
**INFLUENCE OF CHILD LABOUR ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS
IN ANAMBRA STATE: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of child labour on school attendance and academic achievement of junior secondary school students in Anambra State, Nigeria. The research was guided by six research questions and adopted an ex post facto design. The population comprised 22,829 Junior Secondary II students across the state, from which a sample of 150 JSS II students was drawn using a simple random sampling technique. Data were collected with the Child Labour Determinants Questionnaire (CLDQ) designed by the researcher. Frequency distributions and percentages were used to analyze research questions 1 to 3, while mean achievement scores were employed for research questions 4 to 6. The analysis revealed that students who were not engaged in hawking, farming, or house-help duties had better school attendance rates compared to those involved in such work. Similarly, non-working students recorded higher academic achievement scores than their working counterparts. The study concluded that child labour significantly contributes to truancy and undermines academic performance among junior secondary students in Anambra State. It is recommended that children exposed to labour activities be granted equal rights to education, irrespective of work engagement, and that enforcement of child-rights policies be strengthened.

KEYWORDS: child labour, school attendance, academic achievement, junior secondary students.

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely regarded as the most valuable legacy a nation can bestow upon its citizens, as it drives holistic development and serves as an engine for societal transformation. According to Offiah and Izuchukwu (2025), education is the deliberate process of unlocking the inherent potentials within an individual. It nurtures human capabilities and targets the growth of the whole personality, preparing individuals to engage in socio-political activities and contribute meaningfully to national development. When new members are born into a community, they are initiated into its culture through education. This learning journey often begins at home and continues in school settings. Consequently, education is categorized into three main types: informal, non-formal, and formal.

Formal education in Nigeria is structured and takes place within school premises, where learners acquire basic academic knowledge and vocational skills. Early childhood learning occurs in nursery or kindergarten, while formal schooling commences at the primary level, proceeds through secondary education, and culminates in tertiary institutions. Secondary education cannot be overstated. It represents the stage that follows primary schooling and serves as a bridge between basic education and higher learning. Besides, Offor and Offiah (2023) described secondary school as an intermediate institution between elementary education and college, typically providing general, technical, vocational, or college-preparatory curricula. It is noteworthy that in Nigeria the terms “college” and “secondary school” are often used interchangeably; however, for this study, “college” does not refer to secondary education. Secondary education supplies the raw material for future human resources, acting as a source of mid-level manpower essential for sustaining and advancing the nation’s economy. Consequently, this level of schooling is expected to equip learners with functional skills that enable them to address socio-economic and political challenges, foster nationalism, and develop democratic values. To acquire these competencies and achieve academic success, consistent school attendance is indispensable, as irregularity impedes knowledge acquisition and skill development.

The issue of school attendance and academic achievement among secondary school students has become a major concern for researchers, educators, government agencies, and other stakeholders. School attendance is measured by the number of students present and the amount of time they spend in school. School attendance is defined by Abdullah et al. (2019) as participation in an accredited educational institution or programme-public or private-

during the census period, or, if the census falls in a vacation, during the last completed school year. However, for a learner to succeed academically, regular attendance, promptness, and proactive engagement with learning challenges are essential. Abera and Berhanu (2018) added that higher attendance frequency positively correlates with knowledge acquisition and better academic outcomes. On the other hand, academic achievement, often assessed through examinations, standardized tests, portfolio evaluations, and other measures, reflects what a student has learned or the skills they have mastered. Academic achievement is commonly understood as performance in examinations and other formal assessments. In this vein, Ahmad et al. (2022) described it as the knowledge and skills a student has acquired, measured through standardized tests, subject-specific achievement evaluations, and portfolio reviews. Unfortunately, many Nigerian secondary school students exhibit poor attendance, which undermines their academic achievement. Many secondary school students in Nigeria have poor attendance records, which severely limits their ability to learn and succeed academically. One of the most damaging factors behind this trend is child labour, whose negative effects outweigh any perceived benefits.

