

Education and Work: Children's Lives in Rural Sub-Saharan Africa

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Introduction

The need to better understand the relationship between education (formal schooling in particular) and child work is urgent because sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has the highest number of young people 'in child labour' (ILO and UNICEF, 2021) as well as the greatest number of young people 'out of school' (UNESCO-UIS, 2019). It is estimated that around 98 million young people of school-going age – almost a third in SSA – are not enrolled in school, with participation rates having stagnated since around 2008 (UNESCO-UIS, 2019). There are also many millions who may be enrolled but not attending regularly, or attending but not learning. Estimates show that in SSA 85 per cent of boys and 95 per cent of girls of primary-school age are 'not achieving minimum proficiency standards' (ACPE, 2018). As the impact of COVID-19 exacerbates socio-economic inequalities, these figures will likely rise, as will the gendered burdens of work that many children will have to take on (United Nations, 2020).

The children least likely to be in school are female, from the poorest households and over-age for grade of entry. Other factors associated with non-participation include living in a remote, rural area or a conflict-affected region; coming from an ethno-linguistic minority or nomadic community; and living with a disability (UNESCO, 2015a). Since SSA includes many of the world's poorest countries, even children who are in formal education frequently combine schooling with unpaid and/or paid work (ILO and UNICEF, 2021). Since the main employment sector in SSA is agriculture, which accounts for more than half the total workforce, many children

are inevitably engaged in subsistence or commercial farming (ILO and UNICEF, 2021).

Globally, financial constraints are often cited as the main reason many children are either not in school or attend sporadically and juggle schooling and work (UNESCO, 2015a). In Ghana, too, poverty has been identified as an important driver of non-attendance – although distance to school is also a major factor in rural areas (Ghana Ministry of Education, 2018). However, as we elaborate further, the realities are inevitably more complex and contingent, and subject to change, with wide variations across and within countries. Thus, the importance of context – in its multiple configurations and manifestations – is paramount.

Aim and scope of the chapter

The aim of this chapter is to explore children's lives as they relate to the education–work nexus in rural SSA. This we achieve, initially, through a selective and purposive summary of the education literature that highlights some of the key issues. We then elaborate an analytical framework with which to better understand the dynamics of education and work in rural children's lives.

First, we situate the issue of children's access to schooling within the broader discourse of child rights and the global development agenda, before identifying the children most likely not to be in school and the reasons why. We then explore some of the key tensions between schooling and work identified in the literature, which we relate specifically to the lives of rural children. Next, we present a relational analytical framework – an 'edu-workspace' – that aims to support more holistic understandings of the dynamics of children's lives as they relate to schooling, work and harm across household, school and work environments. In the final section, we reflect on key issues that are highly pertinent to policy interventions aimed both at increasing educational participation and addressing children's harmful work.

Concepts and definitions

The relationship between schooling and children's work is characterized by tensions. These are exacerbated by conceptual adherence to terms that have been framed in the Global North (Nieuwenhuys, 1998; Twum-Danso Imoh, 2013), and which are often used as oppositional binaries: child/adult; in school/out of school; traditional/modern; rural/urban; harmful/not harmful; female/male. Although seemingly useful for the purposes of making national and international comparisons, they oversimplify our understandings of rural realities as they are gradually solidified into universal categories and truths through the dominant discourse of development (Boyden, 1997;

Twum-Danso Imoh, 2013). We return to some of these terms and binaries later in the chapter.

For the moment, we gloss our usage of three key terms: ‘education’, ‘child labour’ and ‘harm’. While we recognize ‘education’ to be a broad term related to all types of learning – for example, informal, non-formal and formal – the focus in this chapter is on basic schooling (meaning primary and junior secondary). There are three reasons for this: first, educational provision in SSA (as elsewhere) since colonial times has primarily been structured through formal education; second, educational research and educational interventions in SSA have, up until relatively recently, primarily been directed at this area of education; and third, debates surrounding the tensions between education and child labour are generally articulated with regard to formal schooling.

‘Child labour’, too, we recognize to be a contested and value-laden term. However, it is not the aim of this chapter to (re)define and/or measure child labour; rather, we align ourselves with academics who prefer the more neutral term ‘children’s work’ (for example Boyden, Bourdillon and Woodhead). That said, we also use the term ‘child labour’ (sometimes distinguishing it from ‘child work’, as does the ILO) as it appears in the various studies reviewed, elaborating on the authors’ understandings where necessary. Similarly, we employ the term ‘child’ to signify someone under the age of 18, as the term is predominantly understood in the literature, though we also revisit it critically.

The notion of ‘harm’, since it is central to ILO definitions of what counts as ‘hazardous work’ or the ‘worst forms of child labour’, is also of concern. Maconachie et al (Chapter 2, this volume), note that ‘despite its voluminous writings, the ILO has itself never formally defined “harm”’. We agree that ‘the concept of harm is ambiguous, relative and contextual and it may be unhelpful (or even problematic) to present harm as an “objective” concept that can be defined, measured, and assessed with discrete criteria’ (p 41).

It is also worth noting that in much of the education literature (outside the area of social protection) the discussion is more about ‘violence’ rather than ‘harm’ despite the fact that they are interconnected. For example, in the UN definitions both of corporal punishment (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006) and school-related gender-based violence (UNESCO, 2015b) the word ‘harm’ does not feature. Similarly, in the UN report on school violence worldwide (United Nations, 2016), the word ‘harm’ occurs only five times, whereas ‘violence’ occurs over 400 times.

Education for all

Educational access

The right to full-time education for those under 18 years of age is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the African

Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1996, and implemented in 1999). It is also recognized as a global development priority that is reinforced through commitment to the global Education for All (EFA) initiative and Millennium and Sustainable Development Goals (MDGs and SDGs).

