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Liminality and Child Labour: Experiences of School Aged Working Children with Implications for Community Education in Africa

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Abstract: Background: Liminality brings confusion among children as they cannot progress to the next stage of life, neither could they regress to their previous state of events. The situation is precarious for socioeconomic deprived children in Africa as it cast aspersion on their career, health and well-being. The study, therefore, examines the experiences' of children who were supposed to be in school but were observed working at the informal market space in Africa. Methods: Qualitative data was collected through referral and non-discriminative snowballing. Forty-eight participants (48-KII 2, IDI 10, FGD 6–6 person per group, total 36) from Aleshinloye and Bodija markets in Southwest Nigeria were included in the study. Results: Parental poverty, poor education facilities, peer influence, and the frequent strike by education institutions (pre-tertiary and tertiary) were implicated for the prevalence of child labour in the informal market space in Southwest Nigeria. Conclusions: The negative consequences of the liminality stage far outweigh the positive. Therefore, there is a need for conscientious efforts by community leaders, parents, and relevant stakeholders in the society to eradicate snags within the liminality of children's education in order to curb child labour. This is necessary to achieve the sustainable development goals by 2030.

Keywords: Africa; child labour; education; liminality; out-of-school children



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1. Introduction

1.1. Context of Liminality in Africa

Liminality as first used by Arnold Van Gennep (1873–1957) and magnified by Victor Turner was the description of rituals and transition within the social progression that shape social experience. Arnold used the term “liminal phase” in his rites de passage to describe the gap in the natural transition from one stage or phase to another. To Arnold Van Gennep (1960), the transition is in three phases: separation, margin, and aggression. Separation is a symbolic behaviour, which shows the detachment of an individual or group from an earlier static location in the social structure. The second stage is the liminal phase where an individual is in oblivion in the chain of natural progression because there is currently an absence of any aspect of the past or the next stage. The third stage is aggression, which is a stage of consummation (Turner 1969).

According to Obono and Mohammed (2010), the modern industrial society established the school as a strategy to prepare children for future labour force participation. However, in Africa, the length of time spent acquiring such education could become confusing and worrisome due to incessant strike action on campus, which results in a student spending more than 4 years for a 4-year programme. On many occasion, during periods of prolonged strike action which creates non-engagement of schooling activities and idleness, it becomes difficult to describe anyone as students, neither are they unemployed but they are in the central stage as they cannot advance to the next level academically, neither can they

retrogress backward to their previous level. This stage of betwixt is a deviation from the natural norm of progression.

Obono and Mohammed (2010) liken this period to a foetus in the womb that has no status or social rank signifying them, nothing distinguishes them to a specific object. They could as well be likened to temporary or contract staff within an organization who are neither staff of that organization, neither are they unemployed. Liminality breeds ambiguity, depression, and confusion when children cannot classify themselves as students or employees of an organization. They are likened to “*Jambite*” (those seeking admission into the tertiary institutions) who are neither in school nor are they out of school. That period of waiting for admission is characterized by pressure and wilderness of time.

In this study, we engage the term liminality to explain the experience of children in Africa using Nigeria as a case study. The central focus is on children who were once students in a school but are currently or temporarily not in school. The liminal may be caused by strike action within the education system, a period of waiting for admission, or children that dropout of school due to the inability of parents to pay tuition fees. During the liminal period, young children are categorized into three groups. The first are those who utilize this period to engage in industrial activities within the informal market space. The second are those who utilized the liminal stage to learn vocational skills such as fashion design, mechanical engineering, hairdressing, etc. The third are those who remain at home with hope or anticipation that the liminal stage will soon pass away. In this study, we are concern about the first and second groups. The liminal phase was used in this article to examine the ambiguity experienced by children in Nigeria. Such ambiguity is seen, first among children who are waiting for admission into the tertiary institutions and for this reason, are not classified as students, out-of-school children, or employees. They are in a state of flux, un-identity, or identity crises; they are neither here nor there (Obono and Mohammed 2010). Children that learn vocational skills during the liminality stage are likely not certified apprentice because they do not often complete the learning process, nor are they currently a student in the formal school setting. There is a tendency for those that decide to learn vocational skills to spend a longer period than schedule.

Furthermore, this study seeks to examine the passive but significant economic contributions of the liminal phase of young children’s education to social development in Nigeria and Africa. The education system in Nigeria provides a case to illustrate and examines certain questions about learning in the liminal phase: what are the experiences of school-aged children during the liminal phase of their education? What are the push factors that motivates these children to engage in industrial activities within the informal market space? What are the pull factors that propel traders in the informal market space to recruit children? How is the recruitment process define and how do traders get these children? While we argued that, it is ideal for children to work and contribute to the economic growth of a country within a relevant context. We also suggest that this process should pass through natural progression (Basic education, pre-tertiary institution, tertiary institution, work) as anything-contrary increases the risk of premarital sex, teenage pregnancy, child parenting, HIV, and STD prevalence, increased crime rate, and insecurity. These disadvantages may well overwhelm the benefit and raise questions about the implications of the children’s liminality phase on the education system in Nigeria. Previous studies on the liminality has largely been conducted in developed countries, especially in Europe. These studies focused on the effects of liminality on identity construction, and learning within an organisation (Beech 2011; Olaveson 2001; Tempest and Starkey 2004). The only known study on liminality that was conducted in Africa concentrated on the effect of liminality on adolescent reproductive health (Obono and Mohammed 2010). However, negligible attention has been given to the liminality in the education system as pathways to child labour within the contexts of Africa. This study is essential as child abuse is a resurgent and topical issue with high prevalence in Africa, and it is a major threat to the achievement of the sustainable development goals in the continent.

