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Child Labour Practices as Predictors of Educational Involvement of School-Age Children in Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Child labour remains a pervasive socioeconomic challenge in Nigeria. Despite being regarded as educationally advanced, Ogun State continues to see school-age children engaged in economic labour during school hours, raising serious concerns about educational participation and child welfare. This study examined child labour practices as predictors of educational involvement among school-age children in Ogun State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was employed. Using a multistage sampling procedure combining purposive, judgemental, and snowball sampling techniques, 1,685 school-age children were recruited from markets and motor parks across all three senatorial districts of Ogun State. Data were collected using two validated instruments, the Prevalence of Child Labour Questionnaire (PCLQ; $\alpha = 0.814$) and the Child Labour and Education Questionnaire (CLEQ; $\alpha = 0.875$), yielding an overall reliability index of 0.944. Descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis were conducted at the 0.05 level of significance. Child labour was highly prevalent, with hawking the most frequently reported activity (mean = 3.46). Regression analysis revealed that child labour practices collectively accounted for 4.8% of the variance in educational outcomes ($R^2 = 0.048$, $F = 28.499$, $p < 0.05$). Hawking ($\beta = -0.210$) and domestic services ($\beta = -0.208$) negatively predicted educational involvement, while load-carrying showed an unexpected positive association ($\beta = 0.552$) that requires further qualitative investigation. Child labour significantly constrains educational participation among school-age children in Ogun State. The government should provide accessible and affordable educational opportunities and enforce the Child Rights Act of 2003 to reduce child labour.

Keywords: Child labour practices, Educational involvement, School-age children, Ogun State, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Child labour stands out as a significant contemporary global challenge, posing a socioeconomic threat to children and contravening the Child Rights Act of 2003, which was enacted to protect the rights of all children in Nigeria, thereby impeding sustainable child development in numerous African nations, including Nigeria. Owoyemi (2018) and Bashir (2023) note that children's engagement in street hawking, domestic service, trading, and street begging has become prevalent, representing enduring features of economic subsistence for numerous Nigerian school-age children. The root causes of this phenomenon are primarily linked to factors such as urbanisation, high illiteracy rates, elevated unemployment levels, family breakdown, the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), extreme poverty, communal conflicts, insecurity, rural-

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urban migration, a passive social welfare policy, cultural factors, and other concurrent socioeconomic crises. In addition to adversely affecting child involvement in education, child labour also functions as a deterrent to global economic and developmental progress (Hoque, 2021; Boutin & Jouvin, 2022; Francis & Yinalabi, 2022).

Considerable strides have been taken over the years to diminish the prevalence of child labour worldwide. The number of children engaged in labour declined dramatically, from 246 million in 2000 to approximately 160 million by 2020 (ILO, 2021). Despite this progress, the occurrence of child labour has witnessed a recent surge, particularly across sub-Saharan Africa, where approximately one in ten children remains involved in such labour (ILO, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic, which caused financial strain on numerous vulnerable households and pushed many into poverty, is anticipated to heighten children's susceptibility to labour engagement (Ahmad et al., 2020; Idris, 2020). The recent elimination of fuel subsidies poses an additional significant challenge, disproportionately affecting households with below-average incomes and potentially contributing to the vulnerability of school-age children to child labour. Child labour, therefore persists as an enduring global problem, necessitating comprehensive recognition of its repercussions to guide both public and commercial strategies aimed at improving children's wellbeing and facilitating the realisation of their full potential (Chowdhury, 2021; Sikander et al., 2022).

Contemporary academic literature, civil society advocacy, and international organisations broadly concur that child labour carries detrimental consequences for children's development (ILO & UNICEF, 2021). These alleged negative consequences form the basis for distinguishing between child labour and child employment. Child labour adversely affects the educational engagement of a significant population of children who juggle both work and school, often leading them to prematurely leave educational institutions when they should be focusing on learning. The absence of accessible, affordable, and quality education leaves children compelled to engage in work, frequently under hazardous or exploitative circumstances (ILO & UNICEF, 2021).

National and local empirical evidence further confirms that child labour significantly undermines children's education and long-term development. National data indicate that many working children either integrate employment with education or drop out entirely, leading to poor attendance and diminished learning outcomes (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022; ILO, 2023). UNICEF reports between 2021 and 2023 further confirm that long working hours, street work, and domestic duties contribute to Nigeria's high out-of-school population (UNICEF, 2023). Studies conducted in Nigeria have demonstrated that child labourers perform worse academically, are more frequently absent, and face higher risks of early school leaving compared to non-working children (Nwisagbo, 2024). Moreover, Enebe et al. (2021) highlight that children engaged in labour experience physical, emotional, and social challenges that further limit their educational participation. Child labour, therefore, not only deprives children of the knowledge and skills necessary for future advancement but also perpetuates poverty and negatively impacts national economies by reducing productivity and earning capacity.

