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ARTICLE

Interactions between Child Labour and Schooling: Parental Perceptions in Rural and Urban Ghana

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Understanding the interaction between child labour and schooling in rural and urban areas in Ghana is essential to implement the most appropriate intervention. I aimed to establish parental perceptions of the extent child labour interferes with schooling in rural and urban areas in Ghana. The participants recruited were from Ghana purposively sampled across rural areas (Ankaase, Anwiankwanta and Kensere), and urban areas (Jamestown, Korle Gonno and Chorkor) amongst sixty government officials, NGO representatives, and both parents whose children were and were not involved in child labour. The research utilises semi-structured interviews conducted with parents (ten), stakeholders (ten), focus groups (thirty); and participant observation techniques (ten) utilised to gather the needed data. Interviews were recorded, transcribed utilising a framework approach as the data analysis method. This article finds that the child labour in the rural areas is not always inconsistent with school attendance while, in the urban area, the two activities are incompatible.

Keywords: Child labour, schooling, parental perceptions, rural area, urban area

Introduction

A critical consideration for contemporary Ghana is to find a new policy approach on child labour that is context-specific and that can reform the present national and international policies which attempt to eliminate child labour by way of legislation. The conviction that children's participation in work hinders their schooling is one of the cardinal reasons for strongly objecting to child labour. In many developing economies, the negative interaction between child labour and children's schooling has been established (Guarcello *et al.*, 2015; Kluttz, 2015; ICI, 2019; UNICEF, 2020; Churchill *et al.*, 2021; Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2021; ILO and UNICEF, 2021). However, there is also a body of research that establishes that children can combine work and schooling without having harmful effects on their school attendance, retention and performance, and that it is possible for children to engage in work and use their income to support their schooling (No *et al.*, 2012; Okyere, 2013; Rammohan, 2014; Meemken *et al.*, 2017; Quattri and Watkins, 2019; Akoyi *et al.*, 2020; Okyere *et al.*, 2021). This study was planned to contribute additional evidence from rural and urban Ghana to the discussion on the interface between child labour and schooling and discover what policy interventions are needed to curb the problems associated with child labour. Hence, it is crucial to answer the research question below: To what extent do parents in rural and urban areas in Ghana view child labour as interfering with schooling and what policy interventions are needed to curb the problem of child labour?

To understand why Ghana's current approach to eliminating child labour can be seen as problematic, this study starts by exploring, in Section One, the aim and research question guiding the article while examining, in Section Two, the scholarly context of debate around the harms and possible benefits of children's work. Additionally, the conceptual and analytical framework of

child labour policy, which provides a conceptual framework for the article, is presented in Section Three. Further, the methods and research design of the study, detailing what was done, how it was done, and why it was done and describes the study context is presented in Section Four. While intervention seems urgent in view of the numbers involved, the aim to remove children completely from the workforce takes no account of the widespread belief that work confers socialisation and skills that children need. For a government to secure compliance with its laws, its policy agenda must resonate with the people affected. Hence, this study canvassed the views of parents and relevant others who were recruited, interviewed, and observed as outlined in Section Five. These views are discussed in Section Six and their implications presented in Section Seven. They reveal an important difference between child labour in rural areas, which seems compatible with education, and in urban areas where it does not. That insight, and its bearing on policy, are this study's contributions to discussions in this area.

Child labour and its interaction with schooling around the globe

Child labour has been defined as constituting all tasks performed by children that are hazardous to their health and development (Dammert *et al.*, 2018). As we shall see, there is some debate about this absolute characterisation, but to the extent that it is hazardous, child labour poses a serious problem worldwide. The current global estimates show that at the beginning of 2020, 160 million – some 63 million girls and 97 million boys – were in child labour, comprising nearly one in ten of all children (ILO and UNICEF, 2021). Almost half of all children engaged in child labour (79 million children) were engaged in hazardous tasks which directly threatened their education, health, safety, and moral development. Since 2016, progress against child labour has stalled around the globe (ILO, 2021). In Ghana, some 916,500 children aged five to eleven years, 564,500 aged twelve to fourteen years and 411,500 aged fifteen to seventeen years, are engaged in child labour (ILO and CEIS, 2016). Thus, an estimated 1.9 million children aged five to seventeen years are involved in child labour, which is about 22 per cent of all children in this age group (ILO and CEIS, 2016). The prevalence of child labour varies by region from a high of 33 per cent in Bono, Bono East, Ahafo and Upper West regions to a low of 5 per cent in Greater Accra (ILO-IPEC, 2013). While most children engaged in child labour in rural areas participate in farm work, children involved in child labour in the urban area are mainly engaged in fishing activities, trade, child domestic work (CDW) and construction (Adonteng-Kissi, 2021). There is a marked difference between rural and urban areas with the rate of child labour in rural areas (30 per cent) more than twice that in urban areas (12 per cent) within the five to seventeen years age range (ILO and CEIS, 2016). Boys are also more likely to be involved in child labour than girls (ILO and CEIS, 2016), with a 2 per cent difference in the involvement of boys and girls in the five to seventeen age range and an 8 per cent difference in the fifteen to seventeen years age range (ILO-IPEC, 2013).

