



*International Journal of Development and Sustainability*

ISSN: 2186-8662 – [www.isdsnet.com/ijds](http://www.isdsnet.com/ijds)

Volume 8 Number 1 (2019): Pages 69-77

ISDS Article ID: IJDS18100401



# Child labour and educational development of the Nigerian children

Unwana-Obong Dominic Uyanga <sup>1\*</sup>, Oto-Obong Johnson Ekpo <sup>2</sup>, Kelvin Udim Davies <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Educational Founds, G&C, University Of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Department of Curriculum Studies and Educational Management, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

<sup>3</sup> Department of Educational Founds, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi, Nigeria

## Abstract

Many developing countries of the world today are faced with the challenge of child labour in their societies. This has generally been attributed to the economic decline of these countries which has forced children into becoming workers in order to contribute to the sustenance of life of the family. This situation has led children to become hawkers on the streets, selling different wares for the family to survive. However; this has made them prone to being targets for all kinds of wicked manipulations, being victims of many uncertainties, has also resulted in deterioration of educational development and sometimes even death. This paper discusses the concept of child labour and highlights the grave consequence of this menace. It has made some suggestions on how the hope of the Nigerian child can be made brighter and secured.

**Keywords:** Child Labour; Educational Development; Nigerian Children

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**Cite this article as:** Uyanga, U.D., Ekpo, O.J. and Davies, K.U. (2019), "Child labour and educational development of the Nigerian child", *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 69-77.

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\* Corresponding author. E-mail address: [unwanauyanga@gmail.com](mailto:unwanauyanga@gmail.com)

## 1. Introduction

Child labour is one of the most insidious forms of cruelty and human rights violation done against children. This is because it not only dehumanizes them but introduces them to a life of bondage and servitude. In many developing countries across the world, inclusive of Nigeria, this is a regular occurrence. Child labour is exploitative, debilitating and outright criminal. However, many individuals attribute this disturbing trend to economic situations in the country, most especially decline in the economy. Other factors which are being pointed to are high rate of unemployment, poverty, ignorance and illiteracy. Child labour ranges from having children hawking wares on the streets, engaging in farm work for many hours, trafficking of children as prostitutes to other parts of the world such as Europe and America and domestic helps within and outside the country to engaging in criminal activities such as drug peddling and theft.

Child labour often denies children the opportunity of being educationally developed as those involved in it, hardly attend school punctually and regularly. It increases the rate of truancy, absenteeism and eventual drop out from schools. This portends great danger to the developmental aspirations of the Nigerian nation. Nigeria cannot become a developed nation if those to lead the nation tomorrow are not educationally qualified today. It is not in doubt that, education is the key to success since it enlightens the mind, instills creativity and reduces servitude. This out rightly means that when a child is deprived of education because of child labour, it diminishes his ability to succeed in life, that is, the child becomes less likely to succeed in the modern and contemporary society which is highly competitive and needs educationally developed and sound individuals to drive the economies of the world. The main purpose of this paper is to discuss how child labour can affect educational development of the Nigerian child and proffer possible solutions to curbing this ugly menace in the Nigerian society.

## 2. The concept of education

The concept of education can be viewed from various perspectives among which are the fact that it is anything which meets the basic criteria of:

- i. transmitting what is worthwhile to those who become committed to it
- ii. involving knowledge and understanding and some sort of cognitive perspectives which are not inert
- iii. having rules or procedures of transmission that do not lack willingness and voluntariness on the part of the learner (Peters 1966 in Ibia and Ette, 2011).

The concept of education has also been viewed as a process of inculcating knowledge, skills and attitudes in individuals to prepare them to be functional and productive members of the society who are capable of developing themselves and contributing to the development of the society. The process of education therefore emphasizes development in the three domains of learning- cognitive, Psychomotor and Affective domains. Individuals must acquire knowledge (cognitive domain), skills and competence (psychomotor domain) and right attitudes (affective domain) in order to function effectively in the Nigerian society. No domain is more

important than the other because when the three domains are not developed, ill-educated individuals will become the products of the education process and their deficiencies will manifest in the societies they live and work in.

## 2.1. Value of education: Nigerian context

Value can be defined as something that is qualitatively cherished and therefore held in high esteem especially as a result of one's belief. The National Policy on Education (2013) has stated that Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on the following set of beliefs:

- i. education is an instrument for national development and social change
- ii. education is vital for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria
- iii. education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society
- iv. education is compulsory and a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, ethnic background and any peculiar individual challenges
- v. education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of society.