Since access to full-time education is considered a universal human right, any denial of that right is by definition a harm. Thus, from the outset, children's work, if it takes time away from children's educational activities (be they in class or at home doing homework), is positioned as antithetical to, or at the very least, in competition with schooling (Myers and Boyden, 1998). Indeed, in the dominant development discourse (epitomized by the United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], ILO, Overseas Development Institute [ODI]¹ and World Bank, for example) child work and child labour are predominantly framed negatively as an impediment to achieving EFA (for example, Guarcello et al, 2015), even though a child's earnings may provide the means to attend school in the first place (Wambiri, 2014; Pankhurst et al, 2016).

From the end of the 20th century, school enrolments mushroomed across SSA, albeit unevenly, as demonstrated by improving enrolment rates, diminishing repetition and drop-out rates, and narrowing 'gender gaps' (UNESCO, 2015a). However, in resource-constrained contexts, including in parts of Ghana, increases in school participation have not necessarily been matched by improvements in school quality and learning opportunities (Lewin and Akyeampong, 2009). As the 2004 EFA Global Monitoring Report acknowledged, 'the focus on access often overshadows the issue of quality' even though quality stands at the heart of the EFA movement (UNESCO, 2005, p 12, see sections 5 and 6). Moreover, as we argue later in the chapter, the non-provision of 'inclusive, equitable and quality education' (as articulated in SDG 4) to children who *are* in school, is as much a denial of their rights to education as non-participation in schooling is to children who are *out of* school.

Who's not in school, and why?

Globally, as stated earlier, SSA has the largest number of school-age children out of school, with a disproportionately high number of out-of-school children (OOSCs) found in a handful of countries,² including Ghana and Nigeria. As the 2015 EFA Global Monitoring Report noted, many OOSCs are caught up in conflict, or have been displaced by conflict. Others are migrants, fostered children, children with disabilities, children from the nomadic communities, who account for around 20 per cent of the population in East Africa, and those who come from minority ethno-linguistic groups. Otherwise, in very broad terms, across SSA, children are more likely to be out of school if they come from rural areas, from poorer families, are girls, and are older (UNESCO, 2015a).

Importantly, however, figures for OOSCs are thought to be huge underestimations; neither one-off annual school enrolments (as recorded in education management information systems [EMIS] data), nor household survey attendance data, reflect the amount of time that children are actually at school or in the classroom engaged in meaningful learning (Fair, 2016). What is more, EMIS data in many contexts are inconsistent, unreliable and incomplete (Husein et al, 2017), making it even more challenging to gauge who is ‘in’ or ‘out of’ school.

Within the dominant statistical research on school access, as exemplified by World Bank and UNESCO Global Monitoring Reports, reasons for not being in school are generally categorized as supply- or demand-side constraints. In SSA, supply-side constraints include a lack of schools nearby, which also relates to school travel time and costs and safety concerns, especially regarding young children and girls; a shortage of classrooms, water and other necessary infrastructure; and inadequate supplies of teaching and learning materials and qualified teachers (Bashir et al, 2018). Many of these same ‘inputs’, however, are also commonly identified indicators of school quality, which, when inadequate, reduce demand for schooling (Hunt, 2008). Additional factors include curriculum and pedagogy, disciplinary regimes, as well as informal teacher-student and peer interactions (UNESCO and UNICEF-UIS, 2014; Bashir et al, 2018), which are addressed in more detail later.

Demand-side reasons for not being in school include economic hardship (as discussed later), which tends to be exacerbated in large households with many school-age children; child or family health issues, including hunger; early marriage and pregnancy; perceptions of the low value of education, due variously to its poor quality and lack of relevance to local socio-economic realities (Tafere and Pankhurst, 2015); and absence of employment opportunities for school graduates (UNESCO, 2015a; Bashir et al, 2018).

Across SSA, however, poverty and the high direct and indirect costs of education (including loss of children’s labour) have been identified as the main reasons children in the very poorest communities are out of school (UNESCO-UIS and UNICEF, 2015; Bashir et al, 2018). To address this, most governments have abolished school fees, at least for primary education, and are increasingly committed to providing more resources for educational development (ACPE, 2018). At the same time, they struggle to keep pace with expanding school-going populations while simultaneously investing to improve quality. However, costs to households still persist in the form of parent teacher association (PTA) levies, school development funds, exam fees, uniforms, stationery, textbooks and transport. As a result, completing even a cycle of primary schooling is unachievable for children in the very poorest households (UNESCO, 2015a). Children from families living in poverty have to work both to help themselves and their family satisfy basic

needs (Sabates-Wheeler and Sumberg, 2020), including paying for their schooling or that of siblings (Boyden, 1994; Okyere, 2012; Wambiri, 2014). Put another way, for many children living in extreme poverty, schooling would not be possible if they did not work (Woodhead, 1999; Jonah and Abebe, 2019).

What is being done about widening access?

Programmes designed to increase participation in basic education are premised on the assumption that the main reason that children are out of school is because families cannot afford to educate them, and/or (to a lesser extent) because parents are presumed to be unaware of the value of education, particularly with respect to girls (UNESCO, 2015a). To address the economic constraints poor households face, and reduce their reliance on children's labour, social safety net strategies aimed at widening access – such as school feeding programmes (SFPs), scholarships for girls, fee waivers and cash transfers – are spreading across Africa, undergoing particularly rapid expansion in Ghana, Kenya, Senegal and Tanzania (Beegle et al, 2018).

School feeding programmes have been particularly effective at increasing participation especially in poorer rural areas, where enrolments are usually low (Bundy et al, 2009), and in a few instances have been shown to contribute to improved test scores (within the project's limited time period) (Bashir et al, 2018). Cash transfers have also consistently been associated with improved school participation (Fisher et al, 2017). This has been the case with the Livelihood, Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme in northern Ghana, although it has also been noted that not all children within a household necessarily benefit equally (Roelen et al, 2015).