There is current discussion on whether combining schooling and work is helpful or destroys children's opportunities. Dunne *et al.* (2021) observe that the interactions between work and schooling are multi-dimensional, complex, and usually context-specific. The engagement of children in work is one of the key barriers to Education for All (EFA) which is a global initiative first launched at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 by United Nations and its affiliate bodies (Guarcello *et al.*, 2015). In their study in Southwestern Nigeria, Bamigboye and Adeyemi (2016) suggest that engaging children in work destroys children's capacity to enrol in school and challenges children getting educational benefits. An increasing body of literature suggests that there is an adverse connection between child labour and educational outcomes in Pakistan (Hou *et al.*, 2016; Fatima, 2017; Churchill *et al.*, 2021). Although education is free in both Sudan and South Sudan, Bérenger and Verdier-Chouchane (2016) observe that enrolment is low in rural areas particularly for girls as a significant number of them stay at home and perform domestic chores or engage in economic activities.

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Another school of thought contends that children may obtain useful human and psychological capital through the combination of schooling and work in the form of skills, competence, responsibility and self-esteem that make children confident to improve in education and in the future labour market (Adonteng-Kissi, 2022). This argument is reinforced by several studies from developing countries (Tamanja, 2016; Adonteng-Kissi, 2021; Okyere *et al.*, 2021). This research reveals that engaging children in work does not impede education but makes schooling possible for children. In his study in India, Rammohan (2014) reveals that the negative impact of child labour on education is expected to be negligible. In Cambodia, No *et al.* (2012) find that academic achievement of children engaged in work is not lower in comparison with children who do not work. In Bangladesh, Quattri and Watkins (2019) reveal that child labour is not detrimental to children as many children engaged in work are enrolled in school. In Uganda, among smallholder coffee farmers, families certified by Fairtrade (FT) improve their children's education (Meemken *et al.*, 2017; Akoyi *et al.*, 2020). Supplementation of families' incomes by children's labour in Uganda enables them to pay for private education (Akoyi *et al.*, 2020).

Conceptual and analytical framework of child labour policy

Child labour theory usually dwells on local types of labour, assuming child labour is situated mainly within farming, fishing, and informal sectors, connected with a specific phase of economic development; hence, child labour will fall as economies develop, grow, formalise, and industrialise (Kirby, 2017). This suggests that child labour policy might have been based on an erroneous assumption that the practice necessarily causes harm to children's education and health (Valentine, 2017). This leads to inappropriate policy design, excluding children from all economic activities based on age and boycotting what children produce (Dammert *et al.*, 2018). Thus, policy dwells mainly on complete elimination of child labour and reinforces a Western definition of childhood which suggests that child labour is injurious to children's development (Bourdillon and Carothers, 2019). This western conception views childhood as a developmental space and an agency for prospects (Fass, 2013). By contrast, Abebe and Ofosu-Kusi (2016) reveal the significance of looking beyond the 'deficit' model of childhood to rather understand the way children assist in reconfiguring the generational and social dynamics as happens in Africa through engaging children in cultural, social, economic and political life.

There are increasing studies on child labour that demonstrate that children view work as a right and as providing the prospect of playing a critical part in the community as well as a rite of passage to adulthood (Abebe, 2019; Okyere *et al.*, 2021). The social-constructivists' standpoint is that it is obstructive to deliberate on the legitimacy of child labour using an absolute binary of 'good or bad' (Huynh *et al.*, 2015). The view of the social constructionist that there are child-specific goods appears to assume an understanding of the nature of children and the way they are different from adults (Giesinger, 2017). Although a strict and rigid policy of child labour elimination is socio-culturally undesirable and possibly destructive, a strategy with a long-term focus on decreasing the engagement of children in the labour market that starts by focusing on the conditions where children are most at risk is suitable for most children. Children working full-time are mostly unable either to attend school or to satisfactorily advance in schooling (ICI, 2019). Child labour delays development as it implies that the next generation of workers will not be adequately skilled and educated (Churchill *et al.*, 2021). The significance of poverty reduction, social mobility, and quality education needs to be adequately considered to ensure good justification for a long-term policy of eliminating child labour. Child labour in family businesses can be more prone to abuse and exploitation as legislation usually does not impose serious punishment on families (Adonteng-Kissi, 2022). Although it is acknowledged that child labour is essential to ease short-term poverty in some families with some conditions, this viewpoint does not reverse the necessity for a strategy

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with the long-term aim of eliminating child labour and increasing school enrolment and attendance (Kirby, 2017).

