

**JOURNAL**

*Of*

**ACADEMICS**

*Volume 5 Number 3*

**April 2011**

ISSN 1597 - 9083

*Published by*

**ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIAN ACADEMICS (ANA)**

**CHILD LABOUR: A HINDRANCE TO EFFECTIVE ATTAINMENT OF  
NINE-YEAR COMPULSORY SCHOOLING IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper examines the causes of child labour, and its effects. The paper attempt to suggest strategies that could help in checking child labour. Some of which include effective enforcement of labour laws, creating of conducive learning environments, effective and regular inspection of schools, sensitization of the parents, provision of basic amenities in rural areas and poverty alleviation programmes.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Education is the foundation needed by any nation for economic growth, political stability and social harmony. It is in recognition of this, that the Nigerian government has over time been fine tuning educational policies towards effective attainment of educational goals. The introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) which seeks to provide nine years compulsory schooling is in recognition of the role of education in national development. The issue of child labour may however, make such educational goals not easily attainable as children who are expected to be part of the nine-years compulsory schooling are involved in various forms of child labour even at school hours. This paper examines this problem in a critical manner pointing out some of the factors that have come into play in perpetuating the problem. This paper not only points out the consequences of the continual existence of child labour on the development of Nigeria as a nation but also suggests ways through which the issue can be tackled in order to ensure that a great number of the Nigerian children involved in child labour find their way back to the classrooms.

**NINE YEARS COMPULSORY SCHOOLING IN NIGERIA, A MYTH OR REALITY**

The Universal Basic Education programme embarked upon by the Federal Government of Nigeria in September 1999 is almost the same as the old Universal Primary Education (UPE) Scheme. It is free and universal like before, but now in addition, is compulsory. The then president Olusegun Obasanjo in Launching the programme emphasized that having carefully reviewed the current national needs, there was the need to give education a broader focus. Thus, the new UBE now extends to all children from age six to age fifteen (Tahir, 2006).

The Universal Basic Education implementation guidelines stated the specific objectives of the programme to include:

- Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to it's vigorous promotion.
- The provision of free, Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian of school going age;
- Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system;

- Catering for the learning needs of young persons who, for one reason or another, have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complimentary approaches to the provision and promotion of Basic Education and
- Ensuring the acquisition of the ethical, moral and civic values needed for the laying of a solid foundation for lifelong learning

The objectives of the Universal Basic Education are basically directed at ensuring that illiteracy is reduced to the barest minimum. The school is seen as a very vital social institution that would not only help in achieving this but would also prepare the recipients of education to function in a desirable manner in line with the societal expectations. It is in view of this that the national policy on Education (FGN 2004) provides that the quality of instructions at all levels of the Nigerian educational system should seek to inculcate the following values,

- Respect for the worth and dignity of the individual.
- Faith in man's ability to make rational decisions.
- Moral and spiritual principle in inter-personal and human relations;
- Shared responsibility for the common good of the society
- Promotion of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children; and
- Acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance.

In order to attain these noble values of education, the National Policy on Education (FGN 2004) further states that Basic education shall be of 9-year duration comprising 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education. It shall be free and compulsory. The question thus arises, how compulsory has the basic education scheme been in Nigeria since its inception in 1999 when many children are seen engaged in one form of child labour or the other even at schooling hours. As UNICEF (2006) noted "A staggering 15 million children under the age of 14 are working across Nigeria. Many are exposed to long hours of work in dangerous and unhealthy environments. Carrying too much responsibility for their age..."

#### **WHAT IS CHILD LABOUR?**

Child labour refers to working children who are below a certain minimum age. Such work could be mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children and deprives them of opportunities for schooling and development (Aliyu, 2006). The International Labour Organization (1993) regards child labour as economically active population under the age of fifteen years. Many children especially in the developing countries of the world are engaged in various forms of work, some of which include hawking, tailoring, carpentry, and others. Such children often work for long hours, missing out on schooling and opportunities for equipping themselves with skills that would enhance their economic and social development. Generally, most of such working children have no time, money or energy to go to school. As ILO (2006) noted, about six million working children in Nigeria, split between boys and girls, do not attend school at all, while one million children are forced to drop out due to poverty or because of parents demand to contribute to the family income. It is important therefore that the issue of child labour in Nigeria needs to be seriously addressed if the goals of Basic education scheme must be attained.

#### **CAUSES OF CHILD LABOUR**

Wide-spread level of poverty in Nigeria significantly contributes to child labour. The Human Development Index (HDI) which measures human achievements in the most basic human capabilities, ranked Nigeria 151<sup>st</sup> out of 174 countries in 1998 (Akinferinwa; 1997). Poverty often prompts parents to make their children to work in order to support the family upkeep. As observed by Syed, Mirza, Sultana and Rana (1991), parents constitute about 62% of the source of induction of children into employment. The children make their own decisions to work only 8 percent of the time.