Yet, there is very little evidence on the long-term impact and sustainability of such programmes in ensuring sustained access (Snivstveit et al, 2016), especially if funded by outside donors for a limited period. Edmonds and Shrestha's (2014) paper, entitled *You Get What You Pay For*, is a cautionary tale in this respect. Sixteen months after it had ended, the researchers returned to the site of a one-year programme aimed at combatting child labour in a carpet-weaving factory in Nepal. They found that all the educational gains accrued during the project had been erased, and the children were back weaving carpets. This example may be an extreme case – we don't know – but it highlights the urgent need to carry out impact assessments well beyond the end of development projects.

What is more, as shown by an assessment of cash transfer programmes in six countries in SSA, including Ghana, the impact on children's work patterns is never straightforward (Fisher et al, 2017). Although such interventions may increase access to school, they do not necessarily reduce either absenteeism or 'child labour' (in this case, paid employment outside the home). Rather,

they often signal a shift to unpaid work on the family farm as increased assets, such as livestock, generate further work (de Hoop et al, 2020). As discussed in [Chapter 7](#) (this volume), public works programmes (in which households offer adult labour in return for cash and/or food) can have similarly ambiguous impacts on children's educational participation and their patterns of work, as they often get drawn into paid and unpaid gendered labour as a result (Devereux, 2000; Devereux et al, 2008).

The relationship between education and work

Education and work in competition

The dominant discourse sustains a hierarchical education–work binary, which positions education above work (Jonah and Abebe, 2019). This is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it reflects neither the situation within the lives of children, nor the views of the children themselves (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2013). In addition, it assumes that school is a benign space for education and learning, and therefore the proper place for children (Myers and Boyden, 1998). Further, this is the default rationale in much anti-child labour literature even when it is acknowledged that the education on offer is sub-standard, and that children both need and want to combine schooling with work (for example, Quattri and Watkins, 2016; ILO, 2017a). A recent regional ILO brief on Africa exemplifies this attitude: ‘There is an on-going need for investment in what we know works in getting children out of work and into the classroom – and keeping them there’ (ILO, 2017b, p 8).

In this influential literature, work is frequently understood narrowly as ‘productive work’ related to income generation. This excludes much domestic work – often described as ‘household chores’ – which is considered to ‘constitute a “non-economic” form of production’ (ILO, 2017a, p 17), as we elaborate later.

Within this context, a number of large-scale surveys and multi-country studies (including randomized control trials – RCTs) have compared school attendance of ‘working’ and ‘non-working’ children (itself a problematic dichotomy, given the limitations about what counts as work and the fact that children's workloads are constantly changing), and concluded that generally children who work above a particular threshold of hours and/or intensity of work are less likely to be ‘in school’ (ILO, 2017a; UCW, 2017). Yet the classification of children as being either ‘in’ or ‘out-of-school’ constitutes a further unhelpful binary, especially since being ‘in school’ may not necessarily involve much time within the school grounds, let alone in a classroom (Tafere and Pankhurst, 2015). As more longitudinal mixed methods research (for example, Young Lives, Orkin, 2012; Pankhurst et al, 2016)³ and qualitative and ethnographic studies (for example, Berlan, 2009; Okyere, 2012) have shown, the reality of being ‘in school’ is inevitably nuanced. Working children

from poor rural backgrounds, in particular, may move in and out of being physically at school within a single day, or over much longer periods of time, and learning-related activities may only constitute a small portion of that in-school time (Humphreys et al, 2015; Tafere and Pankhurst, 2015).

A second common assumption is that work prevents children from persisting and/or achieving well in school. While work may be a major factor, evidence from more contextually situated studies in SSA point to other challenges that children and families face (Bourdillon et al, 2015, p 6). For example, rural farming households are especially vulnerable to environmental shocks, such as drought or flooding, which may also disrupt children's schooling (Rose and Dyer, 2008). In addition, family crises (such as a death, illness or divorce) can force children out of school, as they have to cover other labour needs, such as caring for a sick relative or taking over an adult working role (Pankhurst et al, 2016). This may necessitate moving to another area (Robson, 2004; Hashim, 2005), which may well disrupt schooling. Children's own ill-health is another reason for missing or dropping out of school (Hunt, 2008), as is hunger, both of which affect the ability of children to learn even if they manage to stay at school (Jomaa et al, 2011; Morrow et al, 2017).

Crucially, the poor quality of schooling available in many rural areas is central to determining whether children attend or persist in school, and whether they learn (Odonkor, 2007; UNESCO, 2015a). So too, is the perceived benefit of schooling by children and parents or caregivers, when viewed within the context of local employment opportunities (Hashim, 2004; Jones et al, 2019). Poor households make strategic choices regarding their children's schooling based on a complex interaction of factors including available finances, the multiple and varied needs of the whole household, and the quality and the likely future benefits of education. In Ghana, the fact that the annual income for household heads who are self-employed in agriculture is the same whether they have no formal schooling or have completed basic education is likely to be a consideration (Krauss, 2017).

In addition, young people may themselves make their own choice of work over education at different times, especially if the schooling on offer is of low quality and they are failing to learn (for example, Chant and Jones, 2005; Tafere and Woldehanna, 2012). Thus, although work demands put on children may prevent them from attending school, it does not follow necessarily that if these children were not in work, they would attend or persist in school.

In contrast to the limited learning afforded by low quality schooling, adults and children may consider children's work and home environments to afford better learning opportunities (Myers and Boyden, 1998; Admassie, 2003). In a similar vein, the harm that is often attributed to many types of what the ILO terms 'hazardous work' may actually be just as evident within the

school environment (Berlan, 2004), or even the home (Odonkor, 2007). Ampiah and Adu-Yeboah's (2009) study on 90 school dropouts in Ghana provides supporting evidence. Although critical incidents related to poverty and/or the need to work were the most commonly cited tipping points that finally kept the children out of school permanently, children identified a combination of out-of-school and (predominantly) in-school factors that led to dropping out, including harmful school processes such as indiscriminate corporal punishment and forced manual labour for teachers.