Ogun State is one of the perceived educationally advanced states in Nigeria, evidenced by high literacy levels among the citizenry. However, the persistent sight of school-age children in motor parks, markets, and busy streets engaged in various forms of labour, including running errands for food vendors, assisting drivers, carrying loads for passengers, and hawking during school hours, raises serious concerns that warrant empirical investigation.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Determine the frequency of involvement of school-age children in child labour practices in Ogun State.
2. Ascertain the timing of child labour engagement among school-age children in Ogun State.
3. Assess the implications of child labour practices on educational engagement, including school attendance, lateness, and homework completion, in Ogun State.

4. Examine the moderating effects of gender, parental education, and family size on child labour practices in Ogun State.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, employing structured questionnaires administered to school-age children found on the streets during official school hours and engaged in various forms of labour. The target population comprised all school-age children in Ogun State who observed hawking, begging, carrying loads, or working in markets and motor parks during school hours.

Sampling Procedure

One thousand six hundred and eighty-five (n = 1,685) school-age children were selected using a multistage sampling procedure. First, total enumeration sampling was adopted to include all three senatorial districts in the state. Second, markets and motor parks within these districts were purposively selected as primary data collection locations, given their high concentration of child labourers. Third, a judgmental non-probability sampling technique was employed to recruit participants based on availability and accessibility at the study locations. Finally, a snowball sampling technique was adopted as a complementary method, involving referral by participants to others in similar settings, as participants were often mobile and difficult to locate through conventional methods. The target sample size was informed by the estimated population of school-age children observed in economic activity across the selected locations, with an anticipated non-response allowance of 10%.

Instrumentation

A self-structured and validated questionnaire served as the primary instrument for data collection, organised into three sections. Section A obtained demographic information including age, sex, class, religion, family size, and parental education and occupation. Section B focused on child labour practices, covering the prevalence, frequency, type, and timing of engagement in hawking, domestic services, and load-carrying, measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Very High (4) to Very Low (1). Section C addressed the impact of child labour on education by assessing school attendance, lateness to school, and engagement with homework, measured on a four-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1).

Content validity was established through expert review by five academics in the Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, Olabisi Onabanjo University, who assessed item relevance, clarity, and alignment with study objectives. The instrument was pilot-tested on 50 school-age children with similar characteristics to the study population but outside the main study locations. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding the following coefficients: Prevalence of Child Labour Questionnaire (PCLQ; $\alpha = 0.814$), Child Labour and Education Questionnaire (CLEQ; $\alpha = 0.875$), and an overall instrument reliability index of $\alpha = 0.944$. These values exceed the widely accepted threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978), confirming the instrument's reliability.

Data Collection Procedure

An introductory letter was obtained from the Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, and presented to the leadership of each market and Motor Park. The objectives of the study were clearly explained to relevant gatekeepers, and assurances were provided that the research was strictly academic in nature. Seven research assistants were recruited and trained before data collection. Training covered the study objectives, questionnaire administration protocols, and procedures for ethically engaging with minor participants in informal settings. Four assistants were assigned to interact directly with the children, while the remaining three engaged significant others at each location.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research and Linkages Unit of Olabisi Onabanjo University. Given that participants were minors, special ethical protocols were observed. Where parents or guardians were present, verbal informed consent was sought and obtained before the child's participation.

For older children deemed sufficiently mature, informed assent was additionally obtained. Participants were clearly informed that participation was entirely voluntary, that they could withdraw at any point without consequence, and that all responses would remain strictly anonymous and confidential. No personal identifying information was recorded on the questionnaire instruments.

