



Child Labor, Schooling, and Quality Education among School-Age Children in Nigeria

Jacob Kola Aina ^{1*} , Abdulsalam Zakariyawu ¹ , Alexander Gbenga Ogundele ¹ 

¹ Kwara State College of Education, Lafiagi, NIGERIA

* Correspondence: akoja64@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Child labor is one of the most pressing challenges facing Nigeria's education system, with far-reaching implications for children's access to education, retention, and learning outcomes. This study examined child labor, schooling, and the pursuit of quality education in Nigeria's Lafiagi District. It used a mixed-methods design with the Parental Child Labor Questionnaire and in-depth interviews. Researchers randomly administered questionnaires to 116 parents who were not the parents of the sampled children. Twenty children were selected for in-depth interviews conducted over four months in their natural settings. The study was grounded in the Human Capital Theory of Schultz, Mincer, and Becker. The researchers analyzed the data using descriptive statistics and thematic coding. The findings revealed the existence of child labor in the Lafiagi District, mainly caused by factors related to a lack of money. The study also found that school location contributes to child labor, a factor absent from several studies. Gender differences were identified, and child labor negatively affects children's development and academic performance and increases out-of-school rates, thereby hindering quality education. The findings also suggest solutions such as financial assistance, free school fees, and school feeding programs. The study recommends enrolling children in schools located close to their homes to improve access to education and reduce their involvement in child labor. It also recommends replicating the study in other regions with larger, more diverse samples to improve the generalizability of the findings.

Keywords: child labor, human capital, out-of-school children, schooling, quality education

INTRODUCTION

Schooling and quality education are critical for the development of any region in a country. Therefore, we must ensure that every child counts in the quest for quality education in the country. Studies show that most regions in Africa lack quality education because people do not view children's schooling from the right perspective. According to Ojuolape and Mohd (2024), parents with low education levels pay little attention to their children's

education in Nigeria. African children face many problems, such as child trafficking, out-of-school children, child abuse, and child labor. This research focuses on child labor.

In Nigeria, school-aged children commonly do all kinds of jobs in both urban and rural areas, either to earn money for themselves or their families. Most of these jobs are hard for their age and detrimental to their health. Bello et al. (2020) observed that in Kano Metropolis, children below 18 are seen hawking, begging for alms, and scavenging when they should be in classrooms. According to the International Labor Organization and the National Bureau of Statistics (2024), these children are deprived of the opportunity to learn, and those who manage to attend classes after working cannot learn effectively because of fatigue. This might explain why Uyanga et al. (2019) claimed that child labor denies children the opportunity to develop educationally.

Education is important for every child, and no nation should trifle with it. Several factors, including poverty, religion, and culture, shape individuals' and the government's attitudes toward children's education in Nigeria. Osiesi and Blignaut (2026) observed that poverty hinders children's educational attainment in Nigeria. Ezegwu and Okoye (2024) recognized the significant role that religion plays in shaping Nigerian education. Olaniran (2024) claimed that culture plays a significant role in children's education in Nigeria. These factors contribute significantly to children's education in Nigeria and have contributed to the current topic of child labor. Child labor in Nigeria varies according to region, religion, and gender. Some regions and religions do not value girl-child education but prefer to use them for household chores and other labor to bring money to the family. Bello et al. (2020) claim that most children in Quranic schools are forced into labor by their masters. Therefore, this creates a gender gap in child labor. Oluwagbohunmi and Popoola (2023) observed gender differences in child labor in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The socioeconomic status of many families makes it difficult to send their children to school, so they prefer to send them out to earn money for the family instead. Most of the jobs these children do are inappropriate for their age and dangerous. These factors threaten national development and require urgent attention. According to Lawal (2024), child labor restricts children's access to education and leads to exploitation.

The quest for quality education is not new, as it is a pillar of sustainable development. Over the years, the Nigerian government has emphasized quality education for its citizens. To achieve this, the government has attempted several initiatives in recent years, but they have not delivered the desired results because of many challenges, chief among them are issues surrounding children's education. Two examples include the National Social Investment Program (NSIP) and the Human Capital Opportunities for Prosperity and Equity – Education (HOPE-EDU) program.