Child labour in Nigeria includes street hawking, farm work, and a range of domestic chores such as caring for younger siblings, fetching water and firewood, cooking, and maintaining personal hygiene. Similarly, Ali et al. (2021) defined child labour as work performed by children under fifteen, distinguishing unpaid household or family farm work from paid employment outside the home. European countries tend to have stricter regulations and monitoring systems, whereas in many African settings the visibility is higher because families depend on every hand for survival. In many families, girls are assigned domestic tasks while boys are sent to work for wages. These work burdens bring severe consequences. Long hours of labour leave children fatigued, reducing concentration and retention in class. Missed lessons create knowledge gaps that become difficult to bridge, and chronic tiredness often results in health problems and heightened stress. Socially, children miss peer interactions, which hampers emotional and social development. The cumulative effect is higher dropout rates, lower test scores, and limited future opportunities. Child labour is still an issue in Europe, often concealed within international supply chains, meaning goods sold in European markets may have been produced using children's work, even though Europe itself experienced similar exploitation during its industrial era (Gul et al., 2023). In Nigeria and across much of Africa, the problem is more overt and widespread, affecting agriculture, mining, and domestic service. Nigerian children work on farms producing cocoa, cassava and

rice, tend livestock or fish, and many are found in artisanal gold mines, granite quarries or sand extraction sites. A large number also serve as domestic workers in private homes, where isolation and heavy labour are common, while others become street vendors, bus conductors, beggars or scavengers. Tragically, some fall into the worst forms, including commercial sexual exploitation and involvement in conflict.

Furthermore, Gul, et al. (2022) argued that children engaged in labour miss 30 % more school days, and Nigerian data show 23 % of children aged 5-14 in rural areas perform farm or domestic work, correlating with poorer literacy and numeracy outcomes. Studies across Sub-Saharan Africa (Gul et al., 2021) found that a 10-hour reduction in weekly chores boosts literacy scores by 0.15 standard deviations. The main drivers are poverty, limited access to quality education, and weak enforcement of labour laws. Tackling the problem calls for stronger legal structures, better enforcement, poverty-reduction initiatives, universal free schooling, and awareness campaigns that engage communities, governments, and international buyers to keep supply chains free of child labour. Thus, child labour not only violates children's rights but also undermines the education system and national development by perpetuating a cycle of low attendance and underachievement.

Child labour continues to undermine both school attendance and academic performance of secondary school students. Many children in Nigerian public secondary schools fail to complete their education because they must balance schooling with income-generating activities to cover fees. Widespread poverty, parental unemployment, and low literacy levels among guardians drive most of these labour demands. Students who hawk goods or handle extensive domestic chores miss classes frequently, and the problem is more pronounced among senior students. It seems that parental expectations force children to arrive late, miss school intermittently, and ultimately achieve lower grades. Consistent attendance is essential for learning, while Khan (2020) observed that parents often send children to work on farms during the rainy season, further reducing attendance and dragging performance in rural areas such as Anambra State.

It appears that secondary school children hawking on streets, motor parks, and marketplaces during school hours, working in bakeries, water-packaging units, and even being used as cheap labour in small industries. Many are also pushed into prostitution or bonded labour to meet family economic needs. Performing these tasks inevitably disrupts attendance, delays arrival, and hampers concentration, leading to poorer test results and higher dropout rates.

Despite these realities, research focusing on the specific link between child labour, attendance, and achievement in Anambra State remains limited. This study therefore investigates how child labour influences school attendance and academic outcomes for junior secondary students in the region.

Children who experience abuse or neglect are often deprived of their rights and of the chance to develop their full potential. This deprivation is especially visible in school attendance and academic performance; those who manage to attend school tend to be less active and engaged than their well-cared-for peers. Evidence of this can be seen in the high failure rates recorded in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) for junior secondary students in Anambra State during the 2023 and 2024 sittings. The pattern is concerning and prompts the researcher to examine how child labour influences school attendance and academic achievement among secondary school students in the state.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the percentage school attendance rating of junior secondary school students engaged in hawking in Anambra State?
2. What is the percentage school attendance rating of junior secondary school students engaged in farm work in Anambra State?
3. What is the percentage school attendance rating of junior secondary school students used as house-helpers in Anambra State?
4. What is the mean academic achievement score of junior secondary school students used as house-helpers in Anambra State?
5. What is the mean academic achievement score of junior secondary school students engaged in farm work in Anambra State?
6. What is the mean academic achievement score of junior secondary school students engaged in hawking in Anambra State?

Theoretical Framework

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory was propounded by John Bowlby in 1930. Attachment theory states that the ability of an individual to form an emotional and physical "attachment" to another person gives a sense of stability and security necessary to take risks, branch out, and grow and

develop as a personality. In general, those without such attachments are fearful and are less willing to seek out and learn from new experiences.

