – enrolment rate and attendance rate – which can be used to assess its success. As attractive and potent as the educational option appears to be, however, the available literature suggests that such policies when implemented in isolation from other policies that address poverty will have little effect on ending child labour. The purpose of this study is to evaluate literature reviewing the attempts by some governments to fight child labour through education alone. The aim is to provide new insights on the adequacy or inadequacy of educational policies as tools and to provide as well, a literature base upon which contemporary researchers and policymakers can reassess the current fight against child labour in Nigeria in general and Akwa Ibom State (the study area), in particular.

EDUCATION AND CHILD LABOUR

Education in any society serves as a means for sustaining social cohesion and order, and for the transmission of skills and knowledge across generations. As a means for sustaining social order, education influences children to obey, respond and become skilful without threatening the existing social order. In other words, it ensures the integration of children in society by directing, correcting and shaping their behaviours to fit with the present and future needs of the society. At the same time, it equips the children with the know-how to conquer their environment in order to provide for their needs.

In view of the critical role education plays in any nation, most governments centralize their educational policies and programmes, provide for a child’s right to education in their constitution, and in partnership with international organizations, set and define targets for ensuring education for all. The aim here is to increase the literacy level cum productivity level of the nation (Sinha, 2003). Consequently, education is increasingly geared towards national development to the detriment of individual skill and knowledge development.

According to Doftori (2004), education has a direct link to child labour because child labour is a symptom of a faulty/deprived educational system. This link is not a difficult one to accept given that in those societies where education has been democratized and made accessible to more marginalized families, child labour is rare to non-existent. This is so, in part, because all or almost all children of school age in these societies are in school and so are less vulnerable to exploitation. In societies where education fails and is out of reach for many, children become willing agents for supplementing family income (Ukommi, 2010).

EDUCATION AND CHILD LABOUR IN DEVELOPING NATIONS

Education in developing nations, in addition to preparing students for employment and equipping them with the right value orientation, is also seen as a means for upward social mobility (White, 1996). Thus, people tend to embrace education to the extent that it can help them secure white collar jobs. This explains the emphasis on credentials/paper qualification, sometimes to the detriment of a focus on competence. At a broader level, most developing nations see education as an instrument for national development and a stepping stone to modernization (Levison, 1991). Education is thus widely acknowledged as a vehicle for raising national productivity and for poverty reduction.

Education in developing nations continues to feel the impacts of colonialism (Nielsen, 1998). The colonialists were interested in producing a generation of civil servants that would serve colonial interests. Hence, the education system of the colonial era created Nigerians who were English in attitude, but not in skills. As Rogers and Swinnerton (2000) argue, this approach to education in the developing world is what is giving rise today to a mass of highly certified but largely unskilled people that are unable to address their national challenges.

Today policies on primary and secondary school education in developing nations are largely influenced by the positions of international organisations. The push for compulsory basic education being implemented by most developing nations, for example, is a result of international actions on children’s rights to education (Ray, 2000). These policies, it is hoped, will directly and/or indirectly curb child labour.

Apart from striving realize the right to education for children that has been enshrined in the constitution, policymakers in Nigeria have also attempted to enhance primary education by expanding access and providing new infrastructure. Such actions are backed up in most countries with laws that declare education to be free and compulsory at basic level, with punitive measures for erring parents and children. Here again, one of the principles behind such measures is to keep children in school and away from the streets until they acquire the required minimum level of education. According to Lieten (2000), however, a large population of school aged children in the developing world are still not in school and many have already taken to the streets and are involved in hawking

and/or other forms of child labour. The numerous reasons these children are not attending school include inaccessibility of schools, poor school infrastructure, absolute poverty that push parents to put their children to work instead of school, and poor curriculum that alienates students. These factors in turn prompt parents to forbid their children from attending school and raise children with a dislike or suspicion of the education system.