1.2. Child Labour in the Context

Child labour is a nebulous concept because its meaning differs within different/relevant contexts. For instance, a child hawking commodities on the street may not be regarded as child labour and abuse but rather as a means of training and development of the child within the African context (Adebayo and Olaogun 2019; Johnson et al. 2019). However, the World Health Organisation (2016) describes child labour as any work performed by a child who is below the legal age of work, in exchange for a reward, which deprives the child of formal education and normal development. This definition may have little meaning to poor households who perceive the family as a team where every member contributes to its survival. In line with this perception, Nduka and Duru (2014) noted that the prevalence of out-of-school children is alarming, where children are seen hawking goods at traffic during school hours and many of these children are sexually exploited in exchange of little money. This highlights the precarious situation that many children experience in Africa. Despite the differences in the conception of child labour, it is paramount to note that the engagement of children for labour is dehumanizing.

The recruitment of children for economic activities seems to be more visible within the informal space. Studies show that more than 80% of workers in less industrialised countries are recruited by the informal sector, yet, this is often not documented by relevant policy and labour sector (Al-mataani et al. 2017; Siqueira et al. 2016). Workers in the informal space earn different wages based on their age, gender, and level of education. In the informal market space, workers' wages are determined latently through informal interaction between traders. The traders association accommodates membership into different units. The various association in Nigeria's informal market space, for example, are guided by written and unwritten rules within the market. Many traders in the informal market join the market association because of the benefit of social capital, and protection expressed through unity, soft loan and interpersonal assistance (Omobowale et al. 2018; Oladejo 2015).

Omobowale and Omobowale (2019) further reiterate that the social solidarity that exists between the informal market traders serves as a chain that propels corporation and survival within the informal market space. The binding force that connects traders in the informal market space is social capital, characterized by trust and shared norms (Cohen and Prusak 2001). Considering the large proportion of children recruited by traders in the informal market space and the passion for such action therein. The central question in this study is, why do school aged children engage in labour in the informal market space at a time when they were supposed to be in school? The first objective of the article was to document the liminal stage which many children experience. The second objective examined the push factors that propel the choice of children as labour. Finally, we explored the dynamics of gender preference for recruiting children as labour in the Ibadan informal market space.

1.3. Liminality and Child Labour

Scholars have written extensively on out of school and in-school children (Sambo and Gyang 2019; Zira and Zumo 2020), however, negligible attention has been given to school-age children in the liminal space (they are neither out of school nor are they, in-school children). Millions of children are permanently or temporary not presently in school, neither are they completely out of school. Rather, they are temporary in a state where they cannot be described as students or out of school-children. This betwixt is a critical stage in the development milestone of children as it has long-lasting implications on their health and development. The health, well-being, and survival of children less than 18 years have long been the concern of governments and Non-Governmental Organizations, globally. These are evident by the policy thrust by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that was adopted by the United Nation (UN) General Assembly in December 1966 and entered into force in 1976; Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that was adopted by the General Assembly in November 1989; and the

Declaration on the Survival, Protection, and Development of Children and a Plan of Action for implementing the Declaration in the 1990s that the World Summit on Children adopted in 1990; and the UNESCO annual reports on the state of the world children.

Studies on children working for income have largely focused on child trafficking, house help, and children working to feed family members (Fetters 2020; UNODC 2016). These studies have not given attention to children on the street, and children of the street who risk their life every day carrying heavy luggage for traders in exchange for money. What are the pull and push factors that propel or endears these children to work for traders in the informal market space? How do the betwixt in children's education serve as barriers and enablers to micro-industrial practices at the informal market space? Responding to these questions is germane considering the implications of the high prevalence of child labour in Nigeria and Africa (World Health Organisation 2016).

Nigeria operates 9-3-4 educational system. This comprised of 9 years Universal Basic Education (UBE) which was designed to eradicate illiteracy by providing free, compulsory, and universal primary, secondary, university, and adult education programmes. These free education programmes were aimed to reduce regional and gender inequality in the education system in Nigeria. The 9 years universal basic education (UBE) is made up of 6 years primary school and 3 years junior secondary school. In addition, the 3 years in the system is for 3 years senior secondary school, which prepares students' for entrance examination into tertiary institutions. The 4 years in the system is 4 years in the tertiary institution such as university, polytechnic, monotechnic, and other institutions awarding degree certificates. In time past, it was easier to predict a student's age based on his/her class in school. However, this has become difficult due to the fact that many parents want their children to complete their education on time and for this reason, they aid them to skip classes, and write examination for higher classes.