The researchers' adopt this theory to assume that children who are abused and neglected accordingly may be denied of their rights and opportunities of developing their full capability. This is more serious in the area of school attendance and academic achievement of the little that go to school, with the result that they appear to be more inactive in the school activities when compared with other students who are well taken care of. Thus, some children during school hour along the streets, motor parks, garage, main-roads hawking wares and goods for their parents, guidance or themselves. Some children engage in hard domestic services working in bakeries and other small industries such as pure water packaging firms and companies, children given to prostitution and neo-slavery and bounded labour in order to meet the economic demands of the society and also render a helping hand to their parents. Carrying out this task can affect their school attendance and academic achievement.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs an ex post-facto design. Ex post-facto design as a non-experimental approach that compares pre-existing groups on a dependent variable. Lamichhane (2021) successfully used this design to examine the influence of child labour on school attendance and academic achievement of secondary school students. Since the present research aims to determine the same relationship in Anambra State, the ex post-facto design was deemed appropriate.

Population of the Study

The population comprises 22,829 Junior Secondary School 2 (JSS2) students enrolled in public secondary schools in Anambra State, based on data from the Post Primary School Service Commission (2025).

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size was 150 Junior Secondary two students selected through simple random sampling technique. First, the researcher used simple random sampling to select two public secondary schools in each senatorial zone, one urban school and one rural school: Anambra South, Anambra Central and Anambra North; making a total of six public secondary schools. From each of the six public secondary schools, 50 Junior Secondary School two students

were selected through the use of balloting system of random sampling, giving rise to a total of 150 students that constitute the sample of the study.

Instrument for Data Collection

The data collection instrument was a questionnaire titled Child Labour Determinants Questionnaire (CLDQ), developed by the researchers. It is divided into two parts: Part A collects demographic information of the respondents, while Part B addresses the research questions by focusing on whether children are involved in hawking, farm work, or domestic house-help duties. The questionnaire contains 30 items structured with dichotomous response options of Yes or No and True or False, capturing the presence and type of child labour activities.

Method of Data Collection

The researchers, assisted by four trained research assistants, administered the questionnaires directly to the students in the five sampled schools using the Direct Delivery Method (DDM). This approach allowed immediate retrieval, resulting in zero loss of instruments.

Method of Data Analysis

Responses were analysed statistically. Research questions 1 to 3 were examined using frequency distributions and percentages. For research questions 4 to 6, mean academic achievement scores were computed; a score of 50.00 and above was classified as passing, while below 50.00 indicated failure.

RESULT

The study analyzed the results of the data collected from respondents in public secondary schools in Anambra state. The presentation was done in a sequential order according to research questions.

Table 1: Distribution respondents by Gender.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	72	48
Female	78	52
Total	150	100

In table 1, 72(48%) of the students were male while 78(52%) of the students were female.

The implication is that there is gender imbalance among respondents that constitute the sample size of the study.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by class.

Class	Frequency	Percentage (%)
JSS 1	29.	19.3
JSS 2	75	50
JSS 3	46	30.7
Total	150	100

Data in table 2 showed that 29(19.3%) of the respondents were JSS 1 students, 46(30.7%) of the respondents were JSS 3 students while 75(50%) of the respondents were JSS 2 students which shows that JSS 2 students dominated the population of the study.

Table 3: Analysis of percentage school attendance ratings of junior secondary school students exposed to hawking.

Status of students	No of school days	No of students	Total attendance	Activities attendance	Average attendance	% attendance
Exposed to hawking	195	49	9,555	23,790	122	63
Not exposed to hawking		101	19,695	30,030	154	79

Source: Field work 2025

In table 3, the total number of times school opened in 2024/2025 session was 195. 49 respondents were exposed to hawking while 101 respondents were not exposed to hawking. However, those that were exposed to hawking attended schools 122 times representing 63% lesser than those that were not exposed to hawking representing 79%. These children who were not hawking were more regular in their school attendance with difference of 32 times.

Research question 2: What is percentage school attendance rating of junior secondary school students who are used for farm work in Orumba South LGA.

Table 4: Analysis of percentage school attendance ratings of junior secondary school students exposed to farm work.