Education as a valuable process is therefore important for every individual as it increases an individuals' capacity to make rational decisions, choose wisely between available opportunities and function effectively in the society. Education aims at:

- i. individual development through the enlightenment of the head and heart of men and the illumination of consciousness for the all-round development of individual personality.
- ii. social and national development through promoting essential values
- iii. social transformation by enabling men and women initiate and bring about desirable changes in the society
- iv. acquisition of values by promoting spiritual, moral, cultural and social values (Uyanga and Eman, 2016).

Exposing a child to education offers many benefits and frees the child from a life of servitude and ignorance while widening the view of the child to enable him or her live in a contemporary global village with all its challenges and prospects. Education brings about the all-round development of the child as he/she is exposed to the curriculum which includes hidden and manifest experiences that tend to mould his/her mind and build him/her up in character and learning. A child has a very impressionable mind and therefore should not be exposed to dangerous and harmful things that can impact negatively on his/her development. The educational development of the Nigerian child should be prioritized as the child of today becomes the adult of tomorrow and if the Nigerian society is to become developed, then the all-round development of the child which education guarantees should not be fiddled with. It may be in line with this that the former Minister of Education; Prof. Ruqayyatu Ahmed Rufai in her foreword in the National Policy on Education (2013) opined thus: "our covenant with every Nigerian child therefore, is access to quality education relevant to the need of the Nigerian economy...".

### **3. Child labour in Nigeria**

Child labour is defined as work engaged in by children which deprives them of their childhood, their potential and dignity as children. In Nigeria, it is not uncommon to see children working as street vendors, beggars, car washers, heavy load carriers especially in markets in towns and cities while in the villages, children are engaged in tedious farm activities, carrying of heavy loads and gallons of water for long distances, auto repairs etc. In the words of Onah in Nnabuchi (2013), in Northern Nigeria, the Almajiris (street beggars) are children who beg to survive; about 8 million Nigerian children are trafficked in various parts of the country. Girls are trafficked for forced prostitution to Italy, Spain and France and are also trafficked as domestic helps. The International Labour Organization (1998) defines child labour as an economic activity performed by a person of less than fifteen (15) years of age, excluding some part time work performed by children more than twelve years old. Child labour is an inhumane practice which exposes the child to many dangers and even stigmatization. It is the employment of children in any work that deprives them of their childhood, interferes with their ability to attend regular school and is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful (Stephen, Okon, Franklyn, Effiong, Okon and Okoro, 2016). African historical practice reveals that parents in traditional communities usually had many children and often times engaged them in working to be able to support the family especially on the farms. In the words of Oloko (2004); child labour was considered as part of the social organization in which all members worked together to produce for the group's sustenance. Hence; child labour formed part of the socialization process of the child. Today, this practice has taken a new dimension and is seen in towns and cities with children hawking on the streets especially at traffic lights during school hours. Child labour is an abuse of the rights of the child and it is in opposition to justice. Aristotle in Aminigo and Nwaokugha (2006) affirms that "injustice arises when equals are treated unequally and unequals equally". Child labour denies the right of the child to get a sound education like other children who have access to education without barriers and dehumanizes the child thereby leading him into modern day slavery, making him prone to robbery and sometimes even ending in death. Statistics of the Population Reference Bureau (2007) in Stephen et al. reveal that 45% of over 140 million Nigeria's total population are children under the age of 15 years and 15 million children under the age of 14 are engaged in one form of labour or the other in Nigeria. This is a very disturbing trend as the future of the country is at stake.

Child labour includes hawking wares on the streets by children in order to gain monetary returns, human trafficking especially of children who are made to become child prostitutes or even forceful recruitment of child soldiers as could be seen in Somali at the time of their war. Children who are exposed to fending for themselves and their families or care takers more often than not lose their childhood, dignity and pride and become victims of the harsh circumstances of the environment they become exposed to on a daily basis. Child labour usually arises due to poverty and social exclusion. The poverty index continues to rise in Nigeria and this has forced many parents/ guardians to have no other alternative than sending their children/wards to the streets. This is more widely spread among poorer families in the country.