1.4. Statement of the Problems

The International Labour Organisation (2001) estimates that forty-seven percent of the global working children are in Africa. The prevalence of child labour is still high in Nigeria despite efforts by governments to reduce its practice. The ancient city of Ibadan in Southwest Nigeria is a hot-spot for child labour (Azeez and Nwauwa 2018; Tade and Aderinto 2012), where children are susceptible to sexual exploitation, negligence, drug abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases (Omokhodion et al. 2006; Aderinto 2007). Previous studies have reported that children were recruited by middle-income urban households (Tade and Aderinto 2012; Aderinto 2007). However, negligible attention has been paid to the pathways of child labour through the informal market space where large number of children who are supposed to be in school are presently working for financial reward.

The situation is made worse because many graduates in Nigeria do not get formal employment due to lack of the requisite skills necessary for contemporary industrial organisations (Adebisi et al. 2012; Olutola and Olatoye 2020; Yusuf et al. 2015). This makes most Nigerian youth to perceive education as a fraud because formal education does not guarantee employment after graduation (Odey et al. 2020a). The lack of skills among graduates in Nigeria had been attributed to incessant strike action in the public tertiary institutions (Julien 2018). For instance, within the year 2017 to 2020, the public universities in Nigeria have been shut down for more than 15 months due to incessant strike action, which compels students to stay away from academic activities within the campus. What are the experiences of children during this period of strike? This question is necessary since boredom has been associated with poor academic performance, illicit sexual activities, psychosocial problems, and school dropout (Cui et al. 2017; Elpidorou 2014). Moreover, there is high tendency of students not returning back to school after long period of strike.

Sociologist view school dropout as a long-term process of academic disengagement that is influenced by both in-school, and out-of-school factors that begins early in a student's academic career (Terrence et al. 2018; Freeman and Simonsen 2015;

Rumberger and Rotermund 2012; Henry et al. 2012). Previous studies have associated factors responsible for school dropout to depression (Quiroga et al. 2013), behavioural problems such as substance use, violent behaviour and truancy (Bradshaw et al. 2008), poor academic performance (McGrath and Bergen 2015), negative teachers-students relationship (Prino et al. 2016), poor socioeconomic status (De Witte et al. 2013), and family socialization process (Torres 2015). These pathways leading to school dropout and subsequently working at a tender age are not exhaustive within the contexts of Africa. Unlike previous studies, this study presents the pathways to school dropout within the context of frequent strike action by academic institutions in Nigeria.

2. Data and Methods

2.1. Design

This is a descriptive qualitative design that utilized content analysis to enable the presentation of words and themes. The use of the qualitative technique was necessary to explore the experiences of school aged children that work in the informal market space during the liminal stage of their education. This design helps in the interpretative understanding of children's experiences in Africa using Nigeria as a case study.

2.2. Settings

The study was conducted in Ibadan, located in Oyo State, Southwest Nigeria. Ibadan is the largest ancient city in sub-Saharan Africa. The city is a hot-spot for child labour and trafficking (Tade and Aderinto 2012). The city serve as a source, transit, and destination for working children. The markets in Ibadan serves as a trajectory for child labour (Omokhodion et al. 2006). Ibadan is characterized by ancient and modern markets where children are seen working and begging for alms (Azeez and Nwauwa 2018). Aleshinloye and Bodija markets in Ibadan were purposively selected for the study due to the high incidence of working children in that space. Aleshinloye market is a modern market for buying and selling of household materials and clothes. Bodija market is the largest foodstuff center in Southwest Nigeria. The market serves as interjection between traders in the North and South in Nigeria (Omobowale 2018). Traders from all ethnic groups operate in Ibadan markets.

2.3. Study Participants

Fourty-eight participants were recruited from Aleshinloye and Bodija markets in Ibadan, Southwest Nigeria. Two (2) key informant interviews (one from each of the markets) were included in the study. The key informants were the "Iyaloja" (Market matrons) in the market who were considered influential within the market space. Ten In-Depth Interviews (five from each of the markets) that comprised male and female traders were interviewed. Six (6) focus group discussions (FGD) that includes 36 participants' were included in the study. The focus group discussions was held with young children that works in the market space. To ensure all members fully participates in the study, homogenous focus groups in term of gender, age, and qualifications were formed. The first group of the FGD was a mix of three males and three females, the second group was made up of six males only, while the third group was six females only. The same methods was used in both markets with the thirty-six participants (eighteen participants in each market) in the FGDs. Participants age range between 7 and 17 years. To gain access into the study setting, the researcher got verbal approval from the market leaders. These market leaders introduced the researcher to few traders who had young children as their staff. Through referral and non-discriminative snowballing sampling, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participants.