The size of the household can also be indicted in the rising wave of child labour. The larger household size reduces children's educational participation and progress in school and reduces

parents' investment in schooling and consequently increases the probability that a child will work (Lloyd, 1994). From Lloyd's study, other factors are seen to correlate with household size in determining that a child works. These include: The level of state expenditure on social services, (The higher the state expenditure is on social services, the less the effects of household size), The strength of the extended family bond in existence; (The stronger the extended family system bond, the less the effects of household size, and the phase of demographic transition in the community. (The effect of household size is seen to be larger in later phases of demographic transition). The level of parental education has also been identified as an important factor that helps to determine whether a child works or not. Tienda (1979) pointed out that the educational level of the parents can significantly affect the child's schooling and employment. There are some traditional beliefs/factors that can promote child labour. In some communities, there is the erroneous belief that educated females may not get married or have children. Many families in such communities raise daughters to take over household duties. Naturally schooling is ruled out for such ones. Problems associated with the Nigerian school system inadvertently promote child labour. Many times children may seek employment simply because there is no access to schools. Sometimes, there may be schools but the low quality of education makes the children and their parents to regard attending such schools as a waste of time. As Bonnet (1993) opines that the failure of the education system in African has led many parents to view child Labour as the preferred option for their children.

### **EFFECTS OF CHILD LABOUR**

Child labour has a lot of negative effects on the child and ultimately on the larger society. The young child involved in the labour market is deprived of proper childhood. Nwaham (2009) noted that when the child is born into a family, he/she undergoes some developmental stages socially and psychologically from infancy to childhood, sense of self awareness begins to unfold which could be summed up as inputs, outputs and feedback. All these, greatly contribute to the development of the human personality. Jumping this gradual process of development to assume adult responsibilities denies the child of the opportunity to enjoy being a child. The fact that the Children are not emotionally matured to handle the adult responsibilities bestowed on them by working leads to physical and mental torture" the international labour office reports that children work the longest hours and are the worst paid of all labourers (Bequale and Boyden, 1988). They endure work conditions which include health hazards and potential abuse. Child labour creates and perpetuates poverty as it condemns the child to a life of unskilled and badly paid work. Indeed children working for long hours miss out on the opportunity to acquire education or learn a trade to equip themselves with the knowledge, skills and competencies needed to participate fully in the economic and social development of their communities and to improve their own lives.

### **THE WAY FORWARD**

The Nigerian government has aptly adopted three international labour organization conventions setting a minimum age for the employment of children. The country signed a memorandum of understanding in August 2003 in cooperation with the international labour organization to launch a programme for the elimination of child labour. The government has also passed the Childs rights Acts section 28 and 29 into law. This act prohibits exploitative labour and enforces section 58-64 of the labour Act. All these are aimed at protecting children from exploitative work (UNICEF 2006). Signing treaties and enactment of laws without adequate enforcement strategies will not make efforts at eliminating child labour effective. The Nigerian government should seek to go beyond making compulsory 9 years schooling law on paper by establishing means of pushing the children out of the labour market into the classrooms.

1. The schools should be adequately equipped with both human and material resources needed to make the teaching learning process exciting and rewarding. It is imperative that the cost of education should not be way above the reach of the masses, though the universal Basic Education scheme claims that education is free, it should be made free indeed.

2. Effective and regular inspection of should be put in place to check child labour especially during school hours. Mobilizing members of the local communities into the inspectorate and monitoring teams could go a long way in curbing the menace of child labour. As Rodgers and Standing (1981) stated that legislation is likely to be effective only where there is a capable administration determined to implement these laws. Culprits whether parents or children school be dealt with according to the set rules and regulations.
3. Sensitization and socialization of the parents would go a long way in addressing the issue of child labour. The three tiers of government should embark on this to ensure effectiveness. Such socialization would impress on the parents not only the gains of sending their children to school but also the pains of pushing them too early into the labour market.
4. Provision of basic amenities such as light, water, good roads would help in curbing rural-urban drift which has been identified as one of the factors promoting child labour.
5. Poverty alleviation policies would also help in reducing the incidence of child labour. For example granting of loans to assist poor families in investing in agricultural endeavors or other small scale businesses. Various levels of government can set up agencies to control and monitor such investments.
6. Education is indeed a key needed to launch the nation forward in line with the millennium development goals. All stakeholders therefore, the government, the local communities and parents should contribute their quota to ensuring the success of nine years compulsory schooling in Nigeria.

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