### 3.1. Child labour as a barrier to education

Education provides the situation that makes children to learn. Children learn through experiences brought about mainly by instructions. Education provides the child with certain skills, knowledge and abilities/competencies that may be required sooner or later in life. Good education provides the child with a world of opportunities for self-improvement and greater participation in the wider society. In Nigeria, education can hold the key towards successful livelihood while lack of it can spell doom for the individual. The impact of child labour on the overall education of the child cannot be over emphasized. In fact, all forms of child labour pose barriers to the education of the child as highlighted below:

- i. Children who are engaged as domestic servants for instance and are subjected to working late into the nights and waking up early in the morning, have the tendency to sleep while class activities are going on in school because of physical exhaustion/fatigue. This does not in any way promote learning in the child.
- ii. Similarly, children who hawk before going to school are bound to arrive late and are sure to miss the early lessons, thus depriving the child the opportunity to learn. Moreso, these children do not have time do not their homework.
- iii. Many child labourers are not even allowed to go to school at all. Lack of education becomes a clog in the wheel of progress in life.
- iv. Children engaged in hazardous labour face being afflicted with various forms of deformity, ill health and psychological trauma resulting from harrowing experiences and infections. These constitute impediments to learning which is vital for the development and improvement of the child.
- v. Child labour impedes growth of the child at a pace he should grow. It causes the child to become an adult at a very early stage in life and may eventually lead the child to engage in adult education later in life with little or no seriousness attached to educational pursuit.

### 3.2. Disadvantages of child labour

- i. Health challenges: Children who are exposed to child labour usually work under harsh weather conditions. They hawk their wares on the streets under the sun and in the rain just to make sales and not return home empty handed. This leads to picking up of a lot of sicknesses and diseases. Mishra, (2000) opines that agriculture is the largest sector of employment for children, employing about 1 out of every 3 children involved in child labour. Goldmaan (2004) posits that children in agriculture are exposed to heavy loads, chemicals used for fertilizers and pesticides and to heavy sun rays, wind or even heavy rain. Children who work in factories are exposed to noise from heavy machines which may lead to ruptured eardrums and its attendant problems, electricity accidents, fire outbreaks, dust inhalation etc. Children who hawk on the streets or engage in forced prostitution are raped by customers who pretend to want to buy their wares and this can lead to VVF, unwanted pregnancies, viewing themselves as "not good" etc. Inhalation of smoke from car exhausts also leads to health problems especially amongst hawkers on the streets and roads. All of the above pose a lot of health challenges to the children.
- ii. Educational challenges: Child labour reduces the participation of children in a complete educational programme. Due to their participation in child labour activities; even though on a part time basis, there cannot be total commitment to the educational process. There will be incidences of not attending school regularly, sleeping during classes, not doing homework given or doing it at school for some serious ones and lack of supervision of school work by parents or guardians.

Victims of child labour are mostly truant pupils/students, unkempt, with usually little or no books to study. They cannot participate in class activities optimally either because they are too tired to think or too hungry to try to understand what is happening around them. A report by National Ministry of Education as quoted in Stephen et al. (2016) revealed that out of 42.1 million Nigerian children eligible for primary education, only 22.3 million were in school with 19.8 million out of school and in the secondary school, out of 33.9 million eligible for secondary education, only 6.4 million were in school. This is not farfetched from most parents/guardians inability to send their children to school because of harsh economic realities that have hit and cut across all spheres of social life especially in this present recession the country is facing. The resultant effect of the above is an increase in child labour activities to improve family income and promote sustenance of the family.

- iii. Social challenges: Child labour leads to alienation and separation of children from their peers. Due to their engagements in working activities that would yield an income, these children do not have time to play and relax with their age mates or even classmates. Child labour deprives children from having a childhood and forces them to grow up but does not necessarily make them adults in the real sense of the word, thereby causing them to be stuck between two worlds of childhood and adulthood.
- iv. Death: This is a major consequence or effect of child labour. Children hawking their wares on the streets are exposed to being hit by speeding vehicles especially on the high ways, exposed to diseases which if not well treated, can lead to death. Okafor (2006) reports that based gangs often target girls. They rape and sometimes kill them as part of gang activities.

#### 4. Educational development of the child

Education is the bedrock of development. It is a basic right which ought not be denied men. A right is something men have by virtue of their humanity (Okafor 2006). The right to education is one of the human rights binding all men. This right needs to be respected and fulfilled. This means that provisions need to be made to guarantee the fulfillment of this human right. This means that education must be made:

- i. available
- ii. accessible
- iii. acceptable and
- iv. adaptable ([www.right-to-education.org](http://www.right-to-education.org) in Uyanga and Ideri, 2014).