Policy has been seen to play a critical role within the process of production and reproduction of childhood (James and James, 2017). This argument positions social policies in the realm of legislation, which is enforced by state institutions such as the law courts, judicial and other legal players, and informal procedures for regulation. It is understood that law must cover and express cultural information since it is characteristically normative, describing individuals' rights, responsibilities, and freedoms (Okyere *et al.*, 2021, Turner, 2021). If policy and legislation do not express the cultural and social realities that they are expected to protect and explain, laws are either enforced in a strict manner, or blatantly disregard, misapply, and violate the culture of the people (Bourdillon and Carothers, 2019). Child labourers have protested that policies purportedly designed to safeguard their welfare rather make them vulnerable (Okyere *et al.*, 2021). They usually do not accept International Labour (ILO) benchmarks since the opinions of children and childhood that these seek to express do not fit into the realities of the developing world (Bourdillon and Carothers, 2019). Compulsory removal of children from work can drive them into more harmful labour (Boyden, 2015). Further, policy ignores the fact that children's income from work is sometimes necessary to enable them to attend school, while on the other hand, schooling may not be a reliable means of advancement as it is often of low quality in deprived communities. (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018). Nevertheless, schooling and work may not be incompatible, particularly if schooling times finish or start in the middle of the day (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2021). Research does not support the supposition that parents' financial capacity to enrol their children in school would always motivate them to do so, or that poverty drives children into work (Boyden, 2015). This suggests that parents do not essentially consider formal schooling as better than the skills acquisition at home or work.

Methods

Research design

This study used a qualitative exploratory study approach by employing in-depth stakeholder and parental interviews, focus groups, and participant observation methods to gather rich data and enhance methodological integrity (Roller, 2019). This combination allows triangulation with its benefits of convergence and validity, while the application of open-ended and probing questions offers participants the avenue to respond in their own words (Ashley and Tuten, 2015).

A total of ten semi-structured interviews were carried out with stakeholders from government agencies, departments, and non-governmental organisations such as the Labour Department; The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ); The International Child Resource Institute (ICRI); and The Department of Social Welfare. The method of data collection as shown in Table 1 is the following: Five stakeholders were used in each of the two areas under study. In each area, one focus group discussion was moderated with fifteen participants comprising parents whose children were engaged in child labour and parents whose children were not, and these parents also participated in a total of ten semi-structured interviews. Lastly, participant observations were conducted to examine children's natural working environment and to put into context the empirical results, and to allow the matter to be explained. Participants in the participant observations (five parents in each of the two areas) engaged in a total of ten semi-structured interviews. Being either a parent or a stakeholder in child welfare with expert knowledge was the inclusion criterion for selecting sixty participants for the research. A significant majority of the participants in the rural area were ethnic 'Asantes' while a substantial majority of the participants in the urban area were ethnic 'Ga'. The research occurred in the following areas as shown in figure 1.

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Table 1 Method of data collection involving 60 participants in the focus groups, and stakeholder interviews, and in-depth parent interviews in participant observation

Methods	Rural Area	Urban Area	Total
Stakeholder Interviews	5 participants	5 participants	10 participants
Parental Interview	5 participants	5 participants	10 participants
Focus Groups	15 participants	15 participants	30 participants
Interviews in Participant Observation	5 participants	5 participants	10 participants
Total	30 participants	30 participants	60 participants

The rural farming communities under study in this article are Ankaase, Anwiankwanta (also known as Anweankwanta), and Kensere, and they are all in the Asante Bekwai Municipality. The Oda River and its tributaries, encompassing River Dankran, pass through these three rural communities. The population size of the three locations is similar, ranging from 15,637 in Kesere, 20,451 in Ankasee, and 29,748 in Anwiankwanta (GSS, 2012).

