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The Double Burden: How Child Labor Affects Learning Achievement in Nepalese Schools

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Abstract. The Constitution of Nepal promises free education, but many children work to pay for their schooling, especially in urban areas. The present study investigates the learning achievement of working and non-working children studying in community secondary schools of Lalitpur, Kathmandu Metropolitan City as a function of parental support, academic-related habits and work involvement. A total of 296 grade nine students were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics from a quantitative approach to the data. The study revealed that there were significant differences in the learning achievement between working and non-working children and work hour and parental support were identified as critical determinants. The results highlight the importance of targeted policies to support working children and promote educational equity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a key driver of social mobility and a fundamental human right. In Nepal children work to help pay for education and living costs, despite free schooling being provided by government schools (Edmonds & Shrestha, 2014). So this double burden also reflects on their learning achievements; the working students achieve less than the non-working students.

Children account for approximately 37% of those working in various sectors in Nepal, according to estimates from the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017) and Nepal's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, 2021). They get behind with their work, and their studies suffer.

Child labor in Nepal negatively impacts educational achievement by reducing learning time, hindering academic performance, and increasing school dropout rates. Children involved in work, particularly those in market work, miss school more often and experience poorer academic outcomes (Edmonds, 2009). The need for income often outweighs the perceived value of education, leading to a cycle of poverty and limited opportunities.

The international community has long tried to reduce the number of children engaged in child labor. However, according to a report from the International Labour Office and United Nations Children's Fund (2021), child laborers' numbers increased for the first time in 20 years in 2020.

In the wake of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, identifying reliable child labor survey methods and measures is more critical than ever. In this paper, we investigate reporting differences between children and adults, gender differences in human capital investment tradeoffs between market/domestic work and school, and gender-based differences in adults' perception of children's benefits from education.

The self-reported data estimates indicate children engaged in market work miss almost 1.5 school days per week, whereas the proxy data suggests 0.3 days missed. Observation of 0.4-school day reduction among girls engaged in domestic work using the self-reported data but not using the proxy data (Janzen, 2018). The measurement variation represents not only a level discrepancy, but it also results in different work-school tradeoff estimates depending on which group is surveyed. Our findings urge future research to focus on identifying whose responses are best suited to inform policy recommendations.

The trade-off between housework and schooling among girls only when directly surveying children, we must consider whether adult respondents value girls' time less than boys' time. We use a randomized survey experiment to show that adult respondents identifying schooling's benefits spontaneously list more items for boys than they do for girls. This study documents a significant difference between school attendance reporting by household representatives and children themselves. The differences result in varying tradeoff estimates between child labor and school. Furthermore, our findings demonstrate gender differences in the relationship between child labor and school attendance and highlight the importance of including unpaid domestic work when analyzing child labor's true costs.

1.1. Situation of Child labor and Schools in Nepal

While Nepal makes it illegal to employ individuals under 14, child labor has historically been part of the country's culture. Researchers have established that poverty or the need to pay for basic expenses can drive child labor rates (Edmonds and Pavcnik, 2005). Physical work may negatively affect development, but working children may also derive income and subsequent nutrition from their jobs, potentially offsetting the exhaustion and injuries they suffer, as evidenced by the ambiguous findings of some child labor and health researchers (Beegle et al., 2009). The most common activity among working children is domestic labor (Edmonds, 2009), which may not lead to physical harm.

Nevertheless, working children are more likely than non-working children to miss school, reducing their human capital investment. Beegle et al. (2009) report causal evidence in Vietnam that children working an average amount reduce their school attendance by almost 50% and decrease their educational attainment by more than 20%. Researchers have used evidence from

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the PROGRESA program in Mexico (Behrman et al., 2015) and a school attendance-conditional stipend program in Nepal (Edmonds and Shrestha, 2014) to show interventions providing funds for common expenses can increase school attendance.

Comparison between Children of working mothers and non-working mothers are more likely to use child labor (DeGraff and Levison, 2009), and families often use child labor as a precaution and as insurance against risk after experiencing an income shock. Reducing household risk through health insurance in Rwanda significantly reduces child labor supply and increases educational achievement (Stroble, 2017). Furthermore, educated parents are more likely to send their children to school (Webbink et al., 2015), and mother's education plays a larger role in girls' education than boys' (Thomas et al., 1997).