Given this background, this study examines child labor, schooling, and the pursuit of quality education in Lafiagi District, Nigeria. Several studies on child labor in Nigeria and Africa have been conducted recently. The current study does not imitate these studies but aims to fill the gaps identified in them. A significant number of these studies employed surveys in which only questionnaires were used without any interaction with the children involved in child labor. For instance, Bello et al. (2020) employed a survey method in a northern metropolitan city in Nigeria. Similarly, Chukwudeh (2024) surveyed a densely populated city in Nigeria but did not have in-depth interactions with children involved in child labor. Abdu et al. (2020) used a structured interview, which may not have captured critical aspects of child labor. The current study employed a mixed-method design in which in-depth interviews with children involved in child labor were conducted over four months. Over three months, we observed the children in their everyday environments, such as at home, on the streets, in marketplaces, and in shops. We frequently interacted with these children during school hours, when other children were attending school, to support Human Capital Theory (HCT). This theory posits that choosing work over education means the short-term income from selling goods and working in shops and markets outweighs the long-term benefits of schooling. The study location was unique and differed from that of previous studies. Many earlier studies focused on urban towns and cities, whereas the current study purposively sampled an agrarian town within the district. To strengthen the findings, we triangulated questionnaire data

from parents (not the interviewees' parents) with information from in-depth interviews. The research has specific objectives that have directed all research efforts for over four months. The objectives and research questions are outlined below.

Research Objectives

The principal objective of this study was to investigate child labor, schooling, and the quest for quality education in Nigeria's Lafiagi District. Specifically, the following are the objectives of the study:

1. Examine the prevalence and manifestations of child labor.
2. Identify the factors contributing to child labor.
3. Assess the impact of child labor on the quality of education.
4. Examine gender disparities in the nature and extent of child labor.
5. Explore strategies to reduce child labor and promote quality education.
6. The following four research questions were drawn from the above objectives.

Research Questions

1. Is there any evidence of child labor in the study location?
2. What are the causes of child labor in the study location?
3. What is the impact of child labor on access to quality education?
4. Is there a gender gap in child labor in the study location?
5. What are the solutions to child labor in the study location?

The research objectives and questions are clearly presented as stated above, leading to the theoretical review. Theory is critical to educational research; therefore, this study presents its theoretical framework below.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in Human Capital Theory (HCT), developed by Schultz (1961), Mincer (1974), and Becker (1993). Human Capital Theory views education as an investment that develops individuals' knowledge, skills, and competencies, leading to higher productivity and improved socioeconomic outcomes. Within this perspective, child labor represents an opportunity cost because it provides immediate economic returns while reducing children's opportunities to accumulate human capital through schooling.

Contemporary applications of HCT extend beyond years of schooling to emphasize education quality and the development of cognitive and non-cognitive competencies, including critical thinking, resilience, communication, and problem-solving skills that enhance lifelong productivity (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2017; Leoni, 2025). The theory therefore provides a useful framework for understanding how child labor undermines not only school participation but also children's long-term human development.

The study used Human Capital Theory to analyze child labor as the independent variable and educational achievement as the dependent variable. Therefore, this study investigated the extent, causes, gender issues, and educational impact of child labor using a combined approach that accounted for both quantifiable patterns and the children's realities.

Human Capital Theory was also useful in interpreting the data because it helped explain the link between child labor and education. The finding that children miss classes, arrive late, are tired, lack time for study, and perform poorly academically was explained by the idea that child labor hinders human capital development because it takes time and energy away from learning. Similarly, poverty and distance from school, which lead to child labor, indicate a preference for current gain at the expense of future gain through education.

Moreover, HCT played an important role in discussing the findings and their implications for future productivity and economic mobility. According to the findings, continued child labor perpetuates poverty across generations because it denies children the chance to acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for a productive future. Policy implications, according to the theory, include measures that lower the cost of schooling for families, such as financial aid for low-income families, school feeding programs, free education, and providing schools for poor communities. However, HCT is not enough since there are other determinants of child labor in society, like culture and gender roles.

