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THE DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT OF CHILD LABOUR INVOLVEMENT ON PUPILS' LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT IN DELTA NORTH SENATORIAL ZONE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Child labour is a major problem that has been in existence since the history of mankind. The purpose of this study was to analyse the effect of child labour practises on the academic performance of pupils in the Delta North Senatorial Zone; more specifically, the study was designed to investigate the effect of child labour practises on their academic performance and the socio-economic status of children involved in the practice. The study was guided by two hundred questions and two null hypotheses. Ten (10) primary schools were used from the five zones, with a sample of two hundred (200) pupils from each zone. The structured interview schedule was used to collect data from pupils while their teacher supplied the average score grades of the promotion exams. The collected data was statistically analysed using the Z-test and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation techniques in testing the hypotheses. The major findings were as follows: (1) The pupils not involved in child labour practises performed academically better than those involved. (2) The economic hardship in the country has forced parents to involve their children in child labour without regard to their socio-economic status. But the practise was found to be more common among families of low socioeconomic status. Based on the findings, the government should not only stop mass retrenchment of working parents but also improve the wages of those working to alleviate poverty among parents so that they would not have to depend on the wages of child labour.

Introduction

Child labour is a major problem that has been in existence since the history of mankind. Most children in all societies work in one way or another. The type of work they do varies across societies, and over time, the work they do can become essential. The type of work they do varies across societies and over time. Work can be an essential part of children's education and a means of transmitting vital skills from parents to offspring. Children are gifts from God, and it is the responsibility of parents to take care of them and bring them up for their own benefit and the benefit of society at large.

The United Nations Centre for Human Rights (1997) sees a child as a person under the age of 18, unless national law fixes an earlier age. A person under the age of 18 has no right to vote or be voted for in any House of Parliament because he is treated as a minor. The "child" is completely dependent on the adult for clothing, housing, health care, love, education, and all it takes to grow up into a functioning human being, but today the case is different. Children are not given this special protection. Rather, they are subjected to all forms of inhuman treatment like hawking, child hawking, domestic services, etc. Children are found all over the streets in the Delta North Senatorial Zone hawking items and wares, washing cars and motorcycles, and serving as bus conductors, among other street jobs.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2001) sees child labour as children prematurely leading adult lives, normally working long hours for low wages under conditions that are damaging to their health and to their physical and mental development; sometimes separated from their families; and frequently deprived of meaningful education or training, opportunities that could open up for them a better future. Besides, the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labor (2002) defined child labour more categorically and comprehensively as "work situations in which children are compelled to work on a regular basis to earn a living for themselves and their families and as a result are disadvantaged educationally and socially, where children work in conditions that are exploitative and damaging to their health and to their physical and mental development." It is a short-sighted practise that jeopardises the well-being of future generations and is detrimental to individual children, depriving them of their childhood, hampering their development, and sometimes causing lifelong physical or psychological damage.

At a tender age, when parents and the society are supposed to give proper moral and educational upbringing to the children in preparation for positive roles in the society, they are rather exploited by involving them in child labour practices. Children of primary school age are daily seen hawking various items of goods and baby sitting in Laka South and other parts of the Delta North Senatorial Zone. This happens even during school hours when they are supposed to be in school.

Igbinedion (2004) observed that parents who could no longer afford school fees withdrew their children from school to help families raise extra income. Some of these children were engaged as domestic servants in wealthier households; some worked as car and motorcycle washers and street hawkers.

She stated that street trading, especially by children, appears to have started with the introduction of an International Monetary Fund Structural Adjustment plan, which led to the reduction or withdrawal of subsidies on items such as fuel, water, electricity, and job cuts; parents who could no longer afford school fees withdrew their children from the schools. The economic condition in Nigeria after the "oil boom" era and the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) led further to harsh conditions, including mass retrenchment. In order to survive the hard times, parents involved their children in child labour for cash returns.

