

Perceptions of Basic School Teachers and Parents of the Causes and Effects of Child Labour on School Attendance at Selected Suburbs of Sekondi- Takoradi

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Abstract

This study was undertaken to ascertain the relationship between Teachers and parents' perception of child labour and their commitment to educating their children. The communities used for the study were Nkontompo, Sofokrom, Essipong, Assorkor Essaman Yabiw and Kojokrom. The target population consisted of all Teachers of the selected schools and parents whose wards were in the schools. The accessible population was made up of Teachers teaching at the Primary and JHS excluding the teachers at the KG levels. The Snowball sampling technique was used to select sixty (60) parents while the purposive technique was used to select sixty (60) teachers for the study. In all, the total sample size used was one hundred and twenty (120). The main research instrument used in gathering data was the questionnaire. The conduct of the research was guided by three Research questions. The statistical tools used for the analysis were frequency and percentage distributions and the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. The study revealed that even though teachers are more committed to ensuring that pupils are enrolled and retained in school, they need to be more proactive especially in following up to absentee children and their parents.

Key words: Child labour, drop out, child retention, teacher commitment, parent commitment

1. Introduction

It is an undeniable fact that children are the most treasured assets of every nation. They are the future leaders. It is against this background that there is the need to attach great importance to their growth and development. Writing on the contributions of the youth to national development, Prah (2002) remarked that the nation expects the youth to take their education seriously to enable them to acquire skills which will prepare them to fit into the world of work. The training must include the acquisition of technical and vocational skills as well as information technology in order to prepare the youth to operate competently and effectively in the fast changing globalized environment. Amoateng (2002) revealed that there are 1.7 billion young people aged 10-24 years in a world populated by around 6 billion. For most young people this stage of life is a time of emotional and physical development and represents the transition between childhood and adulthood. But one may ask whether that is the situation on the ground. It is quite startling to read from Amoateng (2002 p.6) that "more than 35 percent of boys and 40 percent of girls worldwide still do not attend primary school. Illiteracy remains high in many parts of the world limiting employment and development". This statistics of girls and boys not in school also reflect in the target communities and may even be worse as child labour seems to be the order of the day. Todaro et al (2001) wrote that the International Labour organization (ILO), estimated that some 120 million children in developing countries between the ages of 5 and 15 are working full time, with another 130 million working half time. Some 61% of these 250 million working children, or 153 million, live in Asia, while 32%, or 80 million, live in Africa, and 7%, or 17 million, live in Latin America. Although Asia has the largest number of child labourers, in relative terms, Africa has the highest child labour rate, estimated at about 41% of all children between 2 and 5 and 14 years old. The above statistics indicate the intensity of child labour and the need to address it, in order to eliminate its adverse effects on human capital development and the future growth potential of developing countries.

The World Book Encyclopedia (1983) explained child labour as the employment of children for economic gain. The term is most commonly used to mean the employment of monies at the expense of their health, education, and total being. Child labour is one of the most problems created by the industrial system in the world today. In a situation where children rather than adults become workers generating income for their parents and themselves. They are often

deprived of the chance to attend school and become educated. The only work they will be capable of doing is unskilled labour. Child labour has been attributed to so many factors. Writing on the causes of indiscipline in schools, Wallace (2002) shared the opinion that many factors have been attributed to this state of affairs. Prominent among them are: poverty, economic hardship, obnoxious cultural practices and irresponsible parents who fail to cater for the needs of their children. Child labour has multifaceted effects on the child however, the effect on the child's education is the major obstruction to the child's progress in life. Burra (1995) also gave some of the effects of child labour as keeping out of school and contributing to the growth of illiteracy among girls. This will definitely change the social positions and future of these children, thus not benefiting the society and the nation as a whole. If for example, Ghana has a high population growth rate and a high illiteracy rate then there is no doubt that the country will be wallowing in near poverty and underdevelopment, because the country cannot boast of a strong manpower basis.

3. Statement of the problem

Teachers of the target schools for this study have been complaining of high cases of absenteeism of pupils in schools, while parents have been complaining of poor academic performance of their wards in school. However, there is the common perception among both teachers and parents that some of the pupils in the areas engage in child labour activities. In fishing community like Nkontompo, where some fathers go to sea with their sons, the children will obviously miss some classes hours during the week.