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the research design, sampling procedures, research instruments, data collection and analysis procedures, measures adopted to ensure reliability and validity, and the ethical considerations underpinning the study. The study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between child labor, schooling, and quality education in Lafiagi District, Nigeria. The mixed-methods design capitalizes on the complementary strengths of quantitative and qualitative inquiry, enhancing the breadth, depth, and credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation (Gamage, 2025; Oranga, 2025).

The quantitative component involved a simple random sample of 116 parents residing in Lafiagi Township. We collected data using the Parental Child Labor Questionnaire (PCLQ). To minimize response bias and maintain independence between the two datasets, the quantitative sample excluded parents whose children participated in the qualitative component. The qualitative component used purposive sampling to recruit 20 school-aged children aged 10–17 years engaged in income-generating activities. The participants were drawn from the agrarian district of Lafiagi in North-Central Nigeria. The study setting was purposively selected because much existing research on child labor has focused predominantly on urban centers, with comparatively less attention given to children engaged in labor in rural and agrarian communities. The researchers identified participants in marketplaces, commercial shops, and along major streets, where they observed children hawking and engaging in other informal economic activities. The sample size was considered appropriate for generating an in-depth understanding of the children's lived experiences of child labor and its implications for their schooling.

Two data collection instruments were utilized: the Parental Child Labor Questionnaire (PCLQ) and an interview protocol. The PCLQ comprised 22 items measured on a five-point Likert scale to examine parents' perceptions of child labor and its influence on children's education. The interview protocol explored children's work experiences, school participation, and the challenges of balancing economic activities and education. Five core interview questions guided the interviews, with additional probing questions used where necessary to elicit richer, more detailed responses.

Expert review established the validity of both instruments to ensure content relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study objectives. The internal consistency of the PCLQ was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.83, which indicates good reliability and exceeds the commonly accepted threshold for research instruments.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The researchers transcribed qualitative data verbatim and analyzed them using thematic analysis involving systematic coding, categorization, and theme development. During interpretation, the researchers integrated findings from both strands to support a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The researchers obtained informed consent from parents or guardians of participating children and informed assent from the children themselves. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right

to withdraw at any stage without penalty. The study maintained confidentiality and anonymity by removing all personal identifiers from the dataset. All research data were securely stored and will be retained and disposed of in accordance with established institutional and research ethics guidelines.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite sustained national and international efforts to eliminate the practice, child labor remains a persistent social and educational challenge in Nigeria. Although scholars offer slightly different definitions, a broad consensus holds that child labor involves children below the legally prescribed working age engaging in economic activities that interfere with their education, health, and overall development (Bello et al., 2020; Chukwudeh, 2024). Lawal (2024) described child labor as a multidimensional phenomenon that continues to affect children across developed and developing countries despite extensive policy interventions. Similarly, Faluyi and Faluyi (2024) argue that its persistence reflects deep-rooted structural inequalities that undermine children's rights and opportunities. These perspectives collectively suggest that child labor extends beyond economic concerns to constitute a significant developmental and human rights issue.

The literature consistently identifies poverty as the most important determinant of child labor in Nigeria. Adeagbo and Mosobalaje (2023), Musa and Magaji (2023), Omigie (2024), and Uyanga et al. (2019) show that household economic deprivation compels many families to rely on children's labor to supplement income. Despite this consensus, poverty alone does not adequately explain the continued prevalence of child labor across the country's different regions. Faluyi and Faluyi (2024) emphasized that cultural norms often normalize children's participation in income-generating activities as part of their family responsibilities. Similarly, Anurioha (2024) argued that cultural and religious practices that frequently conflict with statutory provisions constrain the implementation of child protection legislation. Taken together, these studies indicate that child labor is sustained by the interaction of economic hardship, sociocultural expectations, and institutional limitations rather than poverty in isolation.

The educational consequences of child labor are well established. Previous studies have consistently shown that child labor limits school enrolment, increases absenteeism, reduces classroom participation, and contributes to poor academic performance (Anurioha, 2024; Ayoola & Agbabiaka, 2025). Abdu et al. (2020) observed that child labor negatively affects children's physical, emotional, and psychological well-being, thereby reducing their capacity to benefit from formal education. Supporting this position, the International Labor Organization and National Bureau of Statistics (2024) concluded that child labor deprives children of educational opportunities and healthy development by exposing them to exploitative work during critical childhood stages. Similarly, Agugua et al. (2024) argue that child labor perpetuates intergenerational poverty by limiting children's ability to acquire the knowledge, skills, and qualifications needed for future socioeconomic mobility. Although these studies provide substantial evidence regarding the adverse educational effects of child labor, they are predominantly based on cross-sectional research designs, limiting our understanding of the long-term educational trajectories of affected children.