Schooling and fit with rural lives and livelihoods

The rigid structures of schooling demand that children's work, including within the household, should fit round the regimes of schooling (Bourdillon et al, 2015; Humphreys et al, 2015). Thus, if working children (or their families) do not adjust schedules to enable them to attend school, then work is blamed for their loss of education. Since almost all children in SSA are engaged in some form of work, whether in the home or outside, unpaid or paid, or in the formal or informal sectors (ILO and UNICEF, 2021), school's lack of flexibility concerning annual, weekly and daily timetables has profound effects on children's ability to attend school regularly and on likely learning outcomes (Orkin, 2012; Dyer, 2013).

In Ethiopia, for example, the nationally standardized main school holidays coincide with key events in the agricultural calendar in the grain-producing regions in the north but do not suit the crop calendar in the south (Abebe, 2011). The clashing annual cycles mean that children returning to school mid-year after an absence for seasonal work may be told to come back at the beginning of the next academic year, and repeat the grade (Colclough et al, 2003). This may discourage the child from re-entering school (Hashim, 2004; Wouango, 2013), sometimes due to feelings of shame or embarrassment at having to repeat and/or study with younger children (Ananga, 2011). In addition, since the child will be a year older, they are less likely to stay in school because grade repetition increases both the direct and opportunity costs of education (Lewin, 2009).

That said, some types of work may be more compatible with school timetables than others. Evidence from Ethiopia, for example, suggests that while minding cattle, boys may be able to study whereas girls doing household chores cannot (Orkin, 2012). Double-shift schooling, which is common in rural areas, offers slightly more flexibility as the half-day timetable gives children more time to contribute to their households' livelihoods (Wambiri, 2014; Pankhurst et al, 2016; also see Chapter 9, this volume).

The dissonance provoked by the spatial and temporal disconnects between rural lives and formal education is compounded by other tensions. These include the curricular irrelevance of much of modern schooling to the

lives and needs of rural communities (Odachi, 2011; Dyer, 2013). Such curricula take no account of the skills that children have learned outside school (Bourdillon et al, 2010) while schools position working students as childlike, irrespective of the adult responsibilities they have outside school (Dunne and Ananga, 2013).

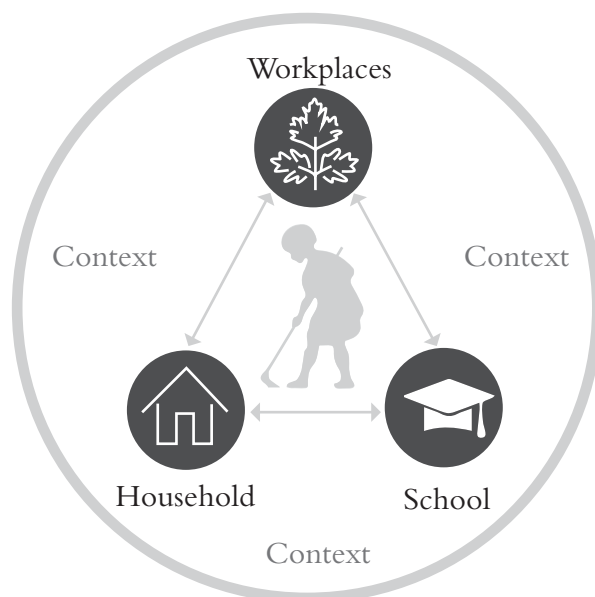
In conclusion, contextually situated research provides insights into the complex ways in which education and work interact and the multiple influences and demands on children's time. In the next section, we focus on three key social arenas, namely the household, school and work environments, which together we term the edu-workspace.

The edu-workspace: learning, labour and harm

As we illustrated in the previous section, whether or not rural children can realize their right to education depends upon a host of factors. The interactions between these place competing demands on children's time in three key overlapping social arenas: the household, workplaces and school. In order to better understand these dynamics, we propose a conceptual model that we term 'the edu-workspace'.

The triangular relational matrix illustrated in Figure 4.1 not only includes interactions between the workplace(s), the school and the household, but

Figure 4.1: The edu-workspace



Source: Authors

it centralizes the child within these interactions. In so doing, it offers a reconceptualization and contextualization of the relationships between children's work and education. It acknowledges that both learning and work take place within each of the arenas of the edu-workspace, and that the potential for harm exists in all three arenas. Further, the matrix highlights the fact that children's experiences are shaped by social relations within and between home, school and work. The edu-workspace foregrounds the dynamic interplay within and between each arena and emphasizes how the child navigates and experiences this nexus. There are multiple tensions between the three social arenas: schools (embedded within education systems), households (with their multiple, often changing, family and community configurations) and workplaces (in multiple locations including family farms and businesses, and commercial farms). These are also subject to conditions and power relations in the wider economic, social, temporal and spatial contexts, as we elaborate later.

This conceptual framework represents the complex and overlapping relations that are the nexus of children's lives. Given the relational and contextual contingencies, childhoods are never singular or uniform but rather complex, evolving and diverse. As we discuss later, they are experienced through the symbolic and material significance of a range of social variables including gender as well as histories of migration, settlement and work in different contexts (Burman and Stacey, 2010; Jonah and Abebe, 2019; Rai et al, 2019). This means, for example, that gender practices within community and household contexts will produce operational understandings of appropriate work (domestic, unpaid, paid and/or hazardous) for both girls and boys in ways that delimit and define childhoods, future social trajectories and on-going engagements in social and economic life. Schools too often reaffirm these understandings of gender, through their formal and informal processes, such as gender-differentiated teacher–student classroom interactions or allocation of school responsibilities. This gendering will also be intersected by ethnicity, religion, age, disability and migration status, among other variables, to produce edu-workspaces within which childhoods are constructed and lived out.

In the next three sections, we explore the three social arenas of the edu-workspace, focusing in particular on the school since details on schooling are frequently absent in much of the literature on child labour. Understanding how children navigate the edu-workspace offers the potential for more nuanced and socially sensitive insights into their education and work, wherever they take place. It allows us to consider more holistically the total burden of work on children in the school, household and workplace, as well as recognizing learning across the three arenas. Further, judgements about potential harm to children should not only be focused on the workplace but should refer to the whole edu-workspace.

