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## Child labour: A violation of children's educational rights in Ghana

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### Abstract

The study investigates the extent to which child labour impacts on the academic work of school children in the Nkwanta South District of the Volta Region in Ghana and how it can be eradicated. One hundred and sixty child workers were selected through the tracer method to participate in the study. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data and the data was analysed using descriptive statistics. It was realized that most of the children were engaged in agricultural activities and the major causes of their plight include parental poverty and illiteracy, and raising money for their education and families. Child labour leads to lateness, absenteeism and weak academic performance. The study recommends that government should implement all laws and policies on child labour.

**Keywords:** Child labour, education, performance, poverty, policies

### 1. Introduction

Child labour as a human right violation has become a matter of grave concern over the past decade especially in developing countries. The International Labour Organization (ILO), (2013) <sup>[20]</sup> estimated that over 215 million children are engaged in several economic activities in the world today and that some 60 percent of them work in the agricultural sector. Children are supposed to be educated to ensure that they acquire relevant knowledge, desirable attitudes, values, skills and good behaviours (Yidana & Boadu, 2012) <sup>[3]</sup>. However, child labour takes them from the classroom to perform different economic activities.

Notwithstanding several global interventions to address child labour, the prevalence rate is rather on ascendancy in developing countries, especially Africa which has the highest incidence of child labour of 41 percent as compared with 21 percent in Asia and 17 percent in Latin America (Africa Recovery, 2001) <sup>[4]</sup>.

Ghana as other African countries has a high prevalence rate and this is a major constraint in human capital development. A baseline study commissioned by the Ghana Government in 2007 revealed that 6.3 million children were engaged in child labour (Abdul, 2007) <sup>[1]</sup> as against 1.2 million in 2003 which was observed by Global Match International Secretariat, (2004) <sup>[18]</sup>. The problem however is that most of such victims are school going children (Kim & Kantor, 2005) <sup>[24]</sup>. Most working children in Ghana (about 82.5%) were found in the rural areas, mostly in agricultural activities (Abdul, 2007) <sup>[1]</sup>.

Governments have been putting efforts to eliminate child labour to promote human capital development. Post-independence efforts to eliminate child labour started with the Education Act 87 (1961) which made education free and compulsory for all children of school age (United Nation International Children Emergency Fund-UNICEF, 2004) <sup>[37]</sup>. In 1967, the Ghana's Labour Decree (1967), prohibited employment of children under the age of 15. Other post-independence measures included free and compulsory basic education in the 1987 Education Reforms, the ratification of the UN Convention on Children's Rights, in 1990, Article 28 (2) of the 1992 Constitution, the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) in 1996 and the Children Act (1998). In addition, in 2001, the government instituted the capitation grant to reduce burden of parents. The grant covers essential school fees of children at the basic education level such as text book fees, cultural fees and sport fees. Other measures to reduce child labour include the School Feeding Programme and free supply of school uniform.

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Despite these efforts by the government, child labour is still high in the Volta region (33.2%), with the Nkwanta South District with a very high prevalence of (39.1%) as compared to national prevalence rate of 20 percent (Ghana Statistical Service, 2003) <sup>[17]</sup>. The Nkwanta South District of the Volta region in Ghana is mostly made up of rural communities who engage in small scale agricultural activities.

### 1.1 Statement of problem

Most school children in the Nkwanta South District of the Volta region are engaged in child labour at the expense of their education. They face multiple burdens from the demands of work and schooling. The lifelong damage to the children include, denying them basic literacy and life skills as well as psychological and physical trauma. It deprives the victims of a better future life and this leads to vicious poverty cycle. Child labour is a sad situation that poor children have to go through. There is however, very little knowledge about the extent to which child labour affects the academic work of school children in the Nkwanta South District of the Volta region. This research sought to investigate the extent to which child labour impacts on the academic work of school children in the Nkwanta South District of the Volta Region and how it can be eradicated.

### 1.2 Research questions

1. What are the main causes of child labour in the Nkwanta South District of the Volta region?
1. Which economic activities in the area are the children mostly engaged in?
2. What impacts does child labour have on the education of school children in the area?
3. What could be done to solve the problem in the area?