2.4. Instruments and Guides

Semi-structured interview guides, audiotape, pen, and field notes were tools used for data collection during the interviews and focus group discussions. Semi-structured

guides was used to ensure consistency of instruments within groups. The topics covered by the interview guides were: entry processes into the market, social network in the market, motivation for recruiting children as labourer, wages or salary paid to these children per day and month, gender preference for child labour, reasons for such preference, the recruitment processes of those children, market association and levy, what motivates children into this trade, was dropping out of school temporary or permanent, if permanent they should give reasons, and description of their family history. The interview guides was piloted at New Gbagi market, Ibadan Southwest, Nigeria. Correction and adjustment were made after the pilot study.

The interview guide was modified for the FGD due to the level of reasoning and understanding of young children. The FGD was conducted for only young children that works in the market. The participants in the FGD were within 7–17 years, while those in the IDI and KII were within 38–65 years old. A focus group comprised of 6 members and six FGDs (3 in each market) was conducted within June to August 2018. The length of time was due to busy nature of the sales personnel in the market that made them unavailable at a spot. Patience and persistence was required to finally get their audience due to their busy schedule. Data collection was only possible on Thursday morning during the period when shops and business environments were temporary shut down due to the compulsory environmental sanitation exercise. When a Thursday was not possible, a schedule was made for another Thursday. This continued until the data was completely collected. Comments from the respondents were recorded with an audio tape recorder. Field notes were used to jot down points after requesting for permission from the respondents. The themes that formed the objectives of the study were derived from the responses of the respondents. The total duration of each interview range from 1–4 hours as repeat interviews was conducted when a session was not exhausted for the key informants. The interviews ended after data saturation. All interviews was conducted at a private office in the markets as participants insisted they were comfortable with the settings. The researchers ensured that only the participants were around the study setting during interviews.

2.5. Data Collection Procedures

In-depth interview (IDI) was conducted with ten traders in the two markets (five persons per market). The respondents were purposively selected through snowballing after the initial referral from the key informants in the market. After each face-to-face interview, the researchers requested for a referral from the respondent for any other person who have a child as a staff. Despite referrals, two persons still refused to take part in the research because they thought the researchers were law enforcement agents. The researchers therefore informed all respondents that this was purely an academic exercise. This continued until data saturation when new ideas were not forth-coming.

Two key informant interview (KII) was conducted among female market leaders and prominent persons (Market matrons) in the markets. A key informant was selected from each market. The key informants has been in the market for more than 5years. The key informants identified and linked the researchers with traders that met the inclusion criterion. This made the respondents a little relaxed even though they were initially nervous due to the insecurity in Nigeria. The IDI, and KII was limited to 40 min at each setting. When an interview was not completed by 40 min, the researchers revisited the respondents to continue. All respondents gave verbal consents.

Six focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with children that currently work in the market. At each market, three focus group discussions (FGD) were held. This makes a total of six focus group discussions at the two markets. Each focused group comprised of six individuals and a total of 36 individuals participated in the entire FGDs. The FGD did not exceed 60 min. The young participants were informed that participation was not compulsory and that they were free to opt out at any time. The young children that participated in the FGD gave consent by writing their names on a sheet of paper, and

appending their signature beside their names. In addition, contextually children between 7 and 17 years were old enough to understand the concept of the study. The FGDs were conducted to explore the experiences of children that works in exchange for financial rewards. The FGDs were held at the market because the participants felt comfortable and safe at the location. Arrangement were made for the meetings to be held on Thursdays between 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. In Ibadan, business activities do not commence until 10 a.m. on Thursdays due to compulsory environmental sanitation exercise within the market on this specific day. Thus, the researchers utilized this free period to conduct the interviews. The discussion was conducted in Pidgin English and Yoruba language simultaneously. All discussions were audio recorded with the consent of the participants and the FGDs were conducted between June and August 2018. Four female research assistants were recruited and trained on methods of data collection. These research assistants were postgraduate students who are resident of the study location for at least 5 years.

2.6. Data Analyses

The thematic analysis approach as suggested by [Braun and Clark \(2006\)](#) was used for this study. In the thematic analyses, the data generated from the field were qualitatively analysed to generate themes and sub-themes. The themes were generated from the experiences of respondents. Thus, the researchers were able to compare and contrast data to efficiently describe the relationship between themes. The two researchers were involve in the coding using Microsoft Word. An initial line-by-line open coding was used to categorize and summarize the data ([Berg 2001](#)), followed by more focused coding centered on the significant codes and categories that tended to be more conceptual. This facilitated comparative analysis, aimed at comparing data to data, and data to codes and categories in order to identify similarities and differences. The thematic analysis was done using an inductive method as themes were developed from data generated from the field. First, code was generated from data. When a group of codes was repeated in a particular way, it became a theme. Themes were developed by the compare and contrast approach, which entailed a line by line analysis of words, sentences, and content. Each line was read, and contextual meaning deduced. This was followed by sentence to word, and sentence to sentence analysis to know how one word and sentence differed from the preceding word and sentence, and the meaning therein. Pairs of text were compared to know their contextual meaning among the respondents. This method made the data analyses robust.