Jamestown, Korle Gonno and Chorkor are the three urban fishing communities under study in the Accra Metropolis (GSS, 2012). The indigenous Ga people dominate the Jamestown community, which is at the centre of the city of Accra. It is one of the oldest communities in Accra and emerged as an urban community in the seventeenth century directly located east of Korle Gonno (Sackeyfio-Lenoch, 2014). The second community, Korle Gonno, is a well-established and typical indigenous coastal community known as Ga Mashie, meaning King of Ga. Chorkor is ethnically homogeneous and has relatively high illiteracy rates, high levels of unemployment, and generally low incomes. These communities have a population of 16,221 (Jamestown), 27,826 (Korle Gonno) and 23,853 (Chorkor) respectively.

Data generation activities and data analysis

The interview schedules of the different approaches were the focus groups' interview schedule (thirteen questions); parental interview schedule (fourteen questions); stakeholders' interview schedule (twenty questions); and participants' observation interview schedule (twelve questions). Each interview went on for between thirty and ninety minutes. In the analysis process, the framework approach was utilised since it was flexible to permit me to collect the required data for analysis. The gathered data were scrutinised at the analysis stage, and in harmony with main themes. The data were then charted and sorted out.

This covered a five-stage process which comprised familiarisation; identifying a thematic framework; indexing; charting; and mapping and interpretation (Spencer *et al.*, 2014). The familiarisation with the transcripts of the collected data (parental and stakeholder interviews; focus group transcripts, observation, or field notes) was done to understand the outline of the data collected. The thematic framework was identified in the second phase, after the emerging themes were acknowledged in the data set. The main themes that the participants had expressed that establish the groundwork of the thematic framework were used for clarifying and classifying the data. Portions of the data that were consistent with a theme during the indexing phase were recognised. This process was applied to all the textual data that had been collected. The precise data set was indexed in the fourth stage known as charting and charts of the themes were arranged. Although the data sets were taken from their context, the data were acknowledged to be clearly identified from the precise transcript from which they were taken. In the final stage, the main features as put in the charts during the mapping were analysed and interpreted using NVIVO. The analysis provided a schematic diagram of the event, which provided guidance in interpreting the data set.

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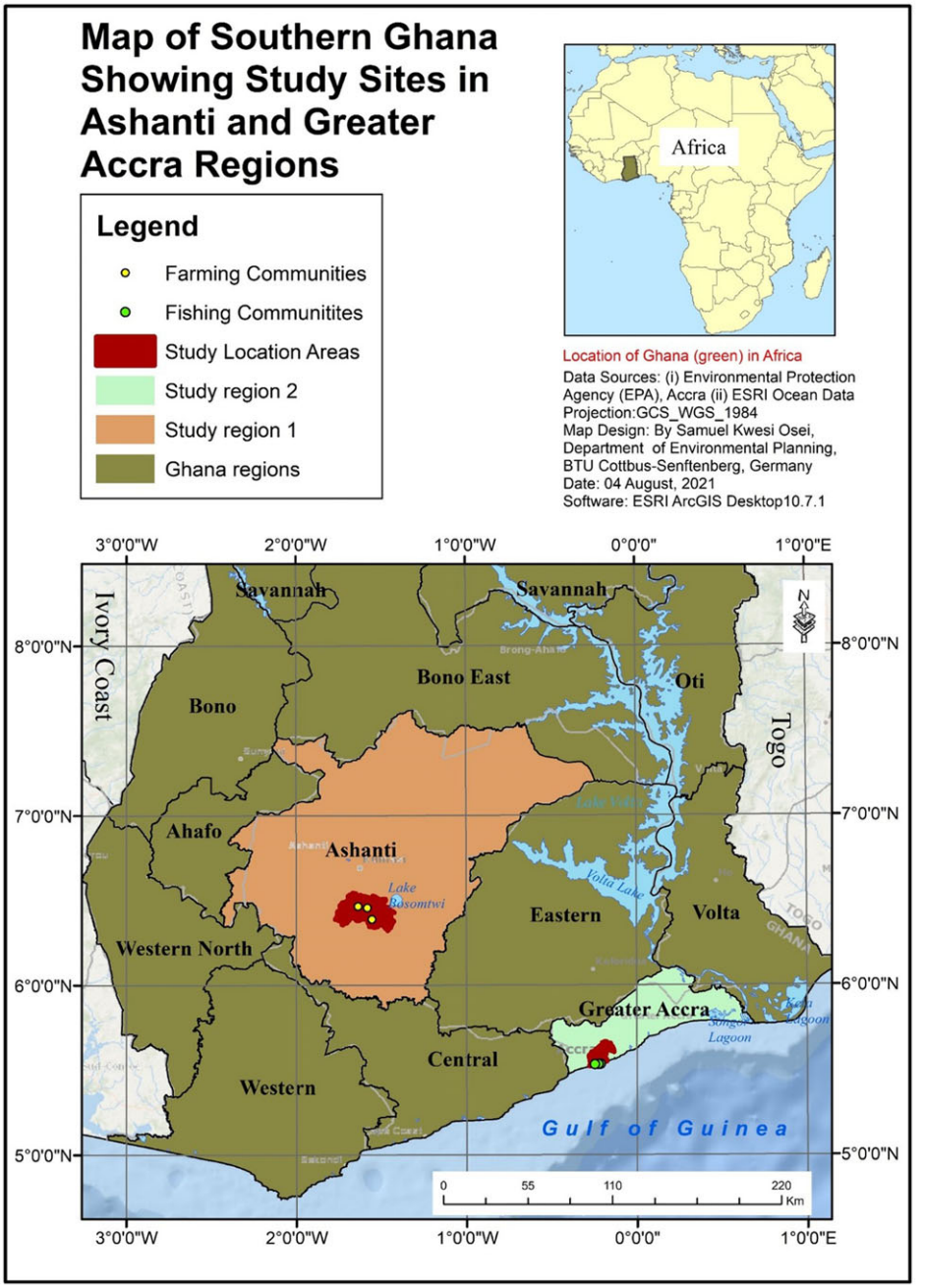