### 2. Literature Review

Breakdown of marriage, separation, death of parents and poverty are major sources of child labour (Ghana National Commission on Children, 1997) <sup>[15]</sup>. UNICEF (2000) <sup>[34]</sup> noted that family circumstances contribute immensely to the problem of child labour and indicated that most victims of child labour do not stay with either or both parents for reasons such as increased fosterage within families, increased divorce rate and death of one or both parents. The ILO (2004) also observed that most working children find themselves in difficult family situations such as single parents, family illness or incapacitation and dysfunctional families. The major reason why children work is poverty (Department for International Development-DFID, 2000; Africa Recovery, 2001; Akordor, 2007; Patrinos and Psacharopoulos, 1997; UNICEF, 2000; IPEC, 2003; ILO, 2004, *The Mirror*, Saturday, July 19, 2008) <sup>[22, 4, 11, 7, 27, 22, 34]</sup>. The Director of Labour Statistics of Ghana Statistical Services stated that the causes of child labour were poverty, ignorance, large household sizes, single parenthood, irresponsible parenting, lack of parental care and love, as well as loss of both parents (Akordor, 2007; Africa Recovery, 2001) <sup>[7, 4]</sup>.

Kelsey and Peterson (2003) <sup>[23]</sup> noted that child labour continues to be a global problem because of its impacts. A former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan in March 1999 stated that "child labour has serious consequences that stay with the individual and with society for far longer than the years of childhood" (Donnellan, 2002:1) <sup>[10]</sup>. The educational impacts of child labour include lateness,

absenteeism, inactive in classroom works and weak academic performance and school dropouts (ILO, 2004). Ghana Statistical Service -GSS (2003) <sup>[17]</sup> observed that child labour is stressful and burdensome and has some emotional impacts which tend to affect the academic work of children. Child workers are constantly on call and deprived of rest and sleep. They are often blamed as stupid, lazy, careless, and rude and liars. They go to school emotionally disturbed and this affects their concentration and ability to learn properly (ILO, 2004). ILO-IPEC (2006) <sup>[22]</sup> further stated that child labour can leave lasting psychological scars on children and deprives them useful skills needed for the world of work.

Mechanisms to eradicate child labour started in 19<sup>th</sup> century when Britain and Germany passed child labour laws in 1802 and 1839 respectively. The United States also passed a law on child labour in 1916 (World Bank Encyclopedia vol.3 1992). These laws sought to prohibit employment of children below 18 years.

There have been many attempts by the United Nations (UN) to abolish child labour. One of such attempts was the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the General Assembly in 1945. Article 30 provided a warning to member states never to engage any person in an activity that was destructive to his or her rights, (UNICEF, 2004) <sup>[37]</sup>.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) was also adopted by the UN General Assembly on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 1966 to address human rights. Article 10(3) of the Covenant stated that special measures of protection and assistance should be taken on behalf of all children and young persons without any discrimination for reasons of parentage or other conditions. It continued that employment in work harmful to their education or health should be punishable by law (<http://www.UN.org/over/rights.htm>).

Another global effort to eradicate child labour is the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which was approved by the UN General Assembly on 20<sup>th</sup> November, 1989 and was ratified on 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 1990. Article 32(1) states that the child should be protected from work that is harmful to the child's education, health and development (Convention on the Rights of the Child: 44).

UNICEF and UNESCO undertake programmes to eliminate child labour. The Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000) came out with a proposal. Some important articles geared towards elimination of child labour included Articles 3 and 7. Article 3(2) for instance stated that commitment must be made to remove all forms of child labour whilst that of 7(2) stated that each member state should take measures to prevent child labour.

The African Union in an attempt to address child labour came out with a Charter on the Welfare and Rights of the Child in 1990 which entered into force in November 29, 1999. Article 15 (1) states that every child shall be protected from doing work that is hazardous to his development. (<http://www.umn.edu/humarts/africa/afchild.htm>).

In Ghana, the Government has shown more commitment to the issue of child labour. She became the first to ratify the Convention on Children's Rights in 1990. The Ghana National Commission on Children was quickly established in 1991 to address issues in the convention. To make child labour part of the statute books, it was incorporated into the 1992 constitution. Article 28(2) of the 1992 Constitution

stated that “Every child has the right to be protected from engaging in work that constitutes a threat to his health, education or development”. (1992 constitution: 25) The children’s Act 560 (1998) of Ghana was designed to show more commitment on the part of government to protect the rights of the child. Article 87(1) stated that no person shall engage a child in exploitative labour that deprives him or her of health, education or development (Children’s Act, 1998:27).