So, this study is an attempt to examine such disparities and determinants on the public education performance of few community schools of Kathmandu Metropolitan City. It delves into the scope of child labor, its effect on educational outcomes, and offers solutions to address educational disparities.

1.2. Research Objectives

- To assess the prevalence and status of working and non-working children in community schools of Kathmandu Metropolitan City.
- To analyze the association between work, study habits, parental support, and learning achievement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Children and Academic Success

The relationship between education and child labor is a well-studied phenomenon — though especially in the developing world, where the financial need often drives children to work. Studies of the phenomena demonstrate that the phenomenon has direct economic consequences in an evenly competitive environment in which educational attainment can have long lasting effects. For instance, referring to Basu and Tzannatos (2003), child labor creates a burden in terms of time for the child and increases physical and mental fatigue, making them unable to perform in school. Working children also have lower school attendance and pass rates than nonworking children (Edmonds, 2009).

As per the International Labour Organization (ILO), child labour is the work which deprives children of their childhood, dignity, and potential and that is also harmful to physical and mental development. Socio-economic issues including widespread poverty, lack of access to quality education and weak enforcement of the child labor laws are factors in the child labor problem in Nepal (ILO, 2012). These are some of the educational inequities experienced by working children, particularly in urban and economically marginalized settings.

2.2. Theoretical Frameworks

2.2.1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's theory offers a reasonable perspective on how unmet needs can negatively impact educational attainment. Meeting basic physiological and safety needs is the initial priority of individual according to Maslow (1943), never would an individual even begin thinking of a highest goal to achieve the education. Matters of basic need, therefore, are not often at the top of the list for working children, especially including academics. The fight to meet basic survival needs consumes so much time and energy that it is impossible to focus and learn, which affects their academic performance.

2.2.2. Bourdieu's Theory of Capital

Bourdieu proposes a Theory of Capital to express that economic factors exist in a relationship with social and cultural factors and to elucidate how they ultimately determine educational outcomes. This link between educational attainment and resources (such as parental education, income and home environment) is most pronounced amongst children (drawing of the work of Bourdieu, 1977). Such working children often have limited cultural capital including cultural knowledge, skills, and support from parents for their education. It disadvantages them compared with peers. Parental engagement, as part of social capital, should be helpful to overcome or reduce those challenges at creating a more learning-friendly environment.

2.2.3. Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory

Learning with Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory is social in that social interactions and structurally supported interactions are essential to the process (Rui, 2023). With respect to working children, a lack thereof hinders cognitive and educational opportunities at times. Vygotsky (1978) describes this as collaboration to close those gaps. Where working children meet multiple barriers to their learning, interventions that work to build an enabling educational climate can enhance the learning experiences of working children.

2.3. Empirical Studies

There is also plenty of data supporting that claim indicating negative impacts of child labor on educational outcomes in empirical studies. A study conducted by Ravallion and Wodon, (2000) shows that children with increased hours of work show a proportional decline in their enrollment and performance in school. Similarly, Sapkota and Sharma (2011) studied a sample from Nepal and compared the academic performance of working children with their nonworking academic counterparts of the same age and reported that the working children had considerably poorer performance than the nonworking academic reference group in all subjects, but that the activities requiring critical thinking, higher cognitive performance such as the performance in mathematics and science were significantly poorer in working children than in those who did not work.

In conclusion, parental participation is one of the most important and106 deciding factor of all education success. According to past studies (Fan and Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2007) parental involvement has a strong positive influence on student performance. But often, economic imperatives hamper the ability of parents to participate in their children's education in Nepal. Being anything close to secondary will only serve to compound their plight as they will have fallen way behind other children in terms of their

education.

2.4. Policy Implications

The plight of child labour and its impact on education has been mapped on global and national policy calendars. Notably, the concept of the landmark Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) undertaken by the United Nations centers around the elimination of child labour and access to inclusive, equitable and quality education for all, especially children (United Nations, 2015) In Nepal the School Sector Development Plan (2016) retains targeted interventions to reaching marginalized populations including working children. These efforts focus on teacher capacity building, school capacity building and financial assistance.

