

Child Labour in Rivers State: Implications for Students' Educational Development

Dr. Osilem Okachiku-Agbaraeke^{1*}, Dr. Oroma Alikor¹

¹Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Rivers State University, Nigeria

DOI: [10.36348/jaep.2024.v08i07.002](https://doi.org/10.36348/jaep.2024.v08i07.002)

| Received: 20.05.2024 | Accepted: 28.06.2024 | Published: 22.07.2024

*Corresponding author: Dr. Osilem Okachiku-Agbaraeke

Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Rivers State University, Nigeria

Abstract

The study examined the incidence of child labour in Rivers State and the implications for students' educational development. Three objectives with corresponding three research questions were formulated to guide the study. The population of the study consists of 318 public senior secondary schools and 7,000 teachers in Rivers State Senior Secondary Schools board. The study adopted simple random sampling technique and made use of 30 public senior secondary schools and 300 teachers drawn from the three senatorial zones in Rivers State. The instrument used for the data collection was captioned "Child Labour in Rivers State and Implications for Students' Educational Development Questionnaire (CLRSISEDQ)". The reliability of the instrument was validated by two measurement and evaluation lecturers in the department of educational foundations in Rivers State University, while mean score was used to analyze the research questions and tables were used to organise the data. The result of the findings revealed that to a high extent various forms of child labour exist among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Also, to a high extent many factors are responsible for child labour among the students and finally to a high extent child labour impact negatively on the students and consequently, the educational development of the state. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others, that government should mandate the law enforcement agencies to arrest and prosecute culprits of child labour and parents should give birth to the number of children they can properly cater for.

Keywords: Child labour, Educational Development.

Copyright © 2024 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

INTRODUCTION

Child labour is a social menace in the developing countries of the world today which has attracted global attention. Hence, UNICEF (2007) revealed that a staggering 15 million children under the age of 14 years work across Nigeria and are exposed to long hours of work in dangerous and unhealthy environments. Again, National Bureau of statistics stipulates that half of the population of children in Nigeria are engaged in child labour which interferes with their schooling and development.

ILO (2007) defines child labour as any form of work that a child engages in full time at an early age of 5 – 14 years such as, working too many hours with excessive physical, social and psychological strains on the person which hampers his or her development. However, Njoku (1999) stated that in the 1980s child labour was predominantly found in the informal sector of the economy where children are seen assisting their

parents in farm works, fishing, hunting and other domestic ventures. But today, it has been formalized as children are found hawking on the streets, working in the industries, involved in sex abuses as well as engage in such anti-social roles that are dangerous to their healths. Some parents even give out their children to other homes on commercial purposes. It is obvious that such children are over utilized and treated like slaves by their masters. This negate the labour act of 1974 which prohibits the employment of children under the age of 15 in commerce and industry. This act also restricts labour performed by children on domestic and agricultural works for more than eight hours per day.

From the ongoing, it could be inferred that child labour is illegal and a condemnable act by the society because it undermines the child's psychological, emotional and intellectual developments. Thus, the thrust of this study is to examine the extent of the incidents of child labour and the implications for educational

development of the students' in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

The need to meet up with the 21st century global demands on technology has led many nations and even state governments to consciously focus on the education of the child and youths as a means of actualizing this developmental blue prints. One of such developmental blue prints is Education For All (EFA) programme by the year 2000 proclaimed in 1990 in a world conference on Education For All at Jomtien, Thailand (Obanya, 2002:5). In line with this declaration, Rivers State government in 1999 introduced a sustainable development policy of free education at the primary and secondary school levels.

However, inspite of these policies and programmes which are aimed at redirecting children through sustainable education and development, social menace, such as child labour still plague the state and nation at large. The world today is faced with many cases of child deprivation of the right to education in one form or the other. Hence, it is very common to see children of school age hawking wares on the streets, serving as house helps, doing menial jobs in the factories and worst still, in recent times, teenage girls of about 14 years are exported to Italy for commercial sex activities. The problem of this study therefore, is to examine the extent of the incidence of child labour and the implications for educational development of students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the extent of the incidence of child labour and the implications for educational development of students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. But especially, the objectives of the study include:

- i. To identify the extent of the forms of child labour among the students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State;
- ii. To investigate the extent of the causes of child labour among the students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State; and
- iii. To ascertain the extent of the implications of child labour among the students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State;

Research Questions

In addressing the problems of this study, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

- i. What is the extent of the forms of child labour among the students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?
- ii. What is the extent of the causes of child labour among the students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

- iii. What is the extent of the implications of child labour among the students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Review of Literature

Child labour takes several forms which has the potential for adverse effects on the child and his education. Unwana-Obong, Oto-Obong and Kelvin (2019) asserted that child labour is one of the most insidious forms of cruelty and human rights violation done against children. As a criminal act, it is dehumanizing, exploitative, debilitating and introduces children to a life of bondage and servitude. They further identified forms of child labour as children hawking wares on the streets, engaging in farm work for many hours, trafficking of children as prostitute to other parts of the world and domestic helps within and outside the country to engage in criminal activities such as drug peddling and theft.

A World Bank study on children in the families indicated that in Nigeria, children both boys and girls have set of duties earmarked for them every day of their lives (World Bank, 2006). According to the report, boys clear bushes, engage in farming and fishing, while girls fetch water, wash things, sweep and cook. ILO (2007) reported that about 24.6% of Nigerians at the ages of 10 – 14 are deeply involved in labour. Daniella (2007) in support of the above assertion, stated that in 1999, 25% of Nigerian children between the ages of 10 – 14 years were in labour force rather than in school.

UNICEF (2007) identified three classes of child labour. The first group are children within the family but engaged in domestic household tasks without pay, while the second group are children within the family but do agricultural or pastoral or domestic services outside the home either on seasonal or full-time and the third group are children employed outside the family on bonded work, apprenticeship, skilled trades and unskilled occupations. The organization also recognized migrant children as a form of child labour. These children migrate from rural areas to the urban or from smaller to larger towns with or without their parents for the purpose of a better life.

There are several factors considered to aggravate child labour in the society. ILO (2007) revealed that poverty is one of the greatest single causes of child labour which is followed by culture of a people. In support of this idea, Radfar, Asgharzadeh, Quesa and Filip (2018) stated that child labour is a global phenomenon that is caused by cultural beliefs, religious beliefs, poverty and social injustice which interferes with children's schooling. In the same vien Osaat (2004) espoused that poverty level of the people greatly influence child labour. Also, Owanna (2008) in his study on the prevalence and causes of child labour in Nigeria identified poverty, ignorance and lack of education as some of the causes of child labour. UNESCO (2007) also

identified illiteracy as a cause of child labour. Bass (2004) stated that the rapid population growth in many less developed countries is a binding factor for child labour. Rivers State population census (2006) gave the population figure of the state as 6,689,087 and Ministry of Economic Empowerment Generation (2008) gave the unemployment rate among the graduates in the state as 1.02 million. This situation in no doubt will encourage all forms of child labour because the under aged who may not be adequately catered for will resort to child labour to make both ends meet.

Cigno (2002) stated that globalization which has manifested in the proliferation of industries in many less developed countries has resulted in children of school age abandoning their education to seek for employment opportunities in these industries. The development of civil war in Liberia in 1990s resulted to child labour as under aged children of both sexes were forced to enrol in rebel army which lost their hopes of schooling. On the contrary, Iwarime-Jaja (1995) argued that during the economic boom in Nigeria, the crime rate was low because people were gainfully employed and the incidence of child labour was almost absent.

Ogunaike (2001) posited that child labour has caused Nigerian educational system to collapse. This, according to him prompted the administration of president Jonathan to introduce the Almajiri school system in the north to cater for the Islamic and Nomadic children engaged in cattle rearing and the establishment of migrant fisher folks children education in nine local government areas of Rivers State in 2007 by Rivers State Government.

Becker (1981) highlighted that low living standard, poor neighbourhood interactions, unfortunate leisure time and handicaps in educational development are the emotional experience of a child in labour. Unwana-Obong *et al.*, (2019) espoused that children in labour that are engaged as domestic servants are subjected to working late into the night and waking up early in the morning which makes them sleep in the class because of fatigue. Similarly, children who hawk before going to school are bound to be late, not regular, truant, absent and eventually dropout of school.