It's a phenomenon that became noticeable in the 1980s and is now a permanent feature of the urban landscape in Nigeria. The poor state of parents compels them to deny their children certain rights to life instead of trying to make ends meet without dehumanising their children.

Okojie, Chiegwe, and Okpokune (1996) stated that it was generally acknowledged with regard and self-pity that SAP has brought about untold hardship. It occasioned increases in the cost of living. The economic hardship has made it difficult for many parents to meet the basic needs of their children, including school requirements. As a result of the economic hardship, most people are compelled to take care of their own nuclear families, which is a departure from traditional norms and values that bound the extended family and clan members together.

De Vrics, Agbuya, Rubia, and Fojas (2001) reported that children working in the pyrotechnic industry feel exhausted at the end of the day after long

hours of work in a squatting or standing position. As a result, such children lost their interest in schoolwork. Ekwe (1986) has expressed the view that children who combine schooling and labour have little or no time to prepare for school after long periods at work. This affects their reading habit, as children are often tired at the end of the day and so worn-out that they cannot do their revision and assignments and have no other choice but to go to bed early.

Ebigbo (1986) stated that children involved in child labour perform poorly at intellectual tasks in school and are nearing mental retardation. The children involved in the practise feel exhausted at the end of the day, and consequently, they most likely find it difficult to cope academically in school. Heady (2000) has observed that the academic achievement of children who combine work and schooling often suffers because regular class attendance is more important than learning.

ILO and IPEC (2001) see child labour as a social problem hindering the harmonious, physical, and mental development of children. It is a problem because many children have become involved in it to the detriment of their academic, physical, mental, and social development. It is capable of depriving this country of the leaders of tomorrow if it is not minimised or even stopped.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and statistically tested at a probability level of 0.05.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean academic achievement scores of children engaged in child labour and those of their counterparts not so engaged.
2. There is no significant relationship between family socio-economic status and the inclination to engage in child labour practices.

Methodology

Design of the Study

This research was aimed at investigating the differential impact of child labour involvement on pupils' learning achievement in a Delta North Senatorial Zone primary school. The survey design was deemed

appropriate here because, according to Nwana (1981), in survey studies, "subjects are better observed in their natural setting." The present study involved fact-finding regarding child labour in relation to the academic achievement of primary school children who engaged in the activities and those who did not.

Population

The population of the study consisted of 188,769 pupils from 420 primary schools. Records obtained from the State Universal Basic Education Board, Asaba (2007), served as the data source.

Scope of the Study

This study was confined to only primary schools in the Delta North Senatorial Zone of Delta State. Thus, the findings of the study and their interpretations would be validly generalised to the 420 primary schools in the Delta North Senatorial Zone, although only 10 primary schools were sampled. Teachers constituted the main source of relevant responses in the study since they were judged to be most intimately close to the pupils.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

In composing the sample, the stratified random sampling technique was used. First, the area of study was stratified into zones, namely:

- Ndokwa East and West Zones
- Ukwuani Zone Oshimili South and North Zones
- Aniocha North and South Zones
- Ika North and South Zones

This stratification was done in terms of the five zones that make up the Delta North Senatorial District. From each of the zones, forty (40) pupils who were in primary 5 or 6 were selected, because at this stage they could reason and supply responses about their personal feelings toward child labour practices. A total of 200 primary school pupils were involved in the study. The randomly drawn pupils' sample was taken from different classes and schools. The schools chosen from this zone were purposefully selected because there are many hawkers in the area. From each zone, 40 pupils involved in child labour practises and those not involved were randomly selected with the help of their classroom teachers. Children involved in

child labour practises were randomly selected among the pupils identified through questions asked by the classroom teachers. Besides, the teachers of these pupils supplied their academic performance scores.

Data Collection Instrument

The instrument used in this study was the interview schedule for pupils. The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity tests by experts. The Crombach Alpha reliability index was used to estimate the reliability coefficient, which had a value of 0.61, which was considered adequate for the study.