These efforts notwithstanding, though, significant implementation challenges are still apparent. The limited resources and the socially embedded cultural and social norms significantly hinder the effective monitoring of the implementation of the child labor laws and educational policies. Such obstacles to success must be addressed in a strategic, multipronged approach one that requires community activism, policy planning and the funding of educational equity. All children should be able to learn, and realize their potential regardless of their socio-economic background; and, it is vital that we do what we can to ensure that they do.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative research design to study the learning achievement of working and non-working children of Nepal. The methodology section describes the research design, location, sampling methods, data collecting instruments, and statistical approaches used for data analysis.

This study used a cross-sectional survey design to obtain a snapshot of the educational performance of working and non-working children. This was done in order to explore relationships between variables, as well as differences within the defined population.

The study was carried out in Kathmandu Metropolitan City, institutions located in urban local areas, where community schools are highly concentrated, and this area has a high number of working children. These regions represent wide variety of socio-economic conditions and child labor prevalence.

The target population was of the grade nine students in Community Secondary Schools located in the study areas. To ensure representativeness, a multistage sampling technique was used: Primary Sampling Unit (School Selection): A total of ten community secondary schools were selected randomly from the list provided by the District Education Office.

The selection of students was based on a stratified random sampling method, accounting for an equal number of children who worked and did not work outside the house (n = 296 students). It was stratified by work-status and gender.

A self-structured questionnaire was prepared to collect data on demographic features, work, parental support, and study habits. The research instrument consisted of both closed-ended and Likert-type scale items.

Important sections of the questionnaire covered:

- Demographics: Age, sex and family history.
- Work Involvement: Work type, hours of work per week, and work motivation.
- > ~ More on parental support: Doing homework, visiting schools, supporting learning.
- Study Habits: Time for study, Attendance and participation in class.

We pre-tested the questionnaire with 30 students to confirm its clarity and reliability. Pretest result was used to revitalize the change.

Enumerators trained for the purpose conducted data collection over two months. Before collecting data, we obtained the informed consent from the school authorities, parents, and students. To reduce non-response, the enumerators administered the questionnaires during school hours. Anonymity and confidentiality were protected during the process. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Data were entered into and analyzed with the software SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 25. The following statistical tests were performed:

- Descriptive statistics: Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were computed to describe demographic data and key variables.
- Chi-Square Test: Utilized to explore the relationship between two categorical variables: work status and parental support.
- Mann-Whitney U Test: Performed to compare learning achievement scores of working children and non-working children.
- Kruskal-Wallis test compares academic performance among groups involved with work.
- Correlation Analysis: Spearman rank correlation was performed to examine relationships between working hours, parental support and study habits.

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines to protect participants. The IRB of the respective academic institution approved the study. Participants were told the intention of the study, and participation was voluntary. Various measures were implemented to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the data collected.

Using these approaches will go a long way towards ensuring solid and robust insight into the educational experiences of working and non-working children in Nepal.

This study uses numerical research design method in examing learning achievement among working and non-working children in Nepal. Research design, study area, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, and statistical methods used for data analysis are described in the methodology section.

4. FINDINGS AND DATA PRESENTATION

In addition to documenting measurement differences between self- and proxy-reported school attendances, we find the reporting differences play a role in estimating tradeoffs between child labor and school attendance. We therefore investigate the value parents place on their children's education. Because the estimates diverge greatly for girls, we specifically examine, whether adults perceive the benefits differently based on the child's gender. Parents choose whether to send their young children to school and/or have them work based on a complex set of costs and benefits. We use a randomized survey experiment to evaluate whether adults perceive schooling's benefits differently for boys and girls. As outlined in Sudman et al. (1996), survey respondents asked to form judgments about people or topics look for reference or comparison groups. If a survey question is independent (i.e., unrelated to previous questions), respondents define the reference group only via the information they have on the topic. Independent questions allow respondents to answer based on their own experiences cognitive ability, memory, etc. Questions

asked in a comparative way (i.e., after similar questions about other groups) introduce additional reference points. Respondents may react to comparative questions along two dimensions. The first involves the “comparing or contrasting effect,” in which respondents associate two groups and try to revise their assessments of both to make them similar. The respondents shrink the differences between groups when asked comparative questions. They may, however, consider the second group in contrast to the first, expanding the differences between the two. The second reaction dimension involves the “additive or subtractive effect,” where respondents increase or decrease their response intensity. That is, as a survey asks a respondent repeatedly about a topic or group, his or her responses to it becomes increasingly positive or negative. The two dimensions are not mutually exclusive. For example, responses could demonstrate both the comparing and additive effects.