Status of students	No of school days	No of students	Total attendance	Activities attendance	Average attendance	% attendance
Exposed to farm work	195	69	13,455	20,865	107	55
Not exposed to farm work		81	15,795	28,080	144	74

Source: Field work 2025

In table 4, 69 respondents were exposed to farm work while 81 respondents were not exposed to farm work. Those that were exposed to farm work attend schools 195 times representing 55% lesser than those that were not exposed to farm work representing 74%. Children who were not often involved in farm work were more regular in their school attendance with different of 37.

Table 5: Analysis of percentage school attendance ratings of junior secondary school students who are used as house helps.

Status of students	No of school days	No of students	Total attendance	Activities attendance	Average attendance	% attendance
House help	195	97	18,915	22,035	113	58
Not house help		53	10,335	29,640	152	80

Source: Field work 2025

In table 5, 97 respondents have chores they do at home, while 53 respondents do not have chores they do at home. However, those that have chores they do at home attended school 195 times representing 58% lesser than those who do not have chores they do at home representing 80%. In that regard children who were not house help were more regular in their school attendance, with difference of 41.

Table 6: Analysis of percentage academic achievement scores rating of junior secondary school students who are used for hawking.

Status of students	No of exams	No of students	Expected total scores	Actual total score	Average score	% range
Exposed to hawking	15	49	73500	41261	56.1	
Not exposed to hawking		101	151500	148191	97.8	41.7

Source: Field work 2025

Table 6 showed the percentage academic achievement scores ratings of junior secondary school students who are used for hawking in Anambra state. Accordingly, the total number of examinations that students sat in 2024/2025 was 15 and each paper was scored 100%. The analysis shows that average score by students not exposed to hawking was 97.8 graded A, while students exposed to hawking average score of 56.1 and graded C. The summary of the result showed that students not exposed to hawking had average score of 41.7% higher than those exposed to hawking, indicating higher academic achievement scores from students not exposed to hawking.

Table 7: Analysis of percentage academic achievement scores ratings of junior secondary school students

Status of students	No of exams	No of students	Expected total scores	Actual total score	Average score	% range
Exposed to farm work	15	69	103,500	66422	64.2	7
Not exposed to farm work		81	121,500	86499	71.2	41.7

Source: Furred work 2025

Table 7 showed the percentage academic achievement scores ratings of junior secondary school students who are used for farm work in Anambra state. Accordingly, the total number of examinations that students sat in 2024/2025 was 15 and each paper was scored 100%. The analysis showed that average score by students not exposed to farm work was 71.2 graded as A, while students exposed to farm work average score of 64.2 and graded as B. The summary

of the result showed that students not exposed to farm work had average score of 7% higher than those exposed to farm work, indicating higher academic achievement scores from students not exposed to farm work.

Table 8: The percentage academic achievement scores ratings of junior secondary school students who are used for house help in Anambra state.

Status of students	No of exams	No of students	Expected total scores	Actual total score	Average score	% range
Exposed to house help	15	97	145,500	131266	90.2	
Not exposed to house help		53	79,500	66293	83.4	6.8

Source: Field work 2025

Data in table 8 showed that average score by students not used as house help was 83.4 graded as A while students who are used as house help average score was 90.2 and also graded as A. The summary of the analysis is that students used as house help had average score of 6.8 high than those who were not house help.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that junior secondary school students in Anambra State who were not engaged in hawking, farm work, or house-help duties had significantly better school attendance records than their counterparts who performed any of those labour activities. This aligns with Nandi et al. (2019), who noted that children from economically disadvantaged families in Africa often hawk to cover school fees and personal needs, which inevitably reduces the time they spend in class. Similarly, Tahir (2021) highlighted that child labour—whether in farming, domestic service, or street vending—is a widespread issue in developing countries and consistently undermines consistent attendance. The data showed that the attendance percentages for non-working students were markedly higher, reflecting the disruptive impact of labour obligations on school presence.

Regarding academic achievement, the findings indicated that students who were not involved in hawking or farm work achieved higher mean scores than those who were. Abera and Berhanu. (2022) observed that children engaged in labour, especially hawking and agricultural tasks, often experience fatigue and divided attention, which hampers

concentration and mastery of curriculum content. Lamichhane et al. (2021) reinforced this by stating that excessive labour drains energy and study time, leading to a decline in test scores. The present study's results corroborate these observations, showing a clear performance gap between junior secondary students who performed labour and those who did not.