CHILD LABOUR SITUATION IN NIGERIA

The realities of child labour in Nigeria are not significantly different from those in other developing countries (Ukommi, 2010). Due largely to poverty, many parents put their children to work in order to increase the family income and ensure survival. Thus, to the poor, children are seen as wealth creators. This has a number of implications. It creates an urgency to have as many children as possible, and schooling comes to represent delays in children being able to work.

In order to address the problem of child labour, Nigerian governments at various levels have come to rely on educational policies. In 1976, the federal government in conjunction with state governments implemented the Universal Primary Education (UBE) policy. One of the aims of the policy was to remove a large number of poor children from the streets by granting them access to education. Years after, studies have shown that the policy recorded high enrolment rates in the early stages but these rates subsequently fell steadily over the years (Umar, 1987). The reasons that many of these enrolled children eventually exited their schools include an inadequacy of infrastructure, a lack of teachers or low quality of teachers, parental attitudes to education, and the inaccessibility of schools.

LESSONS FROM BANGLADESH AND NEPAL

In his study of Bangladesh and Nepal, Doftori (2004) noted that like other developing countries with a colonial heritage and a large mass of poor families, these two countries, in line with the prescriptions of international organizations, also:

- * Enshrined the right to children's education in their respective constitutions;
- * Declared and implemented free and compulsory basic education to give effect to this inalienable right;
- * Prescribed penalties for defaulting parents;
- * Outlawed child labour;
- * Provided for more schools/infrastructure to cater to the envisaged surge in enrolment;
- * Provided for capacity building training for teachers and school administrators;
- * Provided for additional school supplies and teaching aids;
- * Abolished all forms of fees; and
- * Democratise access to education.

In his findings, Doftori acknowledged that school enrolment rates for the two countries went up significantly due largely to the implementation of the free and compulsory basic education. Attendance rates, however, did decline with time suggesting that students continued to drop out of school at concerning rates. The reasons for these continued drop-outs included:

- (a) Poverty: a number of those who dropped out were from poor homes and neighbourhoods and found themselves back to the street hawking;
- (b) Distance: governments were not able to bring schools nearer to the pupil;
- (c) Relevance: the curriculum did not impact directly on the pupil and/or reflect their life experiences.
- (d) Teaching Quality: Teachers were inadequate, poorly trained for the programme and sometime absent from schools in some cases taking pupils to work on their farms.

THE CASE OF YOBE STATE

A study conducted in 2009 (Ukommi, 2010) in Yobe State of Nigeria reveals that the Yobe State Government also implemented educational policies aimed at addressing the problem of child labour. Aside from the free and compulsory basic education policy implemented in conjunction with the federal government, the State also provided free uniforms to all students, paid examination fees for students, and provided free meals to all boarding secondary school students and a meal to selected primary school pupils. Special attention has also been paid to the education of the girl-child. New schools are built specifically to provide opportunities for girls who have dropped

out of school. These reforms have been backed up by laws to protect the rights of the child and outlaw all forms of child labour.

Analysis of data generated in the course of the study shows a steady rise in the enrolment and attendance rates of pupils in primary one (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Enrolment, attendance and drop out figures (2003-2007) of selected schools in Yobe State

Year	Enrolment Figure	Attendance Figure	Drop Out Figure
2003	402	375	27
2004	431	415	16
2005	597	568	29
2006	614	591	23
2007	819	788	31

Adapted from Ukommi (2010).

The above table displays the enrolment figure for 2003 as 402. In 2004, it increased to 431, while in 2005 it rose to 597. In 2006, it was 614 and in 2007 it increased to 819. The table further shows that the attendance rate also rose steadily. In 2003, for example, it was 375 while in 2004 it increased to 415. In 2006, it went up to 568 and in 2007 it increased to 788. The dropout figures, however, also fluctuate. In 2003, 27 students dropped out, 16 students dropped out in 2004, 29 in 2005, 23 in 2006, and 31 in 2007.