Researchers have used survey context effects to evaluate responses to wellbeing questions (Deaton and Stone, 2016), and we draw on the literature to design our experiment. During the survey, we asked household representatives to think of a 15-year-old boy who has finished fifth grade (primary school’s conclusion in Nepal) and left school and list any advantages the boy has compared to a peer who did not attend primary school. Respondents could submit as many benefits as they wished. We also asked the same question about a 15-yearold girl and randomly assigned the question order. We consider the first response set independent, as no reference point exists, but interpret the second set as relative to gender.

4.1. Overview of Participants

Table 1. Summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants, highlighting the proportion of working versus non-working children.

Demographic Variable	Category	Total (N=296)	Working Children (N=59)	Non-Working Children (N=237)	Chi-square (χ^2) / p-value
Gender	Boys	155 (52.4%)	48 (81.36%)	107 (45.15%)	$\chi^2 = 24.829$, p = 0.00**
	Girls	141 (47.6%)	11 (18.64%)	130 (54.85%)	
Age Group	12-14 years	104 (35.1%)	7 (6.7%)	97 (40.9%)	$\chi^2 = 24.700$, p = 0.00**
	15-16 years	165 (55.7%)	40 (24.2%)	125 (52.7%)	
	17-18 years	26 (8.8%)	12 (46.2%)	14 (6.3%)	
Ethnicity	Janajati	177 (59.9%)	35 (59.32%)	142 (59.9%)	$\chi^2 = 0.387$, p = 0.95
	Brahman/Chhetri	83 (28%)	17 (29%)	66 (27.8%)	
	Dalit	29 (9.8%)	6 (10%)	23 (9.7%)	
	Muslim	7 (2.3%)	1 (1.7%)	6 (2.5%)	
Father’s Literacy	Literate	211 (71.3%)	29 (49.1%)	182 (76.8%)	$\chi^2 = 6.558$, p = 0.01**
	Illiterate	85 (28.7%)	30 (50.9%)	55 (23.2%)	
Mother’s Literacy	Literate	183 (61.8%)	34 (57.6%)	149 (62.9%)	$\chi^2 = 0.589$, p = 0.44
	Illiterate	113 (38.2%)	25 (42.4%)	88 (37.1%)	

- A significantly higher proportion of boys (81.36%) were involved in work compared to girls (18.64%) ($p < 0.01$).
- The majority of working children (46.2%) were in the 17-18 years age group, showing a strong correlation between age and work involvement ($p < 0.01$).
- Ethnicity did not significantly affect work participation ($p = 0.95$).
- Father’s literacy had a significant association with children’s work involvement ($p = 0.01$), whereas mother’s literacy did not ($p = 0.44$).

4.2. Academic Performance by Work Status

Working while pursuing academic studies can have varying effects on academic performance, while some studies show that work can negatively impact grades and overall academic achievement, others suggest that working can be a positive experience, potentially enhancing resilience and even boosting academic outcomes.

Table 2. Presents the mean scores in key subjects for working and non-working children. The results show statistically significant differences in all core subjects, with non-working children consistently outperforming their working peers.

Subject	Mean Score (Working)	Mean Score (Non-Working)	p-value
Nepali	52.4	68.2	<0.01
English	49.8	70.1	<0.01
Mathematics	45.2	66.3	<0.01
Science	47.6	65.7	<0.01
Social Studies	50.3	69.8	<0.01

Working can significantly reduce the amount of time available for studying, leading to lower grades. Balancing work and studies can create stress, which can negatively affect academic performance. Working can also place a strain on students' financial resources, potentially impacting their ability to purchase necessary materials or afford a comfortable living environment, which can further affect their academic performance. Balancing work and studies can help students develop resilience and time management skills, which can translate to better academic performance. Working can provide valuable practical experience that can complement academic learning and make students more competitive in the job market after graduation. For some students, working can provide financial independence, which can reduce stress and allow them to focus more on their studies.