2.7. Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval was sought from the University of Ibadan Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Committee, University of Ibadan, Nigeria with the assigned number UI/SSHEC/2017/0025. In addition, the international standard ethical issues bordering on respondent's confidentiality, beneficence to participants, non-maleficence, and justice as it affects the study was considered and respected. To ensure anonymity, all respondents and participants were label "P".

3. Results

The findings of the study were presented along three objectives which focused on factors that motivates young children to work in the informal market space, pull factors for recruiting children for labour, and gender preferences for child labour. These objectives aid the interpretative understanding of school aged children experiences during the liminal stage of their education. The major themes in the study were derived from the data.

3.1. Motivation for Working in the Market

We examined many of the young children that work in the informal market space to deduce their motivation for working in the market. While some of these children have been living on the street for years, some others reported that they were driven out of school because their parent could not afford their school fees. Instead of remaining idle at home,

they had decided to “*hustle*” (which means to work in informal settings for a return of money). A respondent reported:

I stopped schooling when I was in Junior secondary classes. My parents could not pay for my school fees. It was embarrassing that I had to drop out of school but I could not stay at home that long because it was frustrating. Thus, I had to “*hustle*” for myself. I work all day including weekends to be able to complement my mother efforts to feed the family

(P1)

This shows that out-of-school children were engaged in informal employment at the informal market environment to get financial resources to care for themselves. Another respondent reiterate this further when she stated:

My parent did not prioritize the education of their female children. They paid less concern to my education to the extent that they did not purchase writing materials and other educational materials for me. The worst was that they were not paying my school fee but the principal had been overlooking them due to my good academic performance. But when the principal died, the new principal insisted that I pay my school fee, and when I could not pay for 2 terms, I was told not to come again

(P2)

This highlights the educational experience of out-of-school children in Nigeria as school dropout resulted in inhumane activities in the informal market space. Some of the respondents were in primary schools, while a few were in secondary schools before they joined the trade. Another respondent narrated her experience on how she started working in the market, thus:

I had difficulty with my academic performance and I could not with the pressure associated with learning in school. I was not performing to expectation academically as I struggled to read in Senior Secondary School, my teacher and classmates often mock me. I found this distressful and felt education was not meant for me. Therefore, I stopped attending school and ran out of home. It was only recently that my stepparents appealed to me to come back home after realizing I have made up my mind. There are a lot of bully in the school and that discouraged me

(P3)

Interpersonal challenges was a constraint to continuing education among children in Nigeria. The challenges range from household constraint to teachers’ management as school bully was identified as a factor that leads to school-drop-out. In a quest to understand other factors that motivate students to drop out of school, we further engaged the respondents to get divergent views from other respondents. We found that aside parental challenges and teachers bullying their students, peer pressure contributes to the high rate of school dropout and children working in the informal market space. A respondent noted:

My friends lured me through financial inducement to join them to hustle in the market space. When I notice they were getting money, I was enticed to join them. It is the survival of the fittest. On my own, I would not have known that I can earn money at my current age but through this “*hustling*”, we are surviving

(P4)

Having identified that inability of parents to pay for school fees, bullying students at school by teachers discourages the student, and influences from peers were motivations that propel children to engage in economic activities in the market space. We also observed that children whose parents were dead were susceptible to work at the informal market

for survival. This was dominant in the remarks of the respondents. For instance, a respondent stated:

I am the eldest son in my family and my siblings depend on me for food, shelter, and clothing. I had to work to provide food, a shelter for all of us since my parents are dead, and there was nobody to assist us. When my parents died, all we got was failed promises from family members. I could not continue my education because there was no finance to sponsor it. The challenges before me propel me to launch into the market to “hustle”. “Bros, man must wack”
(Sir, must eat for survival) (P5)

Due to poverty and the quest to seek finance to feed oneself, young adolescents that were supposed to be in school have plunged themselves into informal economic activities to survive. The poverty rate in Nigeria is alarming and the situation has no sign of relief soon. Another student adduces that the incessant strike by Nigeria tertiary institutions opens the window for many students to engage in self-sustaining economic activities in the informal market space. Since the purpose of formal education was to prepare students for the formal workspace, incessant strike due to disagreement between the academic staff union and the Federal Government of Nigeria has given room for students to work in the market. Some of these students reported that they do not want to remain idle at home. A respondent reported:

I am a student in a tertiary institution but I am fed up with the educational system in the country. We are now on strike for seven months and there is no sign that the strike would be suspended anytime soon. An idle mind is a room for the devil to operate and ever since we were on strike, I have been broke because nobody gives me money for upkeep. To help myself, I came here to “hustle” every day
(P6)

Another respondent noted:

We have gone on strike for four times in 2 years. This is frustrating and confusing. Some of my friends are learning vocational skills like fashion design, while some are not “aristos” (prostitute). I was depressed staying at home, so I had to join a friend to work in the market. I hope the strike is call-off soon
(P7)

The tertiary institution is supposed to be a place of training students academically and morally, however, the institutions have not provided such services due to frequent strike that leads to shutting down of the schools. During this period of strike, many students experience inactivity, and to fill such void, a few engage in economic activities in the informal market space. It was also pertinent to understand the reasons for recruiting children without hesitation in the market.