Harm and work in school

In contrast to the dangers that are associated with agricultural work, the school environment is presumed to be free of harm and hard physical labour. However, it is important to recognize that both are often present in rural schools and that they are important 'push' factors that are likely to encourage children to prefer work to life in school.

Violence and bullying

For a long time, international development literature on the Global South – outside feminist and post-colonial critiques – has considered formal schooling to be an unequivocal good and school as a benign institution (Vavrus and Bloch, 1998; Stromquist and Monkman, 2014). However, the United Nations' *World Report on Violence against Children* (Pinheiro, 2006) was seminal in bringing to global attention the fact that many children experience various forms of violence in and around schools worldwide.

In SSA, gender violence, corporal punishment and bullying are the three areas of obvious harm that have come to greatest prominence over the last two decades (Dunne et al, 2006; Leach et al, 2014; Parkes et al, 2016), propelled by high-profile international campaigns for their global eradication, usually framed within the discourse of child rights. These forms of violence can all be conceptually linked within an analysis of school as a gendered institution operating within broader societal gender norms and power relations (Connell, 1987; Bhana et al, 2021) and within violent historical processes, such as colonialism and apartheid (Epstein and Morrell, 2012; Adzahlie-Mensah, 2014). Yet corporal punishment and bullying, in particular, are more often studied separately and decontextualized, within gender-neutral discourses of 'victim' and 'perpetrator/bully', with gender only considered as a categorical variable (Dunne et al, 2006). Many of these forms of school-based violence are acutely felt by children from poorer households.

Central to school regulation is corporal punishment, backed up by systems of prefects and monitors, who often have the authority to physically discipline their peers (Morrell, 2001; Humphreys, 2008). Although corporal punishment is now illegal in schools in most SSA countries, there has been 'little progress' toward its elimination (ACPE, 2018, p 31). This is largely due to the fact that it is widely accepted as a legitimate disciplinary practice by teachers, parents, caregivers and children themselves – provided it is done in moderation and with the aim of correcting errant behaviour (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2013; Masko and Bosiwah, 2016). However, its application is often excessive and children are frequently punished for issues outside their control, especially children living in poverty who are late or absent from

school due to heavy household or external work commitments (Pankhurst et al, 2016; Isimbi et al, 2017; Devonald et al, 2021).

In addition to violence by teachers against students, a recent global synthesis of survey data confirmed high rates of school bullying, with nearly half of all students in SSA saying that they had been bullied, while just over a third reported physical attacks or being involved in fights (UNESCO, 2019). Physical bullying was more commonly reported by boys rather than girls (25.4 per cent to 18.7 per cent), while one in ten boys *and* girls complained of sexual bullying. Peer violence is often compounded by teacher complicity in ignoring its occurrence, thereby normalizing violence in schools (Leach et al, 2003; Dunne et al, 2005).

Studies of gender violence in schools have predominantly focused on sexual violence against girls (Dunne et al, 2006; Leach et al, 2014). Only more recently have national prevalence surveys among children and youth indicated that many boys also suffer sexual violence in school, though largely from their peers (UNESCO, 2019). There is evidence of (predominantly) male teachers demanding sexual favours from girls (or, to a lesser extent boys) in exchange for preferential treatment, including better grades and/or monetary assistance (Jones and Norton, 2007; Antonowicz, 2010). A review of reports and studies on gender violence in West and Central Africa also reported boys 'procuring' girls for teachers in exchange for reduced fees (Antonowicz, 2010). In some cases, however, girls may actively seek out sexual relationships with teachers as part of the sexual economy. As with 'sugar daddies' outside school, such relationships often enable girls to pay school expenses and may be encouraged by the family (Parkes et al, 2013). In such ways, education is implicated in sexually exploitative activities.

The ill-effects of violence experienced by children in schools in SSA include increased anxiety, preventing children from participating in class (for fear of being wrong and risking further punishment) (Feinstein and Mwahombela, 2010) and depression (Cluver et al, 2010). School violence can also affect students' concentration and learning, resulting in poor attainment (Talwar et al, 2011; Stein et al, 2019), and lead to truancy, absenteeism and eventual dropout (Ananga, 2011; Pankhurst et al, 2016). Sexual violence against girls may result in unwanted pregnancy, which generally spells the end of formal schooling. Even where school policies allow these young women to continue, bullying by classmates, economic constraints and/or lack of childcare usually make it impracticable (Wekesa, 2011).

Child work in school

To date, schools have yet to be given much consideration as sites of labour. Yet, the gendered child work regimes of schools in SSA add to the burden of work that many children already experience at home and in the work

place, and to the potential harm that schools can cause children. For example, [Berlan's \(2009\)](#) ethnographic study in a cocoa-producing area of Ghana found that work in school can be more arduous and dangerous than that carried out on family-owned cocoa farms. In school, children were clearing the ground with machetes in the hot sun, whereas on the cocoa farms there was more shade, and the work was less strenuous, and carried out under greater supervision. Such evidence highlights the need to account for the labouring that goes on in school in debates about the tensions between child work and education, and in judgements about school quality.

Studies in various national contexts in SSA, including in Ghana, have noted how children can spend anything from an hour to a whole day cleaning, working on the school farm or fetching water and sand for school construction projects ([Boyle et al, 2002](#); [Benavot and Gad, 2004](#); [Adonteng-Kissi, 2018](#)). Classroom and school cleaning, in particular, is often officially timetabled. Given that scheduled teaching time may be no more than 3–5 hours per day, especially in double-shift schools, the time children spend working can represent a considerable proportion of school time. This exploitative labour in school is in contrast to the valuable learning that can arise from supervised agricultural activities, where children and their families may also get to share the benefits (for example, [Okiror et al, 2011](#), in Uganda).