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

The researcher administered two hundred (200) copies of the questionnaire by hand with the help of research assistants. The retrieval of completed questionnaires was also done by hand. The responses to the items on the instrument were analyzed using a computer. The hypothesis was tested using the Z test and the Pearson product moment at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The data obtained from the study were analysed and presented in two tables based on the research hypothesis.

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Table 1: The Z test of significance of difference between the academic achievement means of pupils involved in child labour and their counterparts not so involved.

| Variable Group | Academic achievement of pupils | | | | observed x - value | Critical z-value | Decision |
|--|--------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| | X | SD | N | df | | | |
| Children not involved in child labour | 60.69 | 12.34 | 100 | 198 | *10.25 | + | Reject null hypothesis |
| Children involved in child labour practice | 41.54 | 14.03 | 100 | | | | |

*P<0.05

The result from the table showed that there was a significant difference between the academic achievement of children who were engaged in child labour and that of their counterparts who were not. This finding was based on the observed z-test statistic value of 10.25. The observed mean for children not involved in child labour was 60.69, and for their counterparts involved in child labor, it was as comparatively low as 41.54. The observed z-test was 10.25 against the z-critical value of 1.96. The observed z value was greater than the z critical value, hence the null hypothesis was rejected. There was therefore a significant difference between the mean academic achievement scores of children who were engaged in child labour and their counterparts who were not so engaged. The children who were not involved in child labour performed better than those that were. This was found to be in line with Heady (2000), who stated that the academic achievement of children who combine work and school often suffered. Ekwe (1986) had also remarked that children who combined schooling and labour had little or no time left to prepare for school after the long period of time at work as child labourers. This affected their reading habit as they were often tired and worn-out at the end of the day and could not review their school work nor did they have the stamina to attend to their assignment. The only natural option left for them was to go to bed early.

Table 2: Pears on Product Moment Correlation Analysis relationship between family socio- economic status and inclination to child labour practices.

| S/N | Variables | Sample size, n | No of pairs | Df | Correlation coefficient | Critical value | Decision |
|-----|---------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|----|-------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Socio-economic status | 5.39 | 100 | 98 | -129 | .196 | Do not reject null hypothesis |
| 2 | Inclination to child labour practices | 7.91 | | | | | |

HO₂ showed the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics Procedure for the relationship between family socio-economic status and family inclination toward child labour practices. The mean socio-economic status

score was 5.39, while the mean inclination toward child labour practises was 7.91. The observed value was 129 against the critical r value of 196. Since the critical r value was greater than the observed r value, the null hypothesis was retained. There was found to be no significant relationship between family socio-economic status and inclination or proneness to child labour practices.

This revealed that factors that get families predisposed to child labour practises have nothing to do with family socio-economic status and that the circumstances surrounding a family household could influence it no matter the status. This was judged to be in line with Lgbinedion (2004), who stated that street trading, especially by children, appeared to have started with the introduction of the International Monetary Fund (IME) and its recommended Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which led to harsh conditions, including mass labour retrenchments. Parents who could no longer afford school fees withdrew their children from the schools. In order to survive the hard times, parents engaged their children in child labour practices.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been made:

1. The federal, state, and local governments should embark on mass enlightenment campaigns to educate parents and guardians on the dangers of child labour practices. This could be done through effective use of the mass media (TV, newspapers, radio, etc.), school announcements, and social welfare establishments.
2. The government should stop the mass retrenchment and unemployment of parents to ease poverty.
3. Workers should be paid fair wages so that parents do not have to depend on the wages earned by their children.
4. The provision of free universal, qualitative, and compulsory education is of critical importance for eradicating child labour practices.

Conclusion

It is the hope of this researcher that if all hands were on deck, more and more people would become aware of the dehumanising effects of child

labour and the dangers to which children are exposed. The need to see children as precious gifts would be institutionalized, and then child labour would be minimised or eradicated in a nation. To eradicate child labor, the economic status of families should be improved by providing job opportunities and improving working conditions for workers.

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