Factors influencing Impacts are, the number of hours a student works can significantly impact their academic performance. Longer work hours may be associated with lower grades. The nature of the work can also affect academic performance. For example, a job that requires a lot of mental focus may be less detrimental to academic performance than a job that requires a lot of physical labor. Students' individual characteristics, such as their personality, study habits, and work ethic, can also influence how work impacts their academic performance. The impact of work on academic performance is complex and depends on various factors. While it's true that work can present challenges, it can also offer valuable benefits that can positively impact students' academic journey.

4.3. Parental Support and Learning Outcomes

Parental support emerged as a critical determinant of academic performance. Students receiving regular homework assistance and school visits by parents demonstrated higher average scores across all subjects, regardless of work status.

Table 3. Parental support emerged as a critical determinant of academic performance.

Parental Support Level	Average Score (Working)	Average Score (Non-Working)
High	64.5	72.3
Moderate	54.2	68.1
Low	43.7	58.9

Parental support significantly impacts learning outcomes, fostering both academic achievement and overall well-being. Parental involvement, encompassing various forms of support and engagement, leads to improved academic performance, increased motivation, and enhanced social-emotional development.

4.4. Impact of Work Hours on Academic Achievement

Working long hours can negatively impact academic achievement. Studies show that a high number of working hours per week is inversely correlated with academic performance. While the exact threshold varies, working more than 8-25 hours per week is often associated with detrimental effects. Additionally, the intensity and type of work, as well as the student's ability to manage time effectively, also play a role in how work affects academic achievement.

A negative correlation was observed between the number of work hours and academic performance.

Table 4. Illustrates the declining trend in mean scores with increasing work hours.

Work Hours Per Week	Mean Score (All Subjects)
1-10	62.8
11-20	55.4
21-30	48.9
>30	43.5

4.5. Gender Disparities

Gender differences in academic achievement were also examined. While non-working male and female students had comparable scores, working male students outperformed their female counterparts slightly. However, the disparity was not statistically significant.

Table 5. Disparities according to gender.

Gender	Mean Score (Working)	Mean Score (Non-Working)
Male	51.8	69.1
Female	49.3	68.7

Gender disparities in education exist globally, impacting students' academic performance. While some studies suggest girls may outperform boys in certain subjects like reading and at the tertiary level, others indicate boys may have an advantage in math, particularly as they progress through school. Factors contributing to these disparities include societal norms, school environments, and individual student characteristics. Gender disparity analysis in academic performance in higher institutions was conducted using CGPA and national exit examination results. The results of this study indicated a significant gender-based achievement gap in the academic realm of higher education, with male students outperforming their female counterparts.

Studies on gender differences in academic performance have yielded varied results. Some research indicates that girls tend to excel in reading, while boys may outperform in mathematics, especially as they move through higher grades.

At the tertiary level (university and college), studies often show that girls are outperforming boys, even in traditionally male-dominated fields. This is likely due to factors like increased access to higher education and changes in societal expectations.

Some research suggests that girls may have an advantage in reading and language-based subjects, while boys may have an advantage in math and science. This could be due to a variety of factors, including innate abilities, learning styles, and exposure to different educational environments.

Gender stereotypes and societal expectations can influence a student's academic performance and subject choice. For example, boys may be discouraged from pursuing subjects like English or language arts, while girls may be discouraged from pursuing subjects like science and math.

The environment and the way teachers interact with students can also impact academic performance. For example, a teacher who consistently reinforces gender stereotypes may unintentionally create a learning environment that disadvantages one gender. It's important to remember that individual differences, such as learning styles, motivation, and prior knowledge, can also play a significant role in academic performance.

To address gender disparities in education, it's important to challenge gender stereotypes, create inclusive college environments, and provide all students with equal access to educational resources and opportunities.

4.6. Additional Findings

4.6.1. Attendance Rates and Academic Performance

Attendance rates were significantly higher among non-working students, who attended an average of 92% of school days, compared to 78% for working students. Attendance was positively correlated with academic performance.