The child's right to education must be matched with availability of schools, accessibility to those schools, acceptability of teaching methods for instance by the child and adaptability to meet the needs of the learners themselves especially in our immediate environment. The Nigerian child needs to be exposed to quality education for all round development to take place. The child needs to be groomed in a conducive environment that will promote his/her development and secure his/her childhood. The government has a critical role to play by ensuring that the Nigerian child is protected because the real resources of a country are human resources as they are the ones that use acquired knowledge to utilize natural resources.

## 5. The way forward

Several approaches can be used to curb child labour and they are;

- i. Making education compulsory and free: It is true that the Federal Government has designed the UBE as a programme for poverty alleviation or eradication. It is however necessary to take a step further to include compulsory and free education of the child as one of the fundamental human rights in Nigeria. This compulsory and free education of the child should be given up to secondary school certificate level and should be followed by adequate law enforcement to ensure its implementation and that every child in Nigeria benefits from this right.
- ii. Improvement of educational facilities and motivation of teachers: Most primary schools in Nigeria lack the basic facilities for learning- buildings, chairs, desks, text books, black or white boards etc. The teachers in Nigeria, most especially at the primary school level are equally not well motivated to teach; there are delays in payment of salaries for many months, lack of comfortable staff offices and classrooms, delay in promotion when due, non-availability of in-service training and workshops for improvement of competencies in line with global practices to increase the frontiers of knowledge. These obstacles make learning less interesting and teaching less inviting in our schools. The government and all educational stakeholders need to make the school environment conducive for learning by providing necessary facilities and motivating teachers enough to retain the interest of the child to learn. This will help keep the child in school and protect him from child labour.
- iii. Improvement in the Nigerian economy: Poverty has been identified as the major reason for engaging child labourers in an attempt to get them to assist in improving family earning. The economic situation in Nigeria contributes greatly to this. Purposeful leadership which is able to manage our resources, attract investments, increase employment, improve earnings and ensure fair distribution of goods and services at affordable prices is needed at this time. An improved economy will generate improved living conditions and reduce poverty in Nigerian families.
- iv. Creating Awareness on child labour conditions: The government should define specific child labour conditions and generate awareness. Most employers who engage under aged children do not know they are involved in child labour practices. In many cases, these employers are of the wrong notion that certain persons must be engaged in these debilitating jobs and conditions without knowing the legal implications of child labour.
- v. Enforcement of laws on offenders: In Nigeria, it is true that there are laws against child labour, however, what is important is that these laws need to be implemented and enforced against those who encourage children to become child labourers. This will enhance the protection of the child who ought to be taken care of by the society.

## 6. Conclusion

The incidence of child labour is a widespread and growing phenomenon across the states of the Nigerian Federation. This cannot be disconnected from the increase in poverty and unemployment rates in Nigeria especially in recent times. The World Poverty Clock as shown in a report by Kazeem (2018) reveals that 86.9million of the estimated 180million Nigerian population are living in extreme poverty while another report by Oladeinde (2018) reports that the rate of unemployment increased from 18.8% in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2017 to 23.1% in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2018 according to the National Bureau of Statistics. Child labour in Nigeria

increases servitude among children as they beg to survive on the streets. This is a common sight in major cities across the country and predominantly in the Northern part of Nigeria. Child labour also exposes the child to a lot of dangers such as sexual molestation, drug addiction, stealing, educational deprivation and many other health challenges including psychological and emotional trauma. The Universal Basic Education Scheme in place in the Nigerian educational system is for all school aged children as it was introduced to provide compulsory and standard education for all. This was to arrest the teeming population of school aged children that were out of school as can be viewed in the report by Alabi in Ige (2012) which stated that out of 21 million children of school age in Nigeria as at 1996, only 14.1 million were in school. Child labour deprives school aged children in Nigeria from benefitting fully from this scheme and this does not portend well for the future as it reduces human capital development thereby having a negative impact on the individual in particular and the Nigerian society in general.

This situation calls for stringent measures to be put in place to curb this ugly trend. Parents, Guardians and the society in general must realize that as stakeholders, they have a moral obligation to bring up children in a healthy and developed society by guarding against all forms of their involvement in child labour practices as the condition of children does not warrant this scenario. It is important for parents and guardians to know the dangers of not educating their children and protecting them from child labour and its imminent dangers. Hence, child labour in Nigeria should be condemned by all and all hands should be joined to give children good education, love, security and create the atmosphere for the normal life they need to grow up in to become fulfilled and educationally developed to lead humanity through the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

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