Figure 1. Map of Southern Ghana showing study sites in Ashanti and Greater Accra regions

A tape recorder was used by the investigator to record all interviews, thereby enhancing trustworthiness (Eisner, 2017). The study was audited by the investigator: explaining each phase of the research process, augmenting, and justifying what was done. Issues of bias were dealt with by the investigator ensuring that a neutral stance was taken, and that the investigator's own views were bracketed out throughout the data gathering process. Next, at the end of the data analysis, the data

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were checked, and the tentative interpretations of the research were referred to participants to confirm their credibility and authenticity. Data were triangulated by using different sources and related literature (Carter *et al*., 2014).

Ethics

The study was approved by the Human Ethics Committee of La Trobe University (Bundoora Campus), Australia (Application No. 15-002). In adhering to the principles of the University Ethics Committee, cultural differences were respected, and the rights of children were safeguarded before, during, and after the research. Participants received a written and an oral explanation of the study and of the purpose of the study in their mother tongue. Before participation in the study or in any follow-up action, all participants gave informed and written consent. Participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw at any time without consequences. Personal details and the collected data were stored with complete anonymity. All steps taken by the investigator before, during, and after the study were consistent with ethical standards.

Results

In this section, I present the findings on parental perceptions of the extent to which child labour interferes with schooling in rural and urban areas in Ghana.

Rural area

In the rural area, participants suggested that a significant majority of children who work also attend school. Many parents see engaging children in work as constructively shaping the general development of children as they acquire vital skills. Participants explained that many children engage in farm work and keep up with their school attendance. A parent explained:

> Children meet the demands of both work and schooling in this area and for me, I don't think it put them under any stress. Again, most children have been socialised to believe that they must work to support themselves in school.

Focus group participants suggested that children acquire skills through their engagement in work. Stakeholders explained that work serves as a medium to explain and engage daily circumstances, and work activities have meanings for children's identities. A participant in the parental interview explained that work is essentially situated in the practices of the rural area and it depends on the ways in which children negotiate their identities by engaging in these work practices. A parent said:

> I believe cultural values and practices promote work by children and they also mould intra-family decisions. You see, cultural attitudes of parents toward school and work influence family decisions about child labour.

A stakeholder explained that although most children combine schooling and work, more value is placed on schooling than work and vice versa in different families. Some parents enrol their children in school without engaging them in farming because they are poor or do not own farmlands. However, another participant explained that work is necessary for forming character and discipline and preparing children to compete for jobs in the future. A participant in the focus group explained that work tends to be valued over schooling in some families, and children attending school instead of working may encounter social stigma. A parent in the participant observation explained:

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> Work helps to socialise children by allowing them to learn the norms, customs, skills, and behaviours they need to take part in social activities.

Another parent echoed:

> Many parents and their children believe that participating in work from a young age is the route to a successful life, so this makes work an important aspect of the socialisation process and it helps children to learn the importance of a strong work ethic.

These kinds of cultural attitudes play a particularly important role in the rural context, particularly in farming where it is common for children to learn from their parents. Usually, children work on family farms which is part of the process by which children are prepared for adulthood. Participants indicated that by working on family farms, children significantly enhance the creation of family wealth and better standards of living. Parents' level of education, family wealth and land ownership are substantially connected to the prospect that the child is engaged in work. A Director of Social Welfare said:

> Most parents' wish is to instil into their children, norms and values relating to the importance of work. The socialisation process of working children is among the major thing, parents prepare children for.