Data Analysis

Primary data were collated using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and grouped in line with the objectives of the study. Research questions were answered using descriptive statistics, including simple percentages, means, and standard deviations. The hypothesis was tested using multiple regression analysis at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the demographic distribution of respondents. In terms of sex, 770 respondents (45.7%) were male and 915 (54.3%) were female. Regarding age, the majority, 950 (56.4%), were aged 10–14 years, followed by 575 (34.1%) aged 15–17 years, and 160 (9.5%) aged 5–9 years. For class distribution, 760 (45.1%) were in JSS1–3, 545 (32.3%) in SSS1–3, and 380 (22.6%) in Primary 4–6. Concerning religion, 1,005 (59.6%) were Christians, 600 (35.6%) were Muslims, and 80 (4.7%) identified with other religious affiliations. Family size analysis revealed that 725 (43.0%) had 5–6 members, 610 (36.2%) had 1–4 members, and 350 (20.8%) had seven or more members. Regarding mothers' education, 720 (42.7%) had SSCE qualifications, 370 (22.0%) had below SSCE, 280 (16.6%) had no formal education, 170 (10.1%) held NCE/OND, and 145 (8.6%) possessed a degree or higher. A similar pattern was observed for fathers' education.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Demographic Characteristics.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	770	45.7
	Female	915	54.3
Age	5–9 years	160	9.5
	10–14 years	950	56.4
	15–17 years	575	34.1
Class	Primary 4–6	380	22.6
	JSS1–3	760	45.1
	SSS1–3	545	32.3
Religion	Islamic	600	35.6
	Christianity	1,005	59.6
	Others	80	4.7
Family Size	1–4	610	36.2
	5–6	725	43.0
	7 or more	350	20.8
Mother's Education	Below SSCE	370	22.0
	SSCE	720	42.7
	NCE/OND	170	10.1

	Degree or more	145	8.6
	No Formal Education	280	16.6
Father's Education	Below SSCE	385	22.8
	SSCE	680	40.4
	NCE/OND	150	8.9
	Degree or more	220	13.1
	No Formal Education	250	14.8
Father's Occupation	Business	435	25.8
	Civil Servant	185	11.0
	Artisan	295	17.5
	No Occupation	250	14.8
	Others	520	30.9
Mother's Occupation	Business	960	57.0
	Civil Servant	90	5.3
	Artisan	285	16.9
	No Occupation	60	3.6
	Others	290	17.2

Research Question 1: Frequency of Engagement in Child Labour Practices

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics on the frequency of engagement in child labour activities. Hawking emerged as the most prevalent activity, with 37.4% (n = 630) of respondents indicating engagement on a very frequent basis and a mean score of 3.46 (SD = 1.39). Begging and restaurant work were both reported as occasional activities by the majority of respondents (76.0% and 69.4%, respectively), each yielding a mean score of 2.99. Carrying loads for money was also predominantly reported as occasional (59.6%), with a mean score of 2.76 (SD = 1.09). Overall, hawking was the most frequently reported form of child labour across the sample.

Hypothesis: Influence of Child Labour Practices on Educational Involvement.

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant influence of child labour practices (hawking, domestic services, and carrying loads) on the educational involvement (school attendance, lateness, and homework submission) of school-age children in Ogun State.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on Frequency of Engagement in Child Labour Practices.

Activity	Not at all	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently	Mean	SD
Carrying loads for money	310 (18.4%)	160 (9.5%)	1,005 (59.6%)	45 (2.7%)	165 (9.8%)	2.76	1.09
Hawking	180 (10.7%)	250 (14.8%)	505 (30.0%)	120 (7.1%)	630 (37.4%)	3.46	1.39
Begging	90 (5.3%)	110 (6.5%)	1,280 (76.0%)	130 (7.7%)	75 (4.5%)	2.99	0.73
Working in restaurants	145 (8.6%)	115 (6.8%)	1,170 (69.4%)	130 (7.7%)	125 (7.4%)	2.99	0.89

Figure 1. Naïve Bayes classifier on the full training set on Diabetes using 70% 30% split

Table 3. Regression Analysis – Influence of Child Labour Practices on Educational Involvement of School-Age Children in Ogun State.

Predictor	*B*	Std. Error	β (Beta)	*t*	Sig.
(Constant)	27.188	2.555	—	10.641	.000
Hawking	−0.783	0.210	−0.210	−3.735	.000
Domestic Services	−0.689	0.161	−0.208	−4.283	.000
Carrying Load	0.554	0.077	0.552	7.227	.000

Dependent Variable: Educational Involvement of School-Age Children

$R = .220$; $R^2 = .048$; Adjusted $R^2 = .047$; $F(3, 1681) = 28.499$; $p < 0.05$

The multiple correlation coefficient ($R = 0.220$) indicates a modest but statistically significant relationship between the set of child labour predictors and educational outcomes. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.048$) indicates that the three child labour predictors collectively account for approximately 4.8% of the variance in educational outcomes. While this relatively modest explanatory power confirms that child labour practices constitute a statistically significant predictor of educational involvement, the majority of variance is attributable to other factors not captured within the current model, such as household income, school quality, teacher attendance, peer influence, and individual cognitive ability. Future research should incorporate a broader range of predictor variables to improve model specification.