An emerging body of literature has highlighted the gendered dimensions of child labor. Existing evidence indicates that boys and girls experience different forms of labor and associated vulnerabilities. Boys are predominantly engaged in agricultural activities, livestock rearing, apprenticeships, and informal religious education. In contrast, girls are more frequently employed in domestic service and street trading, sectors that often remain underrepresented in official statistics because they occur in informal settings (Anurioha, 2024; Faluyi & Faluyi, 2024). Furthermore, girls face disproportionately higher risks of sexual harassment, exploitation, and early marriage, largely because household investment in education frequently favors boys (Abdu et al., 2020; Ojuolape & Mohd, 2024; Ahmady, 2024). These findings suggest that child labor should not be treated as a gender-neutral phenomenon and that intervention programs should incorporate gender-responsive strategies that address the distinct vulnerabilities of boys and girls.

Beyond educational outcomes, the literature associates child labor with broader public health and national development challenges. Yunusa et al. (2024) observed that working children are frequently exposed to hazardous environments characterized by excessive working hours, poor remuneration, and inadequate occupational protection. Similarly, Adewumi and Bwowe (2024) linked child labor to increased risks of trafficking, sexual exploitation, insecurity, communicable diseases, and premature mortality. Recognizing these broader implications, Yu et al. (2025) argued that sustainable reductions in child labor require comprehensive socioeconomic policies that address poverty, unemployment, and household vulnerability alongside effective legislative enforcement. This position reflects an emerging consensus that legal sanctions alone are insufficient without broader structural reforms that improve household livelihoods and strengthen the child protection system.

Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates substantial agreement on both the determinants and consequences of child labor in Nigeria. Economic deprivation, sociocultural norms, gender inequality, and weak institutional enforcement consistently emerge as the principal drivers of child labor. In contrast, educational deprivation, poor academic achievement, adverse health outcomes, and persistent poverty are its major consequences.

However, the literature still has important gaps. Most existing studies use descriptive or cross-sectional designs that establish associations but do not adequately explain the mechanisms through which child labor shapes educational experiences and academic achievement over time. Furthermore, relatively few studies have examined the combined influence of socioeconomic, cultural, institutional, and gender-related factors within a single framework. Addressing these limitations would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of child labor and generate stronger evidence to inform educational policies and child protection interventions in Nigeria.

RESULTS

Tables 1-5 present the quantitative data analysis. Because a 5-point Likert scale was used, decisions on each item were based on a mean score of 3.0 as the benchmark (Aina et al., 2025; Ijeh & Iburho, 2023). **Table 1** shows that all mean scores are above the 3.0 benchmark, except for Item 3. This establishes the existence of child labor in Lafiagi District. **Table 2** shows that all the mean scores exceed the 3.0 benchmark, indicating that certain socioeconomic activities and the distance between schools and children's homes contribute to child labor.

Table 3 shows that all six items exceed the 3.0 mean threshold. This implies that child labor significantly affects children's education. **Table 4** indicates that all items exceed the 3.0 mean benchmark, suggesting gender differences in child labor in Lafiagi District.

Table 5 indicates that the four items have mean scores above the 3.0 benchmark, suggesting viable solutions to the child labor issue in Lafiagi District. The methodology section established that thematic analysis would be employed. Thematic analysis has various approaches; however, this study adopted the approach proposed by Lawal (2024), which involved coding participants' responses and categorizing them into themes.