Often it is schools in the poorest rural communities that require more student and community labour to build new classrooms and furniture and/or carry out school repairs ([Swift-Morgan, 2006](#); [Essuman and Akyeampong, 2011](#)). Even school feeding programmes can result in extra labour demands on children's time ([Sulemana et al, 2013](#)).

In Ghana, there is also ample evidence that some schools insist on students undertaking paid work on farms to generate income to help run the school ([Berlan, 2004](#); [Ananga, 2011](#); also see [Chapter 9](#), this volume). Teachers also use students as unpaid workers on their own farms and in their homes ([Casely-Hayford et al, 2013](#); [Maconachie and Hilson, 2016](#)). Cleaning male teachers' accommodation puts girls (in particular) at risk ([Antonowicz, 2010](#); [Shumba and Abosi, 2011](#)). Cases have been reported from Central and West Africa of communities and schools (or school staff) having agreements on using children's labour as a form of remuneration or incentive for teachers ([Hashim, 2004](#); [Aronowitz, 2019](#)). Older students may absent themselves from school on days dedicated to labour or, when threatened with punishment for non-compliance, may drop out altogether ([Alhassan and Adzahlie-Mensah, 2010](#); [Ananga, 2011](#)).

Frequently, work in school replicates the gendered patterns of labour within the household, with girls and younger children shouldering the greater burden ([Antonowicz, 2010](#); [Casely-Hayford et al, 2013](#)). Generally, girls sweep classrooms, collect firewood and water (especially if school meals

are cooked on site [Sulemana et al, 2013]) and clean toilets, whereas boys will move furniture and do heavier manual jobs (Casely-Hayford et al, 2013; Leach et al, 2014). Work tasks may also be allocated as punishments, as explained earlier, such as cleaning toilets (for girls), digging trenches or weeding (for boys) or working on the farm (Porter et al, 2011; Levison et al, 2018).

In summary, the evidence indicates that rather than a safe haven from the presumed harm of work elsewhere, schools can be sites of multiple forms of violence and harm – both sanctioned and unsanctioned – and spaces for physically demanding gendered work. Collectively, these common features of rural education in SSA can drive students out of school. What's more, the evidence shows that these multiple harms are likely to be greater for children from the poorest households as schools' inflexible timetables, poor quality teaching and harsh, inequitable disciplinary regimes compound the challenges that working children face when attempting to combine schooling with work and other commitments.

Learning (gender) work at home

The second arena in the edu-workspace is the household. Until relatively recently, research on child labour has taken scant account of the work done in households, which is integral to the child's experiences of their edu-workspace. Unpaid work within the home makes an important contribution to sustaining the household and is integral to the daily life of many children, whether working elsewhere or not (Chant and Jones, 2005; Abebe, 2011; Tafere, 2013). In Ghana, for example, more than 90 per cent of children in cocoa-growing areas do some household work (Tulane University, 2015). Children's contribution to household labour is part of an intergenerational social contract that both adults and children value (Abebe, 2011), but is renegotiated as children grow up and try to balance collective responsibilities and obligations with individual needs and desires (Tafere, 2013; Kassa, 2016). By helping parents and carers with domestic work, including sibling care and farm work, children also free up the adults to undertake paid employment (Pankhurst et al, 2016).

Despite the household being a significant site for child work, especially for girls (Chant and Jones, 2005; World Bank, 2005; Webbink et al, 2012), it is only relatively recently that household chores have been formally categorized as 'work' (ILO, 2017a). That said, the numbers are considered separately (see, for example, ILO and UNICEF, 2021); most surveys still discount domestic work (FAO, 2020); and even the term 'chore' suggests something less serious than 'work'. In underplaying the importance of domestic labour, the dominant discourse reinforces the gender hierarchies within the household.

The intensity of household work increases with age and tasks become increasingly gender-differentiated. Young boys and girls may both collect firewood and water, for example (Kassa, 2016; Levison et al, 2018), whereas as they get older, boys tend towards farming while girls' domestic load includes cleaning, cooking, care work and household management, as well as paid and unpaid farm work (Abebe, 2011; Pankhurst et al, 2016). In general, girls take the greater domestic work burden, which, along with expectations of marriage and child-bearing, frame judgments about what work and education is appropriate (Tetteh, 2011). While this may prepare children for stereotypical gendered work opportunities in both the domestic and 'productive' arenas of adulthood (Hashim, 2004; Abebe, 2011), it also has direct implications for schooling.

The household is also an important site for learning. Through participation in work, children use their mental and physical abilities beyond those required in school, and this can build children's confidence, self-esteem, social status and sense of belonging (Young Lives, 2018). In addition, the collaborative contribution of children to their household is reputed to encourage pro-social behaviour and a willingness to help (Coppens et al, 2016).

Gender relations, interacting with age, seniority and other social markers of identity, are central to the social dynamics of household and community life. Social learning through household work instantiates these social hierarchies (Heissler and Porter, 2013), and is often regulated through the use of corporal punishment. This is permitted in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), provided it is 'with humanity and [is] consistent with the inherent dignity of the child'. Indeed, physical disciplining is regarded as a necessary process of socialization into responsible adulthood and a sign of love (Frankenberg et al, 2010; Chuta et al, 2019). If children return home late from school, or insist on going to school rather than doing chores, they may be beaten in the home (Soneson, 2005; Murphy et al, 2021), or deprived of food (Pankhurst et al, 2016; Adonteng-Kissi, 2018). As part of this socialization, as children get older they, in turn, physically discipline their younger siblings for similar misdemeanours (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2013; Isimbi et al, 2017). GAGE evidence from Ethiopia highlights how adolescent girls are frequently disciplined for contravening gender norms, which may foreshadow later domestic violence (Murphy et al, 2021).