The F-statistic ($F = 28.499$, $p < 0.05$) confirms that the regression model as a whole is statistically significant. Hawking ($B = −0.783$, $\beta = −0.210$, $p < 0.05$) and domestic services ($B = −0.689$, $\beta = −0.208$, $p < 0.05$) both exerted significant negative effects on educational outcomes, indicating that greater engagement in these activities is associated with reduced educational participation. Load-carrying ($B = 0.554$, $\beta = 0.552$, $p < 0.05$) showed an unexpected positive association with educational outcomes. This may reflect the episodic and time-limited nature of load-carrying, which potentially allows greater flexibility for school attendance compared to more continuous forms of labour such as domestic service. Alternatively, it may indicate that children engaged in load-carrying come from households where moderate economic contribution is structurally integrated alongside schooling. This finding may also represent a methodological artefact given the cross-sectional design, and longitudinal and qualitative investigation is warranted before firm conclusions are drawn. Given that the p-value for

the overall model is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study revealed that child labour is highly prevalent among school-age children in Ogun State, with hawking emerging as the most common and frequent form of labour. These findings are consistent with Enebe et al. (2021), who reported a high prevalence of domestic and economic child labour among junior secondary school students in Enugu, and with Ogunyemi et al. (2023) and Abdul et al. (2020), who similarly affirmed that child labour remains a widespread challenge in both urban and semi-urban contexts across Nigeria. The disproportionate prevalence of hawking in the current study likely reflects Ogun State's commercial geography, its proximity to Lagos, and the structure of its market economy, which generates persistent demand for informal child labour in retail and distribution activities.

Economic necessity, parental encouragement, limited access to education, and weak policy enforcement were identified as key factors influencing child labour practices, with cultural norms playing a comparatively lesser role. These findings align with Oli and Nweke (2021), Francis and Yinalabi (2022), and Abdul et al. (2020), all of whom highlighted poverty, family conditions, and unemployment as major determinants of child labour in Nigeria. Taken together, these studies suggest that child labour in Ogun State is primarily a structural, economic phenomenon, rather than one driven predominantly by cultural dispositions.

Child labour was found to have significant negative implications for the educational involvement of school-age children. Hawking and domestic services demonstrated consistent negative associations with educational participation, manifesting in poor academic performance, irregular attendance, and reduced engagement with homework. These findings are consistent with a substantial body of literature, including Agbo (2017), Ibrahim et al. (2018), Ahmed and Ray (2014), Agugua et al. (2024), Abdul et al. (2020), Mbah (2017), Ajagbe and Adegbite (2014), Boutin and Jouvin (2022), Ogunyemi (2019), Adedeji and Fagbohun (2021), and Bello and Tijani (2018). It is important, however, to distinguish between types of educational harm: absenteeism represents a direct structural outcome arising from missed school hours during labour engagement, while academic underperformance constitutes a cumulative outcome of fatigue, reduced study time, and diminished cognitive engagement over extended periods.

The unexpected positive association between load-carrying and educational outcomes is a theoretically significant finding that warrants careful consideration. Rather than treating this result as merely anomalous, it may be understood as complicating simplistic narratives that equate all forms of child labour with uniform educational harm. Boutin and Jouvin (2022) caution that the consequences of child labour vary considerably by type, duration, and context of engagement, and the present finding lends empirical support to this nuanced perspective. Future qualitative studies should investigate the lived experiences of children engaged in load-carrying to determine whether the positive association reflects genuine compatibility with schooling or undetected confounding variables.

These findings carry direct policy implications. The Child Rights Act (2003) and ILO Convention No. 182, both ratified by Nigeria, mandate the elimination of the worst forms of child labour and the provision of compulsory basic education. The Nigerian Universal Basic Education Act similarly commits the state to free and compulsory basic schooling. The present findings suggest that these legislative frameworks require more rigorous enforcement mechanisms, particularly in commercial hubs and transport nodes where child labour is concentrated.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that child labour practices among school-age children in Ogun State are highly prevalent and significantly limit access to educational engagement, contributing to truancy, absenteeism, and poor participation in school-related activities. It is therefore recommended that: (i) the government should provide more accessible and affordable educational opportunities, particularly for children from economically disadvantaged families, through free, qualitative, and compulsory education; (ii) existing laws on child rights, including the Child

Rights Act of 2003, should be more rigorously enforced by relevant authorities; and (iii) future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-methods designs to more fully account for the range of factors that shape the relationship between child labour and educational outcomes, including the unexpected positive association observed for load-carrying in the present study.

considered.

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