Nwauwa (2018) posited that child labour is hazardous and destructive to youngsters' wellbeing, abuses their key rights as human beings, exhaust their quality, harm their bodies, keep them from going to class to acquire education.

Ijah (2008) noted that most children serving as house helps in many homes are not allowed to go to school every day because of work load which in most cases lead them to drop out of school. Eva (2004) supported the above from the finding in his study on the effects of child abuse and academic performance in Enugu municipality in which he discovered that house

helps are denied school, but if allowed to attend, perform poorly in school because of many distractions which eventually lead to their dropout from school.

Theoretical Review

Conflict Theory

This study adopted conflict theory which is one of the major sociological models for understanding the social work among other schools of thought like structural functionalism, symbolic interaction and social exchange theories. Conflict theory has its origin in the works of Karl Marx who believes that the society is composed of class conflict or struggle. The conflict is between the bourgeoisie or wealthy who are the owners of the means of production and the proletariats or poor who are being exploited. However, Marx Weber who rejected the views of Karl Marx opined that class difference could emerge as a result of status, political interest and economic powers.

All the same, the conflict theorists agree on the idea of the division of the society into social structure, but recognize the division between the owners and non-owners of property as the most significant. In this regard, the wealthy group uses their wealth and power to exploit the poor. This is precisely what goes on in the practice of child labour where the relationship between the child and the master or exploiter is that the master uses brute force and economic power to continually keep the child under deprivation as long as he desires.

Finally, the conflict theorists seek for equality for all. This singular need for equal treatment of all forms the bedrock of this study which will bring about the smooth running of the society. The present practice of deprivation, segregation, discrimination and abuses against children in the society will lead to retrogression. But with embrace of freedom for equal co-existence, the state and nation at large will develop educationally and technologically for the interest of all.

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Rivers State of Nigeria and it adopted survey research design. The population of the study consists of 318 public senior secondary schools and 7,000 teachers. The study adopted sampling technique and made use of 30 public senior secondary schools and 300 teachers selected from the three senatorial zones in the state. The instrument used for the data collection was captioned "Child Labour in Rivers State and Implications for Students' Educational Development Questionnaire (CLRSISEDQ)" and the likert-type rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE) were used. The reliability of the instrument was 0.91 and the instrument was validated by two measurement and evaluation lecturers in the department of educational foundations in Rivers State University, while mean score was used to analyze the research questions and tables were used to organise the data.

Presentation of Data and Discussion of Findings

The data generated for the study was from 289 teachers in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State who completed and returned their questionnaire from among the 300 respondents who constituted the sample of the study which represented 96% of the

respondents sampled for the study. The presentation and analysis of the data was based on the research questions.

Research Question One: What is the extent of the forms of child labour among the students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean score of the responses of teachers on the extent of the forms of child labour among the students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

| S/Nos | Statement of Items | N | \bar{X} | C.M | Decisions |
|-------|---|------------|-------------|------------|-----------|
| 1. | Children are given out as house helps to other families. | 289 | 3.26 | 2.5 | VHE |
| 2. | Children of school age are engage in hawking on the streets | 289 | 3.39 | 2.5 | VHE |
| 3. | Some children are engaged in street begging. | 289 | 3.11 | 2.5 | VHE |
| 4. | Some children are engaged in commercial sexual exploitations | 289 | 2.70 | 2.5 | HE |
| 5. | Some children are engaged in baby factory exploitations | 289 | 3.00 | 2.5 | HE |
| 6. | Some children are trafficked for child prostitution. | 289 | 3.08 | 2.5 | HE |
| 7. | Some children are engaged in domestic works in their homes at the expense of their schooling. | 289 | 2.82 | 2.5 | HE |
| 8. | Some children are engaged in agricultural works at the expense of their schooling. | 289 | 2.69 | 2.5 | HE |
| 9. | Children are given out to other families to work on salary basis | 289 | 2.63 | 2.5 | HE |
| 10. | Some industries engage the services of under aged children as casual workers. | 289 | 2.66 | 2.5 | HE |
| | Grand mean | 289 | 2.99 | 2.5 | HE |

Data on Table 1 showed the mean scores of the responses of the teachers on the extent of the forms of child labour among the students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