In Assorkor Essaman, Sofokrom, Essipong, Yabiw and Kojokrom, the parents are predominantly farmers. Some of the parents also go to farm with their wards to assist them. So the high cases of child- absenteeism in school in the areas could be attributed to the engagement of children during school hours either in the farm or in doing any other work assigned to them by their parents. Sometimes the child could also be doing something else for her own personal gain without necessarily being asked by the parents to do so. There are many children of school going ages between 5-20 years who perambulate the streets of Sekondi Takoradi from morning to evening without attending school. Many of such children happen to be people who have dropped out of school whether consciously or unconsciously to engage in income generating ventures such as fish selling, 'kayayo', pure water selling, truck pushing etc. There are many more children who are on the streets not really to engage in any of the ventures mentioned above but to involve themselves in social vices such as pick pocketing, stealing, and illicit sex.

In the target communities for this study, the essence of education seems to have been relegated to the background as both children and parents show little interest in it. Parents implicitly become happy when their wards stop schooling to work for them either in their farms or in their fishing enterprises.

One motivating factor which propels parents in recent times to send their children to school has been the school feeding programme. The feeding programme has been the cause for the recent increase in admissions especially at the Kindergarten and Primary Schools. However, on entering JHS where the feeding ceases, there is apathy on the part of both pupils and parents. This is the stage where most of them drop out obviously for lack of support. The problem of retention of pupils throughout the Basic education level therefore becomes a sequel problem to the main issue of child labour as far as the target communities for this study are concerned.

4. Purpose of study

The study was conducted to ascertain the kind of perceptions Teachers and parents have about the causes and effects of child labour on pupils' education and to establish whether there is a relationship between the perceptions of both teachers and parents and their commitment to keeping the Basic school pupil in school.

5. Research questions

1. What perceptions are held by teachers and parents about the causes and effects of child labour on pupils' education?
2. To what extent do teachers and parents' perceptions about the causes and effects of child labour on pupils' education relate to their commitment to ensuring that pupils do not drop out of school?
3. What reasons are attributed to child absenteeism from school?

6. Methodology

The descriptive design was used. The target population consisted of all Teachers of the selected schools and parents whose wards were in the schools. The accessible population was made up of Teachers teaching at the Primary and

JHS excluding the teachers at the KG levels. The Snowball sampling technique was used to select sixty (60) parents while the purposive technique was used to select sixty (60) teachers for the study. In all, the total sample size used was one hundred and twenty (120). Using the Snowball technique, the researcher contacted the headmaster of each school who then introduced him to the PTA Chairman of the school. Through the PTA Chairmen 60 parents whose wards were in the schools were identified: 10 from each school. Using the purposive technique ten teachers (5 males and 5 females) from each school were also selected for the study. The equity in terms of gender distribution was intended to create balance in their views and opinions. The main research instrument used in gathering data was the questionnaire. Open and closed ended questions were used. There was one main set of questions for teachers and parents.

7. Results and discussion

Research question 1: What perceptions are held by teachers and parents about the causes and effects of child labour on pupils' education?

Perceptions gleaned by the researchers include the following:

1. Parents go to fishing with their wards during school hours
2. Teachers consider absenteeism as normal practice.
3. Absentee pupils are punished by school authorities.
4. Parents prefer to engage their wards in income generating activities to enrolling them in school.
5. Hawking by children during school time is a normal practice.
6. Parents do not show interest in the academic performance of their wards.
7. Children are physically abused by parents if they fail to sell for them.
8. Teachers do follow up of absentee children.
9. Parents reports deviant children to school.
10. Child maltreatment by parents are common happenings.
11. Children of single parents homes are often engaged in hawkin
12. House helps are not allowed to enroll in school.

An overwhelming majority of teachers said "Yes" to items 1-8 and 10-12 thereby making all the perceptions positive except item 9 which was rejected by the respondents. If parents fail to report their deviant children to school authorities, then the possibilities are; either parents engage the children themselves during school hours or they do not like their wards to be punished at school. It is interesting also to note from the responses that while teachers refute the assertion, parents admits that they do report their deviant children to school authorities. According to Wallace (2002), irresponsible parents who fail to cater for the needs of their children are also to blame for the lack of interest showed in schooling by their wards. Parents, again rejected items 1, 6 and 10 and affirmed the rest of the items. The overwhelming affirmative responses by both teachers and parents to the perceptions are an indication that child labour is real and its consequences are felt by the people. Farrant (1988) explained that boredom at school, authoritarian methods in the school, bullying from other pupils, dislike of certain school activities and school phobia do affect school attendance of children.

Research question 2: To what extent do teachers and parents' perceptions about the causes and effects of child labour on pupils' education relate to their commitment to ensuring that pupils do not drop out of school?