3.2. Pull Factors for Recruiting Children

Cheap labour affords organisations to minimize the cost of production and maximize profit. The respondents encapsulate this idea:

The cost of employing and sustaining child labour is relatively less expensive compare to adult employees. Many of these children are struggling to survive, thus, they do not negotiate a high cost of service as they were always scared of losing such opportunity to others who were ready to displace them
(P8)

Hunger was the driving force or push factor that propels children into labour in the informal market space. Another respondent buttressed this when she noted:

Many of these children are from homes experiencing financial difficulty. Their parents may be unemployed or may not have sufficient financial resources to feed

the family and care for other household activities. This may propel the children to seek financial support through seeking jobs outside the home environment. Of course, as a business person who endeavours to minimize cost, I always look out for such minor to manipulate

(P9)

The relatively cheap cost of labour was established as a major reason for recruiting children in the informal business environment. In addition, some of these children persuaded their employer to recruit them for any stipend. A respondent in an In-depth interview noted:

My employee persuaded me to employ her. She had dropped out of school because her parent could not pay her school fees. Her parent advised her to get marry because supporting her schooling was a challenge for the family. To escape from her precarious financial situation, she persuaded me to employ

(P10)

The financial status of these children at home makes them susceptible to cheap labour. In addition, many employers in the informal business environment prefer recruiting children as labour because they could be manipulated to assist in personal household chores without cost implications. A respondent noted:

Many children who are engaged in economic activities here in the market are easily manipulated to perform personal household chores such as the washing of clothes, vehicles, and cleaning the homes of their employer. Adults recruits would not accept to perform such personal household chores, therefore, I would prefer to recruit younger one who will perform both official and unofficial activities with limited cost

(P11)

Due to the poverty, hunger, and inexperience of these children and the desire to survive in a country characterized by harsh economic reality, they were prey to manipulation in their quest for survival. Furthermore, a few traders reported that children were more humble and were less likely to steal away goods. This propels employers to prefer to recruit younger ones, who transport stocks from the warehouse to the trading store. A respondent reported that:

My colleagues in the market introduced these children to me. This was due to the challenge I had with the previous employees that stole my goods and plunged me to debt. To mitigate the reoccurrence of such incidence, I had to engage the services of young children who loiter around the market space. I strongly believe these children would not steal, as they presently do not have many responsibilities that would propel them to engage in illicit activities

(P12)

Child labour seems to be a norm in the informal market space as most traders adduce several reasons for their recruitment. The children who had dropped out of school due to financial constraints were susceptible to cheap economic activities to survive.

3.3. Gender Preference of Child Labour

Gender continues to dominate discussions in the social sciences and humanity due to the dynamics and indispensable nature of humans. Gender preference is also evidence in the economic space as some employers preferred male gender, while others choose female. Employers who preferred female in their office stated that female employee attracts customers to their office and thus, assist to increase their customer base. A respondent corroborated this view by stating:

Female employees attract customers to the office/shop. This increases the volume of the prospective and actual client base. Higher patronage increases the turnover

rate of the business and this is what every employer desires. There are occasions when some customers purchase goods to gain the attention of these female employees. There are also instances when customers had to purchase goods while using that opportunity to woo the female attendant

(P13)

This shows that employers of labour recruit female children for increasing their client base and the turnover rate to dominate the market space. Some of these young female adolescents were also engaged in house-to-house marketing of goods to gain a competitive advantage over competitors. A respondent noted:

I prefer female employees because they help increase patronage through outdoor sales activities such as dancing and singing during sales activities. Increase sales would surely increase profit and market share. This gives joy to the entrepreneur who owns the business venture

(P14)

While recruiting of female for labour were preferred by some traders, others choose male children for labour. Those that reported that they prefer men allude that male children were more industrious than female. For instance, a respondent said:

For me, the choice of whom to recruit differs from some of my colleagues. The nature of my trade requires a male and not a female but I still recruit females as secretary. However, for my office, I prefer male children

(P15)

Traders who needed male labour to perform certain functions for them still signifies that female labour was indispensable in their businesses. This shows that many traders majorly recruited young female children. This was captured by the remark of a trader:

Not all those who told you they preferred to recruit male children for labour in the market were telling you the truth. We are in a union and I can categorically confirm to you that most traders in the market recruit female labour for their offices

(P16)

This shows that most employers of labour in the informal market space prefer females than males for their business activities. This does not imply that males were not consider for employment opportunities in the market but females were preferred for strategic locations in the informal market space. For instance, males were used to carry heavy loads from the warehouse to the main shops or offices, while females were allowed to interface with customers and perform other visible activities in the market space.