**3. Methodology**

The descriptive survey design was adopted by the study because according to Whyte (2006) [39] descriptive survey is suitable for collecting data for qualitative research. According to Whyte (2006) [39] descriptive survey is where the researcher collects information from knowledgeable people to explain social phenomenon. Survey research makes it relatively easy to collect data on attitudes and opinions from large samples of subjects (Weiten, 2001; Amoani, 2005) [38, 6]. This is why the researcher adopted this design.

The population of the study consisted of all victims of child labour in Nkwanta South District of the Volta region. One hundred and sixty victims of child labour were selected as respondents for the research. The selection of respondents was difficult because of lack of reliable data or a sample frame on victims of child labour in the area. However, because of the widespread nature of the problem in the area, the researcher was able to reach 160 of such victims.

The researcher used the “tracer” method to identify the victims. Tansey (2006) [30] stated that, the tracer method was suitable for gathering qualitative information when there was no sample frame. With this method, the researcher was assisted by supervisors of basic schools to identify school community where child labour prevalence rate was high. The researcher then went to those schools and interviewed the headmasters and students who had identified victims of child labour. Names which were revealed as potential child labourers were traced and those identified were interviewed. The questionnaire was the main data collection instrument under the survey. Kumar (2005) [26], states that a questionnaire is a written list of questions, the answers to which are recorded by respondents. Gray (2009) [14] noted the questionnaire saves time and money and the inflow of data is quick and from many people. In addition, the questionnaire is also suitable for wider coverage, and it produces reliable information, and reduces bias and influence of the researcher (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Kwabia, 2006) [16, 25]. In order to design a valid questionnaire, a researcher must consider in detail the information needed to address the research questions (Anderson & Arsenaut, 2004) [4]. The researcher distributed the questionnaires personally to respondents. Data was collected from January to June, 2017.

**4. Discussion of Results**

The descriptive statistical analysis was employed by the study. The questionnaires were first edited to identify and eliminate errors made by the respondents. This is what Cohen and Manion (1985) [8] recommended before data analysis. Out of the 160 questionnaires distributed, 150 were successfully completed and these were what were used in the analysis. The analysis was based on the research questions.

**4.1 Major Child Labour Activities**

The response on the main work the child labourers often do, are shown in Table

**Table 1:** Children’s Responses on the Main Work they do

	F	%
Domestic service	11	7.3
Agriculture/fishing	102	68
Mining/construction	3	2
Street related activities/Trading	34	22.7
Total	150	100.0

Source: field data, 2017

Table 1 shows that majority of the children (68%) were engaged in agriculture / fishing while only 2% were engaged in mining/construction activities. This agrees with ILO (2013) [20] and Dowuona, 2007 that most working children in Ghana were engaged agricultural activities.

**4.2 Causes of child labour**

The study inquired on what causes the children to work and their responses as shown on Table 2 have been scaled as follows; 1 (strongly agreed); 2 (agree); 3 (uncertain); 4 (disagree) and 5 (strongly disagree).

**Table 2:** Responses on Causes of Child Labour

Causes	1(SA)		2(A)		3(U)		4(D)		5(SD)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Parental poverty	139	92.7	11	7.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	150	100
Poor parental care	101	67.3	26	17.3	4	2.7	15	10	4	2.7	150	100
Parental illiteracy	135	90	15	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	150	100
Broken home	34	22.7	7	4.7	2	1.3	10	7.3	0	0	150	100
Large family size	88	58.7	21	14	9	6	23	15.3	9	6	150	100
Raise money for education	134	89.3	6	4	0	0	10	6.7	0	0	150	100
Raise money for my family	122	81.3	0	0	0	0	28	18.7	0	0	150	100

Source: field data, 2017

The result indicates that most of the children strongly agreed to the various items as reasons why they work apart from broken home where most of them (71.3) disagreed. The items on which most of them strongly agreed included “parental poverty” (92.7%), “poor parental care” (67.3%), “parental illiteracy” (90%), “large family size” (58.7%), raise money for education” (89.3%) and “raise money for my family” (81.3%). Parental poverty was the main cause of child labour in the area according to the responses.