Notwithstanding the significant learning that takes place within households, not least about gender identity and position, domestic work reinforces gendered hierarchical relations through social regulation in the form of physical, psychological and symbolic violence. These are often normalized as part of 'growing up' and rarely included in notions of harm. Contextual understandings of these conditions of daily life within households and their bearing on schooling and life outside are essential to enhancing

our understanding the relationship between education and children's work (Abebe and Bessell, 2011).

Learning at work

In this section we focus on the third element of the edu-workspace – the workplace. While there are clearly contexts and conditions in which children's work may be detrimental, the overall picture is inevitably more nuanced. Importantly, in much of SSA, the notion of working hard (in both domestic and waged labour) is part of being a 'good child' (Tafere, 2013; Jonah and Abebe, 2019) and, as highlighted earlier, integral to the reciprocal intergenerational social contract that is central to children's transition to adulthood (Tafere, 2013; Kassa, 2016).

Studies have shown that, at least initially, many children manage to combine paid work – of some sort – and schooling (Okyere, 2013; Maconachie and Hilson, 2016; Mussa et al, 2019). With respect to children working in cocoa, for example, it has been reported that that 71 per cent in Côte d'Ivoire and 96 per cent in Ghana attended school in 2013/14. Only 5 per cent reported negative effects of working on their schooling (Tulane University, 2015). However, combining school and work becomes harder as children get older and opportunity costs increase, and as they progress from primary to secondary school (Lewin, 2009). What is more, to attend secondary school, rural children often have to travel further and may have to pay for boarding, which adds to the already high costs of secondary education (Ohba, 2011; Porter et al, 2011).

As in the home, however, the different kinds of waged work available have a significant bearing on the compatibility of work and schooling. In parts of Ghana, boys may have to give up the whole day to fish or farm, whereas girls may be able to engage in petty trading outside school hours (Ananga, 2011). Whether work can be broken up into small blocks of time outside school hours is also a factor, as in Ethiopia when children worked for individual farmers, or helped on the family farm, and could finish the work after school (Orkin, 2012). In contrast, piecework tasks on commercial farms, fishing or herding cattle required a whole day, and therefore competed with schooling. However, as discussed earlier, the compatibility or incompatibility of certain types of work with schooling depends as much on the flexibility in the structures and processes of schooling, as on the nature or location of the work (Orkin, 2012). As with domestic chores, the ability of children to juggle paid or unpaid work and schooling will also depend on various contextual factors.

Increasing demands on children's time can lead them on the gradual path to dropout as attendance becomes more irregular and it is hard to keep up with school work (Ananga, 2011; Pankhurst et al, 2016). It then becomes

increasingly challenging for these older or 'over-age' working children to find a pathway back to education (Hunt, 2008; Dunne and Ananga, 2013).

In contexts of rural poverty, children's work often enables them to contribute to household income (Young Lives, 2018; Sabates-Wheeler and Sumberg, 2020), which can be a source of pride (Jonah and Abebe, 2019). Importantly, beyond the vital economic contribution to sustaining their household, children are learning vital work-related practical and social skills (Woodhead, 1999; Abebe and Bessell, 2011). Working alongside parents or other adults, be it farming or fishing, may be similar to an informal apprenticeship (Krauss, 2017; Moreira et al, 2017), or 'situated education' (Dyer, 2013, p 606) – preparation for becoming adult members of society (Abebe, 2011; Tafere and Pankhurst, 2015; Bourdillon, 2017; Young Lives, 2018). Learning about their inter-dependence in both their social and natural environments is important for young people's future livelihoods (Bolin, 2006).

Several studies outside Africa indicate there can be learning synergies for children engaging in both school and work, with some suggestion that work may be linked to improved attainment of low-performing students (Staff and Mortimer, 2007). Work experiences can be drawn upon to learn new vocabulary, explain abstract concepts and in understanding some aspects of the curriculum (Aufseeser, 2014; Banerjee et al, 2017). There is some limited evidence that work provides children with greater confidence, skills and connections to enable them to develop small businesses to generate funds and savings to support future studies (Marsh and Kleitman, 2005; Tafere and Pankhurst, 2015).

Yet while there are plenty of potential benefits of combining work and education, it should not be forgotten that violence, harsh discipline or abuse can be a feature of life in the workplace as it can be at home and in school. Indeed, as our earlier discussions have illustrated, harm can occur across the whole edu-workspace.

Moving forward

This chapter has focused on schooling in relation to children's work and harm. In this final section, we elaborate on some of the evident conceptual and theoretical problematics, especially as they pertain to the contingent and relational matrix of the edu-workspace. We begin with context, childhood and gender, then propose areas and methodologies for further research.

Context

The notion of context is itself multi-layered and relational, encompassing household, community, national and international levels, and including

connections, disjunctions and tensions within and across these overlapping and permeable categories. Exploration of the education-work nexus ‘in context’ calls for research to be socio-historically and politically situated, paying attention to international and local economic and political forces, and sensitive to changing and competing cultures, traditions and identities. Geographical and climatic contexts are also critical to consider as agricultural livelihoods in rural SSA, including in northern Ghana, are considered to be the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (Challinor et al, 2007; UNDP, 2018). These intersecting contextual elements have substantive and methodological implications for the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of researching children’s edu-workscapes.

Childhoods

Conceptions of the child, as discussed in Chapter 1 (this volume), are central to our concerns with education, child work and harm. Many critical studies point to a ‘banal developmentalism’ that refers both to approaches to economic and social development in the Global South as well as in the conceptual framing of childhood (Nieuwenhuys, 1998; Burman, 2010). Overbearing Western developmental models are seen in the projection of singular, linear, staged trajectories of both capitalist economies and of childhood (Agbu, 2009). These models are associated with the production of the child as a ‘modern’ subject through a northern cultural imaginary characterized by ‘affective investment in childhood’, the normalization of children at ‘play’, and pathologizing children at work, all saturated with moral opprobrium and occluded assumptions around household organization, gender, wealth, class, race and so on (Burman, 2010, p 14; Burman and Stacey, 2010).