3.4. Positivity of the Educational Liminality Phase

While the educational liminality was detrimental to the children in particular and to the society at large, a few children made wise use of this period to learn vocational skills in order to enhance their chances of survival in a country characterized by high unemployment rate. A respondent reports that:

I used this period to learn vocational skill here in the market, as there are few experts around. I have been learning how to make hair for some months now because I felt bored at home and thus decided to make wise use of my time

(P13)

This shows that some children who were supposed to be in school but are not currently in school chose to learn vocational skills in order to enhance their chances of survival. Another respondent reaffirm the above by stating that:

Although this is not what I initially desired for myself but in a country where graduates are not guaranteed a good paying job, this compulsory break is best

used for learning vocational skills in order to be self-employed after school. That is why I am learning this technical skill here. I have no regret over my action, as the school strike has become part of the system

(P13)

Another respondent added:

I am currently acquiring some skill in fashion designing. I know I may not complete the learning process because my mind is currently divided as school may resume at any time. That nonetheless, I am enjoying myself by efficiently utilizing this period for self-development

(P13)

This shows that the education liminality has some positive, as this period was use by some children for self-development.

4. Discussion

This is the first known study examining the effect of the liminal stage of children's education and child labour within the context of Nigeria. Most studies have focused generally on issues such as child trafficking, HIV, and children on the street ([Abimanyi-Ochom et al. 2017](#)), with exception of [Obono and Mohammed \(2010\)](#) that examined the effect of liminality on reproductive health in Nigeria. We found that, though parental poverty is the major cause of child labour in the study setting, the pathways to child labour includes frequent strikes and systemic failure of the educational system that make children susceptible to work at a tender age. Students' disinterestedness in academics, negative attitude to learning, and frequent poor academic performance have been attributed to frequent strike action by the Nigeria Union of Teachers and Academic Staff Unions of tertiary institutions in Nigeria ([Odey et al. 2020a](#); [Odey et al. 2020b](#)). This study highlights that many children engage in informal economic activities in the market during this period of strike and there is a high tendency that some will not return to school when the strike is called-off. This finding correlates the report by [McGrath and Bergen \(2015\)](#) that a long period of staying at home demoralize children and weakens their enthusiasm in education.

In a similar study conducted in Ethiopia, [Osei-tutu and Tatek \(2018\)](#) noted that participation of children in work (mining industry) outside the home leads to drop in school enrolment. In addition, [Tatek and Kjørholt \(2009\)](#) posits that working children in cash economy in Ethiopia are victims of exploitation. Furthermore, in the view of [Klocker \(2011\)](#), the prevalence of child exploitation is high because these children are not perceive as employees. These perception and characteristics therein has implications for achieving the sustainable development goal (SDG) 4 and 8 (The Sustainable Development Goals are set of goals adopted by World Leaders with the aim to pursue global sustainable development by the year 2030. Target 4, focused on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Target 8.7, calls on government all over the world to take immediate, and effective measures to eradicate force labour, end modern slavery, and human trafficking, and secure the prohibition, and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruiting, and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms), especially, during the period when children who were supposed to be in school but are not, neither are their economic contributions officially acknowledged in the gross domestic product (GDP) of a country because they are not up to the legal age for industrial activities.

We examine the effect of child labour during the liminal stage of children's education. We found that while the effect of the liminal stage could be negative such as increasing the prevalence of susceptibility to school drop-out and out-of-school children, sexual exploitation, drug abuse, poverty, under-employment, and dehumanization of children's personality. The liminal stage of children's education could as well have some positive outcome because children could utilize this period to learn vocation skills, which enhances their chances to gain employment or being self-employ. Our result, consistent with previous

studies (Emerson and Souza 2011; Beegle et al. 2009) demonstrates that the period of betwixt/in-between has both positive and negative consequences to children. This period confuses many who mourn the educational system in Nigeria (Yusuf et al. 2015). It is clear from extant literature that Nigeria students spend long years in school than required due to frequent strikes (Odey et al. 2020b; Atsuwe and Moses 2017). Also, students that graduate in their late 30s and above, most often struggle to get a good job because of age limitations for many job advert (Iroham et al. 2020). Thus, students in Nigeria are predisposed to the danger of unemployment due to frequent strike action that creates a liminal.

Furthermore, the findings from the study show that parental poverty is the primary cause of child labour. The pathway could be when parents are unable to pay school fees and purchase educational facilities for their children, parental unemployment, death of parents, hunger, and negligence by the parent. This may propel children to pick up paid jobs at the informal market space for survival. This finding is in tandem with previous studies that associated the prevalence of child labour to poverty (Currie and Goodman 2020). Basu (2004) reported that as of the early 20s, about 6.1% of children less than 18 years in Nigeria are engaged in child labour outside household environments. Unlike children fetching water for household use and assisting parents to sell in the market, which scholars have argued that it is an integral process for the development of the child (Saliu 2018). More recently, there seems to be a surge of school-age children who are temporary not in school due to paucity in the educational system and these children are not full-time employees of any organization, but, are currently engage in temporary economic activities for the sustenance of self and family members. They are betwixt their education due to the gap in the natural progression of schooling. This has a devastating effect on their enthusiasm towards education in particular and on the social development in Nigeria.