Table 1. Evidences of child labor in Lafiagi District

s/n	Items	Mean	STD	Decision
1.	Children in my community work at home every day.	4.18	1.00	Accepted
2.	Children in my community work outside the home to help their families.	3.97	.62	Accepted
3.	The work these children do is suitable for their age.	2.51	1.2	Rejected
4.	The work these children do exposes them to danger.	3.68	1.04	Accepted

Table 2. The causes of child labor in Lafiagi District

Items	Mean	STD	Decision
1. Children miss school due to work at home or outside the home.	3.87	.89	Accepted
2. Family duties sometimes stop children from going to school.	3.92	.92	Accepted
3. Lack of money affects children's regular school attendance.	4.32	.93	Accepted
4. The distance between home and school makes it hard for some children to attend school daily.	3.81	.88	Accepted

Table 3. The impacts of child labor have on access to quality education

Items	Mean	STD	Decision
1. Children are often too tired from work to go to school.	3.77	.85	Accepted
2. When a child misses school, learning becomes hard.	4.47	.90	Accepted
3. Work and school together make learning challenging for children.	3.76	.90	Accepted
4. Missing school impacts children's academic performance.	3.90	.98	Accepted
5. Children worry about their future because of breaks in schooling.	4.05	.77	Accepted
6. Children's work reduces their time for reading or homework.	3.89	.80	Accepted

Table 4. Results regarding the gender gap in child labor in Lafiagi District

Items	Mean	STD	Decision
1. Boys and girls do different types of work in this community.	4.0431	.78455	Accepted
2. Girls stay at home more often than boys because of household chores.	4.0870	.84361	Accepted
3. Boys receive more encouragement than girls to attend school.	3.1552	.81937	Accepted
4. Boys and girls in my community have the same opportunities to attend school.	3.5086	.91837	Accepted

Table 5. The solutions to child labor in Lafiagi District?

Items	Mean	STD	Decision
1. Reducing children's workload will improve their learning.	4.38	.89	Accepted
2. Financial help for parents will support children's education.	4.42	.87	Accepted
3. School support programs (like meals and learning materials) will boost attendance.	4.48	.86	Accepted
4. Educating parents about the importance will reduce absenteeism.	4.34	.97	Accepted

Table 6. Respondents and Coding

S/N	Respondent	Assigned Code
1	Boy	B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B7, B8, B9
2	Girl	G1, G2, G3, G4, G5, G6, G7, G8, G9, G10, G11

The interview data were analyzed thematically and organized into five themes: child labor, impacts, gender, causes, and solutions. To protect participants' identities, **Table 6** shows that the 20 respondents were anonymized using participant codes: B1–B9 for the nine boys and G1–G11 for the eleven girls. These codes were used consistently throughout the presentation of the qualitative findings. Based on the responses, children are involved in various types of work, categorized into five themes. These themes are based on the key interview question central to the study. The themes are Child Labor, Cause, Gender, Impact, and Solution. Table 2 presents the participants' responses.

Table 7. Themes

S/N	Theme	Response
1	Child labor	Agriculture: weeding, harvesting, feeding animals, and chickens Business: shoe shining, selling in the shop, and at the market Household Chores: washing, cooking, fetching water, and firewood
2	Impact	School attendance, Absenteeism, learning, future, fatigue
3	Gender	Boys, Girls
4	Cause	School distance, money
5	Solution	Feeding, finance, school fees

Table 7 summarizes the interviewees' responses to the key question and the follow-up questions. The first question focuses on the kinds of work children do at home and outside the home. The remaining questions are follow-up questions generated from responses to the key question. Therefore, the responses presented below are drawn from both the principal question and the follow-up questions.

The interview responses are central to this study because they provide insights into how each participant involved in child labor experiences and describes the phenomenon in response to the interview questions. The questions were purposively developed to elicit information relevant to addressing the research questions. Participants' responses constitute the study's primary qualitative data and provide rich, contextual accounts of their experiences, perceptions, and views. In qualitative research, researchers typically collect data in participants' natural or real-life settings, allowing them to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and subsequently analyzed to identify meaningful patterns, themes, and interpretations emerging from the participants' accounts.

Theme 1: Child Labor

The responses indicate that children are involved in different forms of work at home and outside the home. These include agricultural activities, business activities, and household chores.

B3: "I help my father do farming activities, such as weeding and harvesting."

B4: "I help my family with various activities, such as selling at the market, working in the shop, and fetching water."

G8: "I fetch firewood for the family's use."

G1: "I feed my father's goats."

G5: "I help to feed sheep and chickens."

G11: "I help to wash, sweep, and fetch water."