The study also revealed that the vast majority of those involved in child labour (72.67%) were also in school (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Child labourers' response on whether or not they were in school

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	436	72.67
No	164	27.33
Total	600	100.00

Adapted from Ukommi (2010)

As the data presented in Table 2 shows, 436 (72.67%) of the respondents (child labourers) were in school, while just 164 (27.33%) were not in school. These findings contradict the notion that fulltime schooling will prevent children from becoming involved in child labour activities. In terms of why they were engaged in child labour, 73.4% attributed it to parental decision and 87.5% of the child labourers' parents attributed their children's involvement to poverty and attendance problems. The import of this finding is that poverty is a key determinant of child labour (see, Okpukpara & Odurukwe, 2006). Attempts to address child labour must therefore not be limited to educational options alone but combined with serious actions to address the problem of poverty that gives rise to child labour at the first place (Basu, 1998).

THE FUTURE OF THE AKWA IBOM STATE EXPERIMENT

In 2009 the Akwa Ibom State government declared education at the primary and secondary school levels to be free and compulsory. It went on to upgrade and extend infrastructure in schools across the state, supply books and other teaching aids, pay examination fees for students, abolish all forms of fees in schools, pay a subvention of N100 and N300 for each student in primary and secondary school respectively, and reintroduce close monitoring and supervision of schools and the conducting of examinations. The government also commenced selection examinations for students in SS2 for purposes of placement in SS3 and re-invigorated intra/inter schools debates and competitions. All of this was in addition to the promulgation of the Child's Rights Act that clearly outlawed all forms of child labour and child trafficking.

Expectedly, within a year of implementation, school enrolment in secondary schools increased by 300% (The Sensor, 2010). Beyond this impressive increase in school enrolment, however, much remains to be achieved in terms of eradicating child labour in the state. Despite these impressive enrolment increases, for example, the government has yet to increase the number and quality of teachers so as to improve the student-teacher ratio. Though it must be acknowledged that the number of child labourers has decreased, the population of those still

plying their trade is significant enough to warrant serious re-evaluation of the policy. If lessons from elsewhere are anything to go by, the number of children engaged in child labour will increase as the attendance rate of students decreases over time. Meanwhile, other education-related concerns remain: some school administrators have begun to reintroduce school fees under different pretexts, and investments in infrastructure have yet to catch up with increases in enrolment.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis has suggested that Akwa Ibom State has adopted the traditional-educational approach to eradicating child labour. Like other states and countries that have adopted this traditional approach, Akwa Ibom State may not achieve its desired result, especially in the long term. This is because the root cause of child labour, poverty, has not been adequately addressed. In order for educational policies to achieve their desired goals in terms of child labour eradication and control, they must be implemented along with genuine attempts to empower the populace and free them from poverty. It is only in such a combination that child labour in Akwa Ibom State will truly be eliminated. So long as absolute poverty continues to ravage the people, parents will continue to use their children as income/wealth creators to, in their thinking, guarantee their collective survival.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered in the belief that they will help in the control and eventual eradication of child labour, particularly in the study area.

(1) Policies aimed at child labour eradication are not comprehensive enough, particularly in the study area, to address a critical factor with a significant impact on child labour – poverty. Thus, for child labour to be successfully controlled and eventually eradicated, the formulation and implementation of a well articulated and comprehensive policy that will improve access to school, enrich curriculum content, raise the income level of households, and enhance the general well-being of the family is recommended. This will reduce the rate at which children are used by families as income earners.

(2) The incidence of child labour appears to be more prevalent in countries and states that are facing severe economic problems. Thus, it is recommended that developing countries and economically weak states make genuine efforts to develop their economy and promote social justice, for it is only in doing so that the standard of living of the people in real terms will improve and reduce the incidence of child labour.

(3) Governments and agencies must closely monitor the implementation of free and compulsory education policies to ensure that policy aims are not abandoned or defeated by the operators of the school system.

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