Certain types of work in the farms may be considered by the outside world to be hazardous. However, those types of work are a traditional way of diversifying livelihoods. Participants suggested that it is possible there are cases of children who are neither working nor in school – described by one as 'a small proportion … of deviants' – as well as working children who do not go to school but that is not necessarily the norm. A Director of CHRAJ said:

> We educate guardians in this area about the rights of the child. We also tell them that if they are not prepared to take relatives' children who live with them to school then they must return those children to their biological parents. Basic education is free in Ghana and sometimes, some of the NGOs cover extra expenses.

A participant suggested that work in the area under study may support families' income in rural Ghana and therefore help to maintain children in school rather than keeping them out of school. Other participants indicated that farm work often makes school possible in the area under investigation by supporting children to cover miscellaneous costs in school. A Director of Social Welfare Department explained:

> Family expenditures relating to schooling can involve matriculation fees, school uniforms and other clothing, school supplies, transportation, and informal payments. Deprived households cannot simply meet these expenses unless the children help them by working on their farms.

In the rural area, some participants explained that non-working children or children who do not help their parents on the farm or weave 'Kente' cloth are the ones who are not in school. However, some participants explained that attending school is not the same as benefiting from it. A Labour Officer said:

> Although work negatively affects the children's academic performance in school, it makes them financially stable. Many students don't consider the negative effects of work on schooling.

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Stakeholders suggested that government and the private sector should increase their investment in primary school facilities to reduce one of the constraints on family enrolment decisions. Participants explained that girls' enrolment and retention in schooling is minimal owing to logistical challenges and related safety risks. A parent in the focus group said:

> The likelihood of enrolment is high for both girls and boys if a school is close to a child's house. Some children in this area don't attend school because the distance between where children live, and the schools are far apart. What is now being done is to build community schools for children to enable them to attend school regularly.

Some participants suggested that some children are not in school because of the poor quality of education and not because of farm work. Participants indicate that the possibility of enrolment in primary school is less influenced by direct costs than opportunity costs, even though the findings suggest mixed trends.

Urban area

Participants explained that economic participation by children interferes with their schooling and renders many children illiterate and unskilled. Other participants suggested that working children are usually associated with truancy or early departure from school. This indicates that schooling and work are inconsistent considering the number of contact hours that children are expected to spend in school. Further, there are group of children who are neither in school nor working. A Director of CHRAJ opined:

> Everybody knows children seen during daytime in the fishing harbour are not attending school. Parents need to know that as much as they want their children to work to support their families does not mean that work should affect children's schooling.

The coordinator of ICRI observed that their area is a fishing community, and the fishermen claim that when they go to sea, they do not get enough catch. Parents therefore are not able to get enough income to support their families. Stakeholders explained that other parents put their children into work because of sheer adult irresponsibility. A Director of CHRAJ said:

> I believe poverty is only used as an excuse because if parents want to eliminate child labour practice, they could put a stop to it since basic school is free in Ghana.

Other participants indicated that there are parents who can afford to look after their children in school but prefer to let their children work in fishing. A Principal Labour Officer said:

> Labour Department have been doing awareness creation and sensitisation programmes for parents to offer them attitudinal and behavioural change for onward enrolment of children in schools. Again, issues relating to access, quality and teacher training have not been adequately addressed.

Stakeholders from the Labour Department indicated that whenever they go into the communities for monitoring of child labour activities, some parents explain to them that they are aware that many children have successfully completed their schooling, yet they have not been able to secure jobs. They therefore question why they should put their children in school. A Principal Labour Officer said:

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> Some parents believe if they put their children into farm work, children would learn how to farm and get ready jobs.

A Director of the Department of Social Welfare explained that child labour is connected to economic issues as some parents often opt for the path of least resistance by putting the children to work instead of school. Given the choice where there is financial support for the family to ensure that children stay in school, every parent will want his/her child to stay in school so children working is not a preference for parents. A Director of the Department of Social Welfare said:

> There are public schools in Ghana which are free as compared to the private schools that charge high fees. Parents can therefore enrol their children in the public schools and there are other safety nets such as capitation grants, school feeding programme, free school uniforms, free exercise books etc. Yet, many of the children are engaged in fishing without going to school.

However, another stakeholder suggested that welfare programmes such as free primary school have been defeated by the various extra fees that are charged in the public schools. A Director of the Department of Social Welfare said:

> I have a house help that I thought should be in one of the public schools. Every term, I pay various fees not less than GHC 50. This amount of money cannot be paid by an average fisherman. The school feeding programme on the other hand is limited to some few schools in the city since it is on pilot basis.