B8: "I feed my father's animals."

G2: "I cook for the entire family."

B6: "I sell at the market and in the street."

Interviewer: How do these work affect your education and your future?

Theme 2: Impact

The responses show that child labor affects school attendance, punctuality, learning, concentration, fatigue, and perceptions of the future.

B1: *“Household chores make me go to school very late.”*

G3: *“It is sometimes difficult for me to go to school.”*

G4: *“It makes learning harder.”*

G5: *“Sometimes I get to school late and tired because of work at home.”*

B4: *“I am worried that I missed school, because it can affect my future.”*

B9: *“Someday, I am very tired and cannot concentrate well in class.”*

G10: *“When I missed school, I assumed I had missed the whole thing about my future.”*

Interviewer: Do boys and girls in your area do the same kind of work or go to school the same way? What differences do you notice?

Theme 3: Gender

The responses describe differences in the work boys and girls do and suggest that household work and farming activities may affect school attendance differently.

G6: *“Boys and girls in my community do not do the same work.”*

G9: *“Boys do heavier work.”*

G2: *“Some girls do not go to school every day because of work.”*

B5: *“Home chores make some girls go late to school.”*

B7: *“Most boys are engaged in farming work activities.”*

Interviewer: Can you tell me what encourages or discourages you from attending school regularly?

Theme 4: Cause

The responses identify factors that encourage or discourage regular school attendance, including learning materials, transport money, feeding, school distance, school fees, and parents' financial circumstances.

B2: *“I love going to school when I have learning materials, transport money, and free feeding.”*

B1: *“I am discouraged because of the distance from my home, and I have not paid my school fees.”*

G5: *“I am discouraged because my parents do not have money.”*

G7: *“I am discouraged because my home is far from the school.”*

Interviewer: What do you think would help children like you stay in school and learn better?

Theme 5: Solution

The responses suggest that free education, school feeding, financial support for low-income families, and reduced school fees could help children stay in school and improve their learning opportunities.

G3: *“If the government provides free education, free feeding, and financial support for poor families, there will be no need to send children to work.”*

B4: *“Reduction of school fees and introduction of the school feeding program will give me interest and better learning opportunities.”*

B6: *“Free feeding and financial support for my parents will help.”*

The direct quotations presented under each theme are drawn from the interview responses in the study. The thematic presentation is intended to show the participants’ accounts more directly while maintaining the anonymized respondent coding used in the study.

The results of both the quantitative and qualitative data were presented in the preceding paragraphs, providing the following findings:

- Child labor exists in Lafiagi District.
- Socioeconomic factors are major causes of child labor, including a lack of money for schooling, which forces children to work to generate additional income. The study found that school location contributes to child labor, which is a significant gap not identified in the reviewed literature. Children suggested that the distance between school and home leads them to work to pay for transport, since they cannot walk the distance.
- Child labor has severe effects on children’s developmental growth and academic performance.
- There are gender differences in child labor, as it affects boys and girls differently in Lafiagi District.
- There are possible solutions to child labor in Lafiagi District, including financial assistance to indigent families and the introduction of a school feeding program.

With the major findings presented above, it is important to discuss their significance in relation to previous studies.

DISCUSSION

This discussion is based on triangulating quantitative and qualitative data to address the research questions. The findings provide insight into child labor and schooling as factors that hinder quality education in Nigeria. The finding that child labor exists in the Lafiagi District agrees with the Nigeria Child Labor Survey, which reported exploitative work among children aged 11–17 (International Labor Organization & National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). The present study similarly identified agriculture, business, and domestic chores as major forms of work, with some tasks being age-inappropriate and hazardous. This is consistent with Oluwagbohunmi and Popoola (2023) and Faluyi and Faluyi (2024), who associated children’s work in Nigeria with poverty and risks such as heavy loads, kidnapping, and road accidents. The finding also reflects the broader pattern reported in the DRC, India, and Ghana, although the specific forms of work differ across contexts (Adonteng-Kissi, 2024; International Labor Organization, 2024; Mihigo et al., 2024). Thus, these findings align with broader evidence that child labor persists in economically disadvantaged communities.