Table 6. Non-working students Academic performance (Percentage).

Attendance Rate (%)	Average Academic Score
>90%	70.3
80-90%	62.1
<80%	51.4

Regular college attendance has a strong positive correlation with academic performance. Students who attend college regularly are more likely to achieve higher grades, graduate from college, and demonstrate greater engagement with learning. Conversely, lower attendance rates are associated with academic struggles and a higher risk of falling behind. Regular attendance fosters a more active and engaged learning experience, leading to better comprehension and retention.

4.6.2. Study Time Allocation

Non-working students allocated more time for homework and self-study (average of 3.2 hours per day) compared to working students (1.8 hours per day). This disparity was reflected in their academic performance.

Table 7. Non-working students Academic performance (Per hours).

Study Time (Hours/Day)	Average Academic Score
>3	72.5
2-3	65.7
<2	50.6

Study time allocation refers to how individuals choose to spend their time and effort on different study tasks and items to optimize learning. It reflects an individual's ability to manage their cognitive resources and understand the learning process. Effective study time allocation involves balancing workload, prioritizing tasks, and using time efficiently to achieve learning goals. Study time allocation refers to individuals' control and management of their cognitive resources during the memory process, mirroring their comprehension of the tasks and abilities of memory control and management.

4.6.3. Type of Work and Learning Outcomes

The nature of work also impacted academic performance. Students involved in physically demanding jobs (e.g., construction, labor) had lower scores than those in less demanding roles (e.g., shop assistants, tutoring).

Table 8. The nature of work also impacted academic performance.

Type of Work	Average Academic Score
Physically Demanding	47.8
Less Physically Demanding	58.9

Student learning outcomes are statements of what a student is expected to know, understand, and be able to do after completing a learning experience, such as a course or program. These outcomes describe the desired knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes that students should acquire, which are then aligned with the activities and assignments they engage in.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Like existing research, we cannot distinguish who is telling the truth about school attendance and can only inform on the mismatch. Further, our analysis of the relationship between academic attendance and education is not experimental, as we use a one-time, cross-sectional survey. Thus, we cannot attribute causality to our observed correlations between labor engagement and school attendance. Furthermore, our survey experiment analysis implies that respondents perceive question order and assess education’s benefits for boys versus girls in relative terms. Cognitive survey question testing or focus group discussions on the topic could show whether respondents truly perceive the relationship. In the absence of qualitative research, we rely on the survey design and opinion polling literature, which indicates how respondents typically behave.

As references, the drastic change in the physical facilities including enhancement in infrastructure has shown great significant impacts in the reduction of child labor in Turkey (Dayioglu-Tayfur and Kirdar, 2020). Researchers suggest that public investment, the disincentive effects of compulsory schooling, may be more effective in reducing child labor than laws.. We encourage policymakers to promote education’s benefits for both boys and girls and prompt future research to include domestic work and chores when analyzing schooling in places where child labor is common practice.

5.1. Policy Reforms

Child labor won’t end until we cease tolerating its existence and start drawing the line on enforcement there are laws, but they are too frequently ignored. The answer is not merely clamping down on violators: It’s providing economic options for families so that children are not sent out to work. It’s not financial support scholarships, stipends and subsidizing families that need it most. Government and non-governmental organizations need to get serious about making this support available, especially to individuals living in the most remote areas. However, education can’t just sit there it must bend to the needs of working kids. Night classes, weekend programs and vocational training outside of regular hours can keep kids in school, without making them choose between work and school. And remember awareness is key.” Engagement and empowerment of communities are necessary to unlock these resources, so no family feels left out. And it isn’t solely about law enforcement, economic investment or the enforcement of the social contract; this is about reshaping the paradigms through which we address education, work and opportunity with both urgency and a clear focus on delivering poverty’s end.