An observation of the table indicated that to a high extent, there exist various forms of child labour among the students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. This is because the mean score of each of the forms of child labour identified in the study as well as the grand mean is higher than the criteria mean (2.5). The result of the findings revealed that to a very high extent (VHE), children are given out as house helps, engaged in street hawking and begging. While to a high

extent (HE), some children engage in commercial sexual exploitations, baby factory exploitations, trafficked for prostitution, domestic works, agricultural works, work for salary in other families and industries. The findings of the study are in agreement with Unwana-Obong *et al.*, (2019) who identified forms of child labour as children hawking wares on the street, engaged in farm work for many hours, trafficking of children to other parts of the world for prostitution and domestic helps within and outside the country to engage in commercial activities, such as drug peddling and theft.

Research Question Two: What is the extent of the causes of child labour among the students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Score of the responses of teachers on the extent of the causes of child labour among the students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

| S/Nos | Statement of Items | N | \bar{X} | C.M | Decisions |
|-------|--|------------|-------------|------------|-----------|
| 1. | Child labour can be caused by parental ignorance of the consequences. | 289 | 3.45 | 2.5 | VHE |
| 2. | Poverty can cause child labour. | 289 | 3.28 | 2.5 | VHE |
| 3. | Large number of children can cause child labour. | 289 | 2.59 | 2.5 | HE |
| 4. | Unemployment can cause child labour. | 289 | 3.23 | 2.5 | VHE |
| 5. | Separated families can cause child labour | 289 | 3.43 | 2.5 | VHE |
| 6. | The cultural practice of street begging can cause child labour. | 289 | 3.18 | 2.5 | VHE |
| 7. | The practice of engaging under age children in business ventures can cause child labour. | 289 | 2.68 | 2.5 | HE |
| 8. | Peer group can influence children to engage in child labour. | 289 | 2.43 | 2.5 | LE |
| 9. | Personal decision can lead to child labour. | 289 | 2.32 | 2.5 | LE |
| | Grand mean | 289 | 2.95 | 2.5 | HE |

Data on Table 2 showed the mean scores of the responses of the teachers on the extent of the causes of child labour among the students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

A closer observation of the table indicated that to a high extent there are many causes of child labour among the students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. This is because the mean scores of majority of the causes of child labour identified in the study and

the grand mean are higher than the criterion mean (2.5). The result of the findings revealed that to a very high extent (VHE), parental ignorance, poverty, unemployment, cultural practice of street begging are responsible for child labour. While to a high extent (HE), large number of children, engaging children in business ventures cause child labour and to a low extent (LE) peer group influence and personal decision lead to child labour. The findings of the study are in agreement with Owanna (2008) whose study on the prevalence and causes of child labour in Nigeria revealed poverty,

ignorance and lack of education as some causes of child labour. Also, ILO (2007) revealed that poverty is one of the greatest single causes of child labour and Radfar *et al.*, (2018) identified the causes of child labour as cultural beliefs, religious beliefs, poverty and social injustice.

Research Question Three: What is the extent of implications of child labour on educational development of the students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean Score of the responses of teachers on the extent of implications of child labour on educational development of students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

| S/Nos | Statement of Items | N | \bar{X} | C.M | Decisions |
|-------|---|------------|-------------|------------|-----------|
| 1. | Child labour denies children their rights to quality education. | 289 | 3.11 | 2.5 | VHE |
| 2. | Children in labour are emotionally unstable in the class. | 289 | 3.16 | 2.5 | VHE |
| 3. | Children in labour are usually dull in class activities. | 289 | 3.01 | 2.5 | HE |
| 4. | Children in labour always sleep in class because of stress. | 289 | 3.18 | 2.5 | VHE |
| 5. | Children in labour always go late to school. | 289 | 3.05 | 2.5 | VHE |
| 6. | Children in labour are not regular to school. | 289 | 3.42 | 2.5 | VHE |
| 7. | Children in labour are disobedient to school rules and regulations. | 289 | 2.32 | 2.5 | LE |
| 8. | Children in labour do not always do their home works. | 289 | 3.38 | 2.5 | VHE |
| 9. | Children in labour take top positions in examinations. | 289 | 2.25 | 2.5 | LE |
| 10. | Child labour leads to school dropouts | 289 | 3.56 | 2.5 | VHE |
| | Grand mean | 289 | 3.04 | 2.5 | HE |