It should be noted that this study is not referring to children who work during the holiday (Ada et al. 2019; International Labour Organisation 2001), neither are we particular about children assisting parents for domestic activities (child work). As literature reports that, those activities are part of children's development within the context of Africa (Elliot et al. 2018). However, as illustrated by International Labour Organization (2012), the engagement of children for economic activities outside the home affects the mental, physical, and social wellbeing of children. While working at home may not be harmful, child labour outside the home has devastating implications for the children (child work is not the same as child labour). Interestingly, children on the street that engage in economic activities in exchange for financial reward rarely perceive their situation as harmful as they are only concern about survival (Fuseini and Daniel 2020; Magashi 2015). In addition, many children on the street perceived themselves as smart and insusceptible to harm, and thus, little concentration is given to the long-term consequences of their immediate risky behaviour (Aderinto 2007).

The concept of child work and child labour are often interchanged in the literature (Ada et al. 2019). However, as used in this study, child work is the engagement of children in household activities within the home but child labour is the economic activity of children outside the home. We understand that parents may engage the services of children for economic activities outside the home for survival. The situation is precarious when children willingly leave the home in search of economic activities for survival. This is especially so when children that were supposed to be in school are temporary out of school due to institutional strikes. This situation portends great danger as children in the informal market space are exposed to dangerous practices such as intake of drugs and sexual exploitation within the market space. Aderinto (2007), in his study of children on the street, had early thrust the risk associated with children working without supervision to include: sexual abuse by older men, forceful unprotected sexual activities, and abuse of drugs.

Previous studies have reported the influence of peer pressure on children's engagement in inappropriate behaviours that is contrary to the norms of society (Ramjee et al. 2019; Govender et al. 2020; Widman et al. 2016). This study further shows that the process of recruiting children for labour in the informal market is through social networks and re-

ferrals. Traders' link prospective employees to each other and children who are currently engaged in a form of employment in the market, serves as the intermediary between recruiters and their peers who are in search of a job. Child labour increases the likelihood of out of school-children because children may be unwilling to return to school when compel to return. Furthermore, child labour distorts the natural progression of children's development, which should be work after school. It is like putting honey in the mouth of flies and asking the flies not to perch on the honey gallon. This may likely increase the prevalence of out of school-children in Nigeria. Child labour contributes to over 10.5 million out of school children in Nigeria and the figure will further increase due to the deplorable economic system in Nigeria (United Nations Children's Fund 2019). Previous studies have reported that child labour causes poverty, unemployment, and poor health challenges (United Nations Children's Fund 2019; United Nations Children's Fund 2007). In addition, young children who are involved in economic activities for wages experience stigmatization, stress, personality disorder, alienation from family, and are susceptible to anti-social behaviour (United Nations Children's Fund 2007). The hostile environment, which children are exposed to at the market causes emotional stress. Leaving home at an early age to work for money and experiencing sexual exploitation is devastating because this exposes children to sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV (Aderinto 2007). This study found out that aside from sexual exploitation, these children also experience financial exploitation, as what they are paid does not commensurate with their labour.

It is herewith proposed that the challenges found in this study can form the core of the curriculum for the community education strategy intended to serve as a major mitigation. For liminality and child labour are key community challenges that have not been seriously addressed in government policies and/or their implementation to date.

The community education strategy ought to consider the formation of a key planning and implementation team drawn from within the community, and consisting, but limited to, stakeholders drawn from among civil organisations, adult and non-formal educations, teachers unions, community heads, market associations, selected parents, and government officials. It could as well be useful to have the inputs and substantial fiscal support and backing of UNICEF, UNESCO and the UNDP for the reasons that they already have their presence on site, and bringing them along will ostensibly reduce unnecessary squabbles, rivalries and waste of scarce resources.

Once this core group has been established, it will be its primary task to set the agreed vision, aim, objectives, non-formal curriculum, methodology, techniques and materials that would be needed to achieve the set goals of mitigating liminality and child labor. To ensure that the programme is on course, mass mobilization using the social media and mainstream media should be undertaken to get the buy-in of all community members. A monthly monitoring and assessment meeting would be a non-negotiable expectation even as the government is constantly reminded about the need to minimize the basic causes of teachers industrial actions whilst paying attention to elaborate community programmes aimed at directly addressing poverty and unemployment.

5. Conclusions

Overall, our study found mixed implications of the liminal on the educational system in Nigeria. We noted that while a few children utilize the period of inactivity in school to learn vocational skills to enhance their economic chances of survival in a country characterized by massive unemployment among graduates. The informal sector contributes to an increase in the standard of living and the gross domestic product (GDP) of a country. It is also likely to augment the economic situation and life chances of the deprived poor, especially those that live in the slums. However, the consequences of the liminality in children's development overshadow the positive. Children are predisposed to sexual exploitation, cheap labour, abuse of drugs, physical and verbal abuse that has long-term consequences. Children who experience sexual exploitation at a tender age are at risk of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS. The devastating effect of child labour has

prolonged negative consequences that surpass any advantage derive from it (if at all there is any). Further studies should examine the context of liminal on crime rate among children.

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