The fact that most of them strongly agreed to the various items as the reasons why they work, implies that the various items namely poverty, large family size, illiteracy, lack of parental care and raising money for educational needs and for families were major causes of child labour in the area. This assertion confirms with many writers. Poverty for instance is noted by DFID (2000) [11], African Recovery (2001) [4], UNICEF (2004) [34] and ILO (2004) as a major cause of child labour. GNCC (1999), Donnellan (2002) [10], and GSS (2003) enumerated the major causes of child labour to include large household size, illiteracy and ignorance.

**4.3 Impact of Child Labour**

The responses from the children on their feeling for working are summarized in Table 3

**Table 3: How Children Feel for Working**

	F	%
1. Happy	6	4
2. Unhappy	88	58.7
3. Burdensome/Stressful	125	83.3

Source: field data, 2017

Eighty eight (58.7) of them felt unhappy while 83.3 percent saw working as burdensome / stressful. Only 4 percent felt happy for working.

The responses from the children on how the work they were doing affected their academic work are shown on Table 4.

**Table 4: Responses of children about how Child Labour affects their Academic Work**

Impacts of child labour	Yes		No		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
It makes me go to school Late	115	76.73	35	23.3	150	100
It makes me absent myself from school	124	82.72	26	17.3	150	100
It prevents me from doing my home work	121	80.72	29	19.3	150	100
It makes me not to perform well in exams	136	90.71	14	9.3	150	100

Source: field data, 2017

Table.4 shows that the work the children do affects their academic work in many ways. In all, 76.7% agreed that the work made them to go to school late while 82.7% agreed that the work made them to absent themselves from school. In addition, 80.7% of them agreed that the work prevented them from doing their homework while 90.7% agreed that the work did not help them to perform well in examinations. The educational impacts of child labour therefore include lateness, absenteeism, inactive in class and weak academic performance (ILO, 2004).

A cross-check from the attendance registers on the number of days the children absented themselves from school the previous term is recorded in Table 5.

**Table 5: Number of Days the Children Absented Themselves from School the Previous Term**

	F	%
Less than 5	9	6
5 – 9	25	16.7
10 – 14	32	21.3
15 and above	84	56
Total	60	100

Source: field data, 2017

Out of the 65 school days in the previous term, 77.3% of the students absented themselves for 10 or more days. This shows that the rate of absenteeism in the children engaged in child labour was very high. The result from Table 5 confirms the responses from the children that child labour results in absenteeism. A regular student should not absent himself or herself for 15 days or more in a term of 65 days. Table 6 shows the performance of the students in the core subjects. The marks were obtained from the School Based Assessment records. The Table shows that the modal class for each of the core subject was 31-40%.

**Table 6: Absolute and Percentage Performance in the Core Subjects**

Scores	Mathematics		English language		Science		Social Studies	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
11 – 20	9	6	10	6.7	4	2.7	2	1.3
21 – 30	52	34.7	49	32.7	51	34	20	13.3
31 – 40	60	40.0	64	42.7	56	37.3	58	38.7
41 – 50	16	10.7	17	11.3	18	12	36	24
51 – 60	7	4.6	6	4	12	8	16	10.7
61 – 70	4	2.7	2	1.3	5	3.3	11	7.3
71 – 80	2	1.3	2	1.3	4	2.7	7	4.7
Total	150	100	150	100	150	100	150	100

Source: field data, 2017

In all, the percentage of the students who scored less than 41% in the various core subjects include 80.7% in Mathematics, 82.1% in English Language 74% in Integrated Science and 53.3 percent in Social Studies. None of the students scored above 80% in all the subjects during the period.

Table 7 shows the average performance of the students in each core subject. The average of the means (mean of means) for all the core subjects was 36.7%. Apart from social studies, the mean performance of the students in each of the remaining core subjects was less than 40%. The mean performance for the subjects include Mathematics (34.2%) English Language (33.8%), Integrated Science (36.4%) and Social Studies (42.5%) compared with the averages of the schools visited which include 41.3% for Mathematics, 43.5% for English Language, 45% for Integrated Science and 47.1% for Social Studies.