Data on Table 3 showed the mean scores of the responses of the teachers on the extent of the implications of child labour on educational development of the students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

A close observation of the table indicated that to a high extent (HE) the implications of child labour on the educational development of the students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State are very grievous. This is because most of the items on implications of child labour and the grand mean are higher than the criterion mean (2.5). The result of the findings revealed that to a very high extent (VHE), child labour denies children the right of quality education, causes children emotional instability in class, makes them go late to school, makes them not to do their home works and leads them to drop out of school. While to a high extent (HE), children in labour are usually dull in class and to a low extent (LE), children in labour disobey school rules and regulations as well as take top positions in examinations. The findings of the study are in agreement with Unwana-Obong *et al.*, (2019) who asserted that child labour denies children the opportunity of educational development. Also, Eva (2004) and Ijah (2008) whose studies showed that most house helps are denied schooling every day, but if allowed to attend, perform poorly in school because of many distractions.

CONCLUSION

From the findings, the researchers concluded that to a high extent various forms of child labour exist

among the students in the public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, that to a high extent factors such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, ignorance, population explosion and cultural practices are responsible for child labour among the students in the public senior secondary schools in Rivers State and that to a high extent child labour has serious implications on the educational development of students in the public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Parents should give birth to the number of children they can properly cater for.
- 2) Parents should avoid divorce, especially when they have got children so that the children will not miss any of the spouse's care.
- 3) Mass media should create awareness on the dangers of child labour on students' educational development.
- 4) Street hawking and begging should be discouraged by Rivers State Government.
- 5) Parents should not give their children to everybody as house helps.
- 6) Government should make education free and compulsory at all levels.
- 7) Students should be encouraged with regular payment of bursary and scholarship awards by government and non-governmental agencies.
- 8) Government should mandate the law enforcement agencies to arrest and prosecute culprits of child labour.

REFERENCES

- Bass, I. E. (2004). *Child labour in sub-sharan Africa*. United Kingdom: Lynne Reinner publishers.
- Becker, H. S. (1981). *Outside studies in sociology of deviance*. New York: New York press.
- Cigno, A. (2002). *Does globalization increase child labour: NYSC, British development issues*. Lagos: Prince of prints ltd.
- Eva, P. (2004). Effects of child abuse on the academic performance of house helps in primary schools in Enugu urban: The 4th African regional conference on child abuse and neglect. Enugu, Nigeria.
- Ijah, C. N. (2008). Towards promoting gender equality and women empowerment for sustainable human development, University of Port Harcourt.
- ILO Bulletin. (2007). *The state of the world's children*. UNICEF country programme, Nigeria.
- Iwarime-Jaja, D. (1995). *Criminology: The study of crime in Port Harcourt*. Port Harcourt: S.I.J. publishers.
- National Population Commission of Nigeria. (2006). Rivers State office, Masco road, Port Harcourt.
- Njoku, M. (1999). Implications of child labour on the education of the child in Ikwerre Local Government Area, Rivers State: An unpublished graduate work submitted to University of Port Harcourt.
- Nwauwa, I. (2018). Determinant of child labour and academic performance in high schools. <https://www.smemamanticcholar.org>.
- Obanya, P. (2002). *Retrieving education in Africa*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden publisher.
- Osaat, D. S. (2004). Child labour, law and education in Nigeria. *Nigerian journal of empirical studies in psychology and education, (NJESPE), 1(19)*.
- Owanna, H. (2008). Prevalence and causes of child labour in Nigeria. An unpublished project submitted to the University of Port Harcourt.
- Radfar, A., Asharzadeh, S. A., Quesa, F., & Filip, I. (2018). Challenges and prospects of child labour. *Industrial psychiatry journal, 27(1)*, 17-20.
- UNICEF. (2007). *Information sheet – the child rights act*. UNICEF country, Nigeria.
- Unwana-Obong, D. U., Oto-Obong, J. E., & Kelvin, U. D. (2019). Child labour and educational development of the Nigeria children. *International journal of development and sustainability, 8(1)*, 69-77.