A stakeholder explained that some children are punished by parents for refusing to engage in economic activities. Non-attendance at school is widespread since many children go for fishing or go to sell on the streets. A stakeholder explained that there are many ten- to twelve-year-old boys fishing, while girls smoke fish with their mothers who are mostly fishmongers. Another Director of Social Welfare Department echoed:

> A case was brought before our department in which a child insisted on going to school instead of going to sell for her mom. The mother threatened, she was not going to give the child food and the child will also not sleep in her house. The matter was reported to the social welfare department, and I had to intervene.

A participant in the focus group suggested that some parents wait until their children are fifteen years old before thinking of enrolling them in school, after taking their children fishing to make money. Another parent said:

> Sometimes some parents fail to take children to school because of bitterness arising out of divorce. They normally say that, if your mother/father has stopped with me then, I am not going to look after you.

Another participant explained that parents use most of the money they earn from their economic activities to buy beautiful clothes for themselves instead of buying school uniforms for their children. A parent explained:

> Some of our colleague fishermen do not know the essence of education. There are good people in our society who invest in their children's education, but most of our colleagues' fishermen do not value education.

Many participants explained that schooling is impacted by the engagement of children in economic activities. Children can be late or absent from class owing to their engagement in work activities and they can spend less time studying and doing their homework. A Labour Officer said:

> Child labour affects schooling because children's concentration is on money making rather than their education. When there is a boom in fishing most of the children move into the fishing harbour for work. When it is not fishing season, some children enroll or become regular in school.

Many focus group participants explained that the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) has helped to improve school attendance in the area under study. Further, many parents confirmed the positive interaction between GSFP and school attendance in the fishing area.

Discussion

The difference between interaction between child labour and schooling in rural and urban areas (as found in this study) suggests that children of the rural area combine schooling and work in contrast with children in the urban area who drop out of school because of work.

Work socialisation, values and norms

Ethnicity influences parental decisions to engage children in work in the rural and urban areas in southern Ghana. In the urban area, the indigenous Ga people dominate the Jamestown, Korle Gonno and Chorkor communities while the Asante people dominate in the rural area under study. In both areas, and for both ethnic groups, work is strongly valued for its role in socialising children to develop into responsible, competent men or women. If it is not dangerous and does not impede school attendance, then it is a way to acquire essential skills and provide children with cultural identity and a sense of belonging. This argument is strengthened by many studies in Ghana and other parts of the developing world (Twum-Danso, 2009; Abebe, 2020; Okyere *et al*., 2021; Yeboah, 2021; Adonteng-Kissi, 2022). There is the need, therefore, to understand the multiplicity of viewpoints in the engagement of children in work. This involves a readiness to consider concepts and suggestions that may seem antithetical to our individual epistemological and ethical philosophy or those of our agencies. This is particularly the case in relation to the voices of children engaged in work, their families or relatives, and communities, in whose name the laws, research studies, advocacy campaigns and other activities occur.

Work and schooling and elimination of child labour

In Ghana, a substantial number of children are engaged in work, irrespective of their school enrolment. Work *per se* is not detrimental to children; however, conditions under which children work may be. Eliminating child labour without increasing the income of deprived families could generate deplorable conditions, putting children in poverty. Further, elimination of child labour can create serious hardships for poor households as work makes schooling possible in view of increasing income and covering costs. Hence, survival of poor families can be grounded on the cash or their children's in-kind support. This explanation is evidenced by many studies (Quattri and Watkins, 2019; Akoyi *et al*., 2020). A major characteristic in the rural area is minimal financial returns to basic education (ICI, 2019). This is driven not just by a shortage of job prospects for skilled workers and challenge to secure high-skilled employments but also by a substandard education delivered by public schools. The shortage and lack of teachers, substandard teaching facilities and lack of accessible schools strengthen many parents' opinions that schooling is of no critical value and that their children are better off combining school and work. Apart from

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job prospects and incomes for children, expectations of parents in relation to future benefits from schooling can also impact on their choice of combining children's education and work. Instead of focusing exclusively on education, parents permit their children to combine education and work prospects.