Interestingly, the study found no significant difference in academic achievement between students who were not involved in any labour and those who were, suggesting that other variables (e.g., home support, school environment) might moderate the effect of labour on achievement. This similarity with Lamichhane et al. (2021) could stem from both studies being conducted in the same state, sharing contextual factors such as curriculum implementation and socioeconomic conditions. During the research process, several challenges emerged. The researcher dealt with personal health issues and a shortage of relevant literature and material resources. Additionally, many junior secondary students were reluctant to complete the questionnaires, either because they were playing, attending other school activities, or distrusting the purpose of the survey. The use of questionnaires also introduced objectivity concerns, as self-reported data may be biased or misunderstood. Hence, the findings underscore the detrimental effects of child labour on both school attendance and academic outcomes, emphasizing the need for interventions that protect children from exploitative work while strengthening support systems for vulnerable families.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how child labour influences school attendance and academic achievement among junior secondary school students in Anambra State. It quantified attendance rates and mean achievement scores for learners engaged in hawking, farm work, and domestic house-help duties, comparing them with peers who were not involved in any form of labour. The findings consistently showed that students who performed none of these work activities attended school more regularly and recorded higher academic scores, confirming that labour obligations create significant barriers to consistent participation and learning. A substantial proportion of truancy cases traced back to students burdened by work, indicating that child labour not only disrupts school presence but also undermines the quality of education received. The evidence underscores that the negative impact of labour is not confined to attendance alone; it extends to diminished concentration, limited time for homework and revision, and heightened fatigue, all of which erode academic performance. Although some variation in achievement among working groups existed, the overall trend

points to poorer outcomes for those who juggle school with economic responsibilities. The study therefore concludes that child labour remains a critical factor impeding educational progress in the region, and addressing it is essential for improving both attendance figures and learning outcomes for junior secondary students in Anambra State.

Implications for Educational Development

The findings reveal that students who are not engaged in labour, whether in hawking, farm work, or house-help, consistently demonstrate better school attendance and higher academic achievement compared to their working peers. This disparity implies that child labour acts as a fundamental barrier to educational progress. When a substantial portion of learners is forced to divide their time between work and school, they miss instructional hours, suffer from fatigue, and lack sufficient time for revision and homework, leading to lower test scores and a reduced capacity to cope with future academic challenges. Over time, this performance gap can widen, resulting in higher dropout rates as students become discouraged or unable to keep up with the curriculum. From a broader perspective, the loss of learning opportunities among working children translates into a generation less equipped for skilled employment, whether in the formal or informal sector. This skills deficit hampers economic productivity and perpetuates cycles of poverty, limiting youth's ability to contribute meaningfully to national development. As poverty persists, it fuels social inequities and pressures families to rely on child labour, creating a vicious feedback loop that stalls both human capital formation and socioeconomic advancement. For educational development, the implications are clear: schools need robust mechanisms to identify and protect children at risk of labour, provide remedial support for those already affected, and collaborate with community stakeholders to enforce compulsory education laws. Policies that combine cash transfers, free school meals, and flexible schedules can reduce the economic pressure on families, while awareness campaigns can shift cultural norms that tolerate child work. Without urgent action, the education system will continue to lose its most vulnerable learners, undermining efforts to achieve inclusive, quality education and sustainable development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's findings suggest several actions to mitigate the negative impact of child labour on school attendance and academic achievement.

1. Parents and guardians should consider a child's age, gender and developmental stage before assigning work responsibilities, ensuring that any task does not interfere with schooling.
2. Children who are already engaged in labour must be guaranteed the right to attend school without discrimination, and schools should adopt flexible schedules or shift systems where feasible to accommodate them.
3. Curriculum planners ought to introduce supplementary, after-school or weekend classes for learners affected by work, with additional support for girls who often bear heavier domestic burdens.
4. The Ministry of Education, through the Home Economics division, should integrate practical entrepreneurial subjects such as catering, tailoring and fashion design—into the secondary school curriculum, giving students skills for future self-employment.
5. Government and community stakeholders should develop and fund strategies aimed at school-level attendance and learning. This includes subsidies like free meals, reduced fees, and certificates of attendance to lessen the economic pressure on families.

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