The study further found that poverty, the need to supplement household income, and distance from school contribute to child labor. This finding is consistent with Oluwagbohunmi and Popoola (2023) and Ojuolape and Mohd (2024), who linked children’s work to household economic difficulties. Similarly, Mihigo et al. (2024) and Adonteng-Kissi (2024) identified poverty and educational barriers as important drivers of child labor in the DRC and Ghana, respectively. While these studies emphasize socioeconomic conditions, the present study additionally identifies school-home distance as a context-specific factor that may encourage some children to work to obtain transportation money. From the HCT perspective, this suggests that immediate household income may be valued over the longer-term returns of schooling.

The effects of child labor on quality education in the study region are also consistent with previous studies. The present study identified tiredness, lateness, absenteeism, reduced concentration, and inadequate time for homework as important educational consequences. These findings correspond with Akpotor (2018) and Abdu et al. (2020), who linked long working hours with fatigue, poor concentration, and difficulties with schoolwork, and with Tafashiya et al. (2024), who reported lower grades among children involved in hawking. The findings also extend the literature by highlighting children's worries about their future, complementing evidence of psychological and social difficulties, trauma, and abuse among child laborers (Anurioha, 2024; Faluyi & Faluyi, 2024). The consistency of these findings indicates that child labor affects not only attendance and academic performance but also children's well-being and future expectations.

The gender findings agree with and differ from previous evidence. This study found that boys are more involved in farming, whereas girls are more involved in domestic labor. This aligns with Ahmady (2024) and Anurioha (2024), who reported gender differences in the types of work children undertake. This finding also aligns with the Nigeria Child Labor Survey, which reported a slightly higher participation rate among boys and a greater burden of domestic chores among girls (International Labor Organization & National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). However, the finding that opportunities to attend school are the same for boys and girls differs from Ahmady (2024), who reported greater preference for boys' school attendance in some northern regions. Therefore, the current evidence suggests that gender differences remain more pronounced in work patterns and encouragement to attend school than in reported opportunities for school attendance.

The proposed solutions are supported by previous literature. The present study emphasizes financial assistance for low-income families, reduction of children's workload, school meals, learning materials, and parental awareness. These findings agree with Liang (2025), Omigie (2024), and Oluwagbohunmi and Popoola (2023), who emphasized financial support, food assistance, and awareness of the dangers of child labor, respectively. From the HCT perspective, such measures may reduce the immediate economic incentive for child labor while strengthening the perceived benefits of schooling.

Overall, the findings confirm that child labor undermines quality education by reducing attendance, increasing lateness, causing fatigue, limiting time for schoolwork, and reducing concentration. This agrees with the Nigeria Child Labor Survey and with Uyanga et al. (2019), Ojuolape and Mohd (2024), and Abdu et al. (2020), who associated child labor with absenteeism, lower grades, fatigue, and reduced learning. Evidence from the Almajiri context similarly shows how survival activities can restrict formal literacy and numeracy opportunities (Federal Republic of Nigeria & UNICEF, 2024; Lateef et al., 2024; Teke et al., 2020). The present study therefore confirms the broader literature while showing how these educational consequences manifest specifically in the Lafiagi District.

LIMITATIONS

The main limitation of the present study is the possibility of social desirability bias affecting participants' honesty. Such issues could be relevant due to the delicate nature of the topic, which makes it possible for respondents to deny any negative aspects of child labor out of concern for legal or other consequences. Additionally, a high non-response rate reduced the sample size, limiting the statistical power of the findings and the ability to generalize the results to the broader population.

CONCLUSION

Given these findings, the study examined how child labor hinders quality education in Nigeria. It highlighted the challenges that out-of-school children face in achieving education for all. Truancy and absenteeism are major challenges to quality education, as children who do not attend school regularly are unlikely to receive a quality education. The high rate of school dropout is also detrimental to the quality of education in Nigeria. The study

attributes this high dropout rate to the problem of child labor. It investigated child labor, schooling, and the quest for quality education in Lafiagi District. It was concluded that child labor hinders schooling and undermines quality education in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made: First, children should be enrolled in schools close to their homes, or free transportation should be provided. Second, a free feeding program should be introduced in schools across the district. Third, this research should be conducted in another region of the state with a larger sample of children for comparison.

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