Welfare policy and programs

The results of my analysis present evidence that work and schooling are incompatible activities for school-going children in urban Ghana. This assertion is reinforced by other scholars (Guarcello *et al*., 2015; Churchill *et al*., 2021; Dunne *et al*., 2021). In development-policy discussions, scholars have expressed concerns about the impacts of child labour on schooling in addition to current debates on the welfare impacts of labour-intensive development intensified by trade liberalisation. The debate on the poverty trap significantly hinges on the replacement potentials between children's leisure and education (Dunne et al., 2021). There is evidence of increasing adverse effect of poverty on the schooling of children. This suggests that dealing with the needs of deprived families is rather more critical in ensuring school retention for children and diminishing the incentive to work in the urban area. Compulsory legislation as in the case of Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) in Ghana has proven not to be a prerequisite, essential nor adequate for realising Education For All (EFA) particularly if there is no political will in the enforcement of such law and to address everyday challenges of policy execution (Guarcello *et al*., 2015; Bourdillon and Carothers, 2019). Thus, anything short of local support and aggressive community advocacy would make such a compulsory legislation almost ineffective. Usually, the legal framework intended for government action to deliver basic educational services extensively and equitably is provided by compulsory legislation. However, government action, particularly in deprived economies, does not necessarily drive demand. Demand is contingent on a family's cost-benefit analysis and the opportunity costs evaluation. A considerable number of countries have abolished primary school fees and created programmes such as school feeding programs or conditional cash transfers to increase the demand for schooling or enhance enrolment (Churchill *et al*., 2021). Hence, the government's initiative 'Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP)' can provide a viable option for encouraging the schooling of children and minimising the possibility of their engaging in fishing and other work. Students are provided with school meals through this program, and this may offer an avenue to scale-up nutrition interventions in basic education in the urban area, with significant benefits going to very deprived children. In contexts associated with huge educational disparities as is the case in Ghana, school feeding programs can contribute to 'levelling the playing field' by increasing learning outcomes particularly among children at the margin (Aurino et al., 2020). The GSFP has led to an upsurge in school enrolment by 20.3 per cent in schools where it is being piloted compared with 2.8 per cent in schools without the programme (Morgan and Sonnino, 2013). The GSFP targeted at children in the basic school has been used to examine the issue more critically to see how much child labour displaces schooling. Participants suggested that the GSFP serves as an incentive for school attendance in urban Ghana. Despite the positive effects of GSFP, it is confronted with several difficulties (Atta and Manu, 2015).

The effect of children's attendance at school has the potential of being socially gainful in many respects. Evidently, parents are replacing other usages of the time of their children, to get the current income benefit from access to the GSFP in urban Ghana with moderate effect on incomes from the engagement of children in work in urban Ghana. The engagement of children in work can displace time for undertaking homework or attending after-school classes. My results from the urban area strengthen the apparent popular understanding that child labour mainly happens at the expense of schooling and, therefore, it is a key determinant of poverty in this setting in future.

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Policy approaches on child labour

While children should be protected from abuse and have access to education, the success of policies is dependent on the capacity to be culturally responsive to the varied ideological and political expressions and establish coalitions with all stakeholders. There is the need for policy approaches that would effectively safeguard children from exploitation while improving their prospects for their development. Rural and urban communities are in the position to consider the context and determine children who need to be safeguarded from hazardous work, and the way such protection may be governed. There is the need to combine expert knowledge through engagement with parents and stakeholders, to ensure the design of appropriate interventions. Communities, parents, and children need to be engaged in the design and application of policies. Further, the views of children need to be sought. Presently, children's right to express their views on choices that affect them is acknowledged on issues of legal custody and medical decisions (Collins, 2017). However, children are hardly engaged in the design and application of policies although they are the subjects of child labour policies and policies are designed to benefit them. Children's views are critical to determine the impacts of work on their welfare. In some instances, children have offered competent views and recommendations on interventions (Bourdillon and Carothers, 2019). The impact of work on children's welfare depends mainly on their cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. Therefore, it would be in the best interests of the child if policies and programs on the engagement of children in work are culturally responsive. Further, children engaged in work should not be criminalised for working neither should their welfare deteriorate based on policy interventions designed to benefit them.

Conclusion

The interactions between child labour and schooling differ between rural and urban areas or contexts. Additionally, there are general differences in data on the appropriateness, and certainly the viability of eliminating child labour, notwithstanding the general outcry about the pervasiveness of child labour. Therefore, the meaning and dimensions of child labour vary in practice. While current country and international policies contend that child labour should be eliminated, a more nuanced policy approach is preferred which does not assume a universal and exclusive policy lens through which to consider all work performed by children in view of the variations in social, cultural, and economic systems. There is the need for a comprehensive approach that reflects on education in association with the engagement of children in work. In Ghana and other developing economies, it is critical in the design of policies that promote better educational achievement for children. Policy interventions to address the problems associated with child labour should be context specific and need to be based on the forms of child labour arrangements and the institutional structures. Identifying the level of child labour and its impact on school achievement may inform this effort, as well as being an effective way of creating public awareness.

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