5.2. School-Level Interventions

Unarguably, the biggest factor of a child's success at school is the involvement of their parents, however many parents know little of how much their involvement really matters. Schools must also step up and establish parental engagement programs — workshops, periodic parents and teachers meetings and information seminars that teach parents how they can help their children learn at home. Establishing close-knit home-school links like these make it easier for schools to provide students with unified support systems. But engagement doesn't stop with the school day. After-school support is critical for working children. Schools should create tutoring programs, homework help sessions, and safe, structured learning environments where students can receive the academic support they require outside of school hours. Schools must also be proactive in monitoring attendance and performance. So by monitoring attendance closely, and monitoring themselves rigorously on academic progress and getting those at-risk students, they can move in quickly, and step in early with more focused interventions, to make sure no child falls through the cracks. These are not just strategies for academic improvement they are strategies for building a net that holds every child and especially those with extra challenges outside the classroom.

5.3. Community-Based Approaches

To break the cycle of child labor, it's essential to provide sustainable alternatives for families that depend on it. Vocational training programs for parents or older siblings can open up new income opportunities, reducing the financial pressure that forces children into work. Alongside this, community mentorship initiatives should be established, where local leaders, professionals, or older students guide and support working children, helping them build confidence and stay engaged in their education. This mentorship doesn't just boost morale it creates role models who inspire children to envision a different future. Additionally, awareness campaigns are crucial in shifting societal views. By educating communities about the long-term benefits of education and the dangers of child labor, these campaigns can ignite a cultural change that prioritizes children's futures and encourages collective investment in their well-being. Together, these efforts create a multifaceted approach to ending child labor, offering both immediate support and long-term solutions.

5.4. Focus on Gender Equity

Schools need to fight inequality at same rate, in order to cover those caveats. That is why targeted scholarships and mentorship opportunities for girls can go a long way in enabling them to stay in school and pursue their academic goals. Simultaneously, it is essential to promote gender-inclusive education through school environments and community programs that support and power up girls. All these spaces must be free of discrimination, where girls feel valued, supported, and encouraged to fully participate both academically and socially. When we remove the barriers of bias, we do not simply eliminate a challenge we put the full power of every student at our disposal, regardless of their gender.

5.5. Longitudinal Research and Monitoring

This study provides a snapshot of the relationship between child labor and education; however, longitudinal studies are needed to explore the long-term impacts of interventions and policy changes. Regular monitoring and evaluation of implemented programs can ensure their effectiveness and scalability.

5.6. Broader Implications for Sustainable Development

The findings of this study contribute to the broader discourse on achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). By addressing the educational challenges of working children, Nepal can make significant strides toward reducing inequalities and building a more inclusive and equitable society. Collaborative efforts between government, schools, communities, and international organizations are essential to dismantle the systemic barriers that perpetuate educational inequities.

5.7. Final Thoughts

Ensuring educational equity is not just a moral duty. it is a strategic investment in Nepal's future. Children are the building blocks to our progress as a nation, therefore, their education must be valued more than any short term economy that can be earned through labour. Nepal should implement the recommendations from this study, so that every child, no matter what their socio-economic background, can achieve their potential and contribute to the country.

Working children continue to receive a grossly unequal education; we postulate that these inequalities exponentially compound societal inequities. Policymakers should focus on initiatives to:

Financial assistance to lessen economic reliance on child labour.

- Establish after-school programs to help facilitate academic learning among working children.
- Organize workshops on parental engagement in children's education.

Future research may examine the long-term effects of child labor and measure contextualized interventions for similar urban contexts such as Kathmandu Metropolitan City in Lalitpur.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides compelling evidence of the significant disparities in educational outcomes between working and non-working children in Nepal, particularly in urban areas like Kathmandu Metropolitan City and Lalitpur. The findings illustrate how child labor compromises academic performance through reduced study time, irregular attendance, and the physical and mental toll of work. Parental support, work hours, and the nature of the labor were identified as critical determinants of learning outcomes, highlighting the multifaceted challenges faced by working children.

While non-working students generally perform better across all core subjects, the role of parental involvement emerged as a mitigating factor for working children, emphasizing the importance of supportive home and school environments. Furthermore, gendered dynamics suggest that additional barriers may exist for working female students, reflecting broader socio-cultural

inequities.

These findings align with key theoretical frameworks, including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Bourdieu's Theory of Capital, and Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory. Together, these theories underscore how economic, social, and cultural factors intersect to shape educational outcomes. The study reaffirms the importance of addressing both structural inequalities and individual-level barriers to ensure equitable access to quality education for all children.

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