**Table 7: The Average Performance of the Students in the Core Subjects**

Subject	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Mathematics	34.2	32.8	32.0	11.4
English language	33.8	33.0	32.9	10.2
Integrated science	36.4	34.4	31.7	12.7
Social studies	42.5	39.6	36.8	13.3
Average	36.7	34.95	33.35	11.8

Source: field data, 2015

The mean performance of the students in English Language was lower than the other core subjects. This may have implications on other subjects since it is the medium of instruction. On the other hand, the average performance in Social Studies compared with the other core subjects was high maybe because Social Studies is more related to everyday life.

The mean for each of the core subjects is higher than the median which also is higher than the mode for each of the subjects. This is what Alonge (1989) [5] referred to as positive skewness. Positive skewness according to him is where the mean is higher than the median, which is higher than the mode. This situation indicates that the standard of the testees is low (Alonge, 1989) [5]. In addition, Table 7 shows the standard deviation for the subjects include Mathematics (11.4), English Language (10.2), Integrated Science (12.7) and Social Studies (13.3).

#### 4.4 Ways to Eradicate Child Labour

Views were sought from the respondents on how to address

child labour. Table 8 shows their responses on what their parents should do to prevent them from working.

**Table 8:** What Parents should do to Eliminate Child Labour

The role of parents	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
Pay all school fees	145	96.7	5	3.3
Give money to feed in school	144	96	6	4
Provide educational materials	150	100	0	0
Stop engaging you in child labour	135	90	15	10

Source: field data, 2017

All the students agreed that their parents provide their educational materials while 96.7% and 96% respectively agreed that their parents should pay all school fees and give them money for feeding in school. In addition, 90% also agreed that their parents should stop engaging them in child labour. This implies that, the children wanted their parents to pay all their school fees, provide them all the educational materials and give them feeding money to stop working.

ILO (2004) and IPEC (2003) [22] noted that parents have an important role to play towards the elimination of child labour. It is the responsibility of parents to provide children with their needs including educational, health and basic needs (Children’s Act, 1998; Yidana & Boadu, 2012) [3].

The research inquired about the role NGOs could play towards the eradication of child labour in the area and Table 9 summarizes the responses from respondents on the role of NGOs towards the eradication of child labour.

**Table 9:** The Role of NGOs towards Elimination of Child Labour

The Role of NGOs	Yes		No		Total	
	ABS	%	ABS	%	ABS	%
Educating parents not ask you to work	142	91.2	8	8.8	150	100
Give you financial assistance	150	100	0	0	150	100
Providing financial assistance to parents	132	80.7	11	19.3	150	100
Provision of your educational needs	145	93.0	4	7.0	150	100
Give you feeding money in school	138	84.2	9	15.8	150	100

Source: field data, 2017

The positive responses from most of the children on the various items show that the NGOs have major roles to play towards the elimination of child labour in the area. Those who answered in affirmative include; educating parents not to engage children to work (92.2%), given financial assistance to victims (100%), providing financial assistance to the parents (80.7%), and provision of educational needs of the victims (93.0%) and given money to victim to feed in school (84.2%). The positive responses from the children on the role of NGOs agreed with IPEC (2003) [22] when they enjoined NGOs to implement programmes to provide direct support for children, raise awareness and mobilize society to take action against child labour.

When the children were asked on what the government should do to stop them from working, all of them agreed that government should make education free, provide all their educational materials, feed them while at school and provide financial support to their parents.

**5. Recommendations**

The government must implement fully the free compulsory basic education programme and the school feeding programme. In addition, the government must be more

committed to implement all laws and policies on child labour. There should also be intensive public education to create awareness on the impact of child labour. The education should aim at not just informing but most importantly at changing attitudes of people. It would also increase the awareness of the impact of child labour on children’s education, and reduce the incidence of child labour activities in the area.

The government should design a national implementation policy frame work. The document should spell out clearly departments and agencies responsible for the implementation of policies on child labour. It is therefore recommended that Child Labour Monitoring and Inspection Committees should be established in the various communities. The composition of the committees should include circuit supervisors, teachers, Parents/Teachers Associations, opinion leaders and traditional rulers. The committees should be required to perform the following functions:

- Identification of victims of child labour and give them the necessary assistance.
- Preventing the occurrence of child labour.
- Monitoring school attendance of children.
- Make bye laws on child labour.
- Implement policies on child labour.
- Organize awareness raising campaigns.
- Receive and deal with complaints concerning child labour.
- Perform any other function towards the total elimination of child labour.

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