Correlation of Teachers and parents perception of child labour was run against their commitment to retaining the child in school. Table 1 indicates strong relationships throughout. (The coefficients (r) ranged between .576** and .890**) where alpha was set as .05 significance level ($P < .05$). This is an indication that to a very large extent, both Teachers' and parents' perception of the causes and effect of child labour is significantly related to their responsibilities to the child in school. It means, the less teachers and parents perceive child labour as a problem to the child, the less committed they become in preventing the child from dropping out in school.

Research question 3: What reasons are attributed to child absenteeism from school?

Data gathered from the questionnaires indicated that Teachers agreed to the following as been reasons why children absent themselves from school: 1. Unwillingness of parents to buy study materials for their children (96%) 2. Parents ask children to work for them on certain school days (75%). 3. Poor socio-economic background of children (58%). 4. Learning difficulty in school (75%). 5. Poor performance in school (67%). Parents identified the following as reasons for child absenteeism in school: 1. Verbal abuse by teachers (71%). 2. Wrong methods of teaching (71%). 3. Corporal punishment at school (63%). 4. Teacher absenteeism (58%). 5. Inadequate money to buy learning materials for children (97%). 6. Asking children to work for them on certain school days (83%). The poor socio-economic background of pupils is supported by Mahmood, et al. (2005) who asserts that socio-economic factors such as poverty, lack of interest in education, large family size and compulsive societal behaviour are responsible for children engaging in economic activities especially in developing countries.

Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah (2009) also identified factors such as Teacher attitude; grade repetition; corporal

punishment; difficulty in learning; and being overage as the reasons behind dropout. This view was also shared by Twumasi et al (1987) and King (1981) when they argued that child labour is necessary for the survival of poor families however it has detrimental effect on the school attendance of children

From Table 2, the effects of child labour can be grouped under two broad headings namely: effects on academic and effects on social life:

The academic effect of child labour on pupils include, Inattention in class, drossing of in class, poor performance in class, repetition and drop out from school. Heady (2003) established that working children in Ghana spent an average of one hour per week less in school which has serious academic repercussions on the child. According to Gibbons et al (2003) child labour is associated with higher repetition and dropout rates. Child labour competes with school attendance and proficiency.

Writing on the academic effects of child labour on the individual, Canagarajah & Nielsen, (2009) also stated that Child labour interferes with education. Either school attendance is foregone in favour of work, or learning is inefficient, either because the children are not allowed to spend time doing their homework or because they are unable to pay proper attention in school because of fatigue.

The effects of child labour on social life encompasses: Teenage pregnancies, streetism, involvement in social vices, joining bad peer groups among others. To support this, Biritwum, Ashitey, & Hill, (2000), cited by Ogah(2010) said of equal importance to public health is the incidence of teenage pregnancy with its consequences of school drop out, unsafe abortion, children becoming mothers, maternal mortality and lost opportunity for girls. Odaga and haneveld (1995) also report that in 1990 teenage pregnancies accounted for more than 20% of the total fertility rate in sub-saharan Africa, and Njau and Wamahu (1994) estimate that between 10% and 20% of girls in the region drop out of school each year due to pregnancy- related causes. Much as some girls drop out due to pregnancy, some others drop out and consequently become pregnant.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

The study revealed that even though teachers are more committed to ensuring that pupils are enrolled and retained in school, they need to be more proactive especially in following up to absentee children and their parents. Parents on the other hand demonstrated lack of commitment to retaining their children in school. This is based on the evidence that: they are unwilling to buy learning materials to them; they are unwilling to allow the children to be regular and punctual to school by engaging them in income generating activities; and lastly they are unwilling to report absentee children to school authorities for remedies.

It is recommended that the Ghana Education Service should enforce the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education policy in both the urban and the rural settings. The policies on school feeding and free uniforms should be extended to cover Junior High Schools of disadvantaged places.

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Appendix

Table 1: Zero-order correlations between Teachers and parents' perceptions and their commitments to educating the child

Perceptions	Teachers	Parents
Fishing with wards	.845**	.675**
Engagement in income generating activities	.686**	.811**
Hawking by children is a normal Practice	.725**	.890**
Child absenteeism is normal practice	.632**	.662**
Apathy to academic performance	.576**	.756**
Follow up of absentee children	.677**	.815**
Deviant children reported to school	.745**	.878**
Child maltreatment	.676**	.654**

Table 2: Effects of Child Labour on pupils' schooling

Activities	Teachers (%)	Parents (%)
Loitering in the street	80	60
playing at the sea shore	85	40
Poor performance in school	76	84
kayayo	60	55
Drop out from school	85	67
Teenage pregnancy	84	80
Inattentiveness in class	72	60
Dosing off in class	70	46
Involvement in social vices	64	86