A universalized linear chronology used to define age-related stages is a key reference for many of the international development goals. Age life-stage hierarchies are instrumentalized to define the extent and kind of work appropriate to particular ages in ways that effect a separation of childhood from work. This conceptual separation is then reiterated in the opposition between work and schooling. The latter is deemed to be an appropriate activity for children defined by years of age, even in contexts where birth age is not always recorded or known (Berlan, 2009) and where children carry out adult roles and may not self-identify as children (Abebe and Ofosu-Kusi, 2016). Assumptions of age-appropriate activities are also integral to a definition of what constitutes harm and for whom, irrespective of traditions, practices and levels of poverty in particular contexts (Jonah and Abebe, 2019; Yeboah and Daniel, 2019).

Against these normalizing definitions, newer research underlines the significance of the relational complexities of contexts in providing more

contingent understandings of childhoods (for example, Abebe and Ofosu-Kusi, 2016, Chapter 2, this volume). The gender neutrality of 'child', 'childhood' and 'child work' have been specifically highlighted in this regard (Abebe and Bessell, 2011), as it obscures gendered processes and inequalities at work. These contextual and relational perspectives represent a shift in theoretical ground away from conceptions of the child in atomized behaviourist terms making individualistic rational choices about their lives and livelihoods (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Gender

Normalization of gender hierarchies and the subordination of women are echoed in the gender regimes in multiple arenas of social life including households, schools and workplaces (Butler, 1997; Oyěwùmí, 2005; Lugones, 2007). Understanding the particularities of just how gender (as it interacts with other markers of identity) operates in different contexts is critical to addressing the gendered division of labour and the production of gender identity narratives that sustain these fundamental inequalities.

Turning more specifically to work, in the dominant development discourse, waged labour is used as the key definitional category and as a default against which all other kinds of work (formal versus informal, paid versus unpaid) are constructed. That said, such distinctions are, in practice, more blurred (Dar et al, 2002). More than 85 per cent of work in Africa is in the informal sector, which involves high proportions of women, young people and those with low educational outcomes (ILO, 2018; Sumberg et al, 2020). Importantly here, the dominance of these intersecting binaries has added to the invisibility of women's labour and largely obscured how the very notion of work is gendered (Rai et al, 2019; UN Women, 2019). Despite the eventual recognition of household chores as work (World Bank, 2005; ILO, 2017a), Finlay (2019) points out that the Living Standards Measurement Survey (LSMS), overseen by the World Bank, continues to position women's work as secondary to that of men. Similarly, although the UN System of National Accounts recognizes that 'production' may also include unpaid work, it nevertheless excludes unpaid care and domestic work from such calculations (UN Women, 2019, p 143). The privileging of regular, paid activity continues to make it likely that much of women's and girls' work is still not recognized as work at all.

Further, women's reproductive work, acknowledged as central to capitalist economies (Butler, 1997; Oyěwùmí, 1997), remains largely out of sight even though it overshadows the ways that girls navigate their eduscapescapes and future lives. As a result, many quantitative analyses sustain the invisibility and misrecognition of women's and children's work (ILO, 2013; Prügl, 2020).

Indeed ILO (2017c) has highlighted that almost 70 per cent of those with jobs across SSA, and especially women and young people, are in ‘vulnerable’ employment, which is defined as working within the household or on their ‘own account’. This ‘own account’ work is highly gendered as girls face higher expectations than boys that they fulfil domestic chores and work on the household farm alongside their schooling (Bourdillon et al, 2015; Crossouard et al, 2022). In addition, boys generally have greater and more lucrative employment opportunities than girls (Abebe, 2011; Okyere, 2013). The reported prevalence of ‘transactional sex’, often to pay for education, is in part because better paid jobs are often not available to girls (Leach, 2003; Jones and Norton, 2007; Petroni et al, 2017). To add to this, anticipated futures of marriage and child-bearing intensify a gendered/sexual economy in which girls and women must struggle against systematic subordination. In these precarious conditions, the ways that girls and boys navigate their edu-workscapes are subject to the wider social and economic landscape, gendered expectations and the opportunity costs of schooling.

It is evident that decontextualized research that relies on quantifying girls’ and boys’ work hours, or comparing enrolment or dropout rates, or attainment outcomes, cannot begin to engage with the complex, contingent and everchanging scenarios of social and cultural life within which children go to school and/or work.

New research spaces: the edu-workspace

We have argued strongly for a dynamic conceptual framework that centres the child and takes account of the work, learning and potential harm that can take place across three key social arenas – school, household and workplaces – and which situates these interactions within broader contexts. This re-conceptualization also demands a shift away from dominant discourses of development to better explore and understand the dynamics of local contexts; provision of space for more fluid, contingent and emergent constructions of childhood; and an increase in the visibility of multiple forms of learning and work, especially those submerged in assumptions around gender.

Through the edu-workspace we suggest a conceptual framing that focuses on the social geographies of children’s lives as they move within and between the social relations of school, workplace and household. This framing has multiple implications for how we explore and address children’s work. For example, as elaborated earlier, the notion of childhood related to chronological serial time may be neither universal nor relevant for all contexts in SSA. The proliferation of expectations of time-staged hierarchies of progress that reverberate in development discourses are a theoretical imposition. While we may wish to retain childhood, and other similar constructs, it is important remain open to alternative theoretical

structures and assumptions emergent in the field. In the discourses of rights, development and education, a shift is required from generic universalized references to children, to make visible the ways these are highly gendered and intersected by socio-economic status, ethnicity, race, age, location, migration and other markers of social identity. These all make a difference to how and when children access education, and to their experiences within the school system.

Far from being a sanctuary, the school often requires children to work and experience violence and harm. Beyond corporal punishment or sexual abuse, violence also includes more invisible harms of gender socialization or having one's culture and language excluded from the curriculum. This raises critical questions about the normalization of violence in schools and other arenas in the edu-workspace, and the point at which they can be considered as harm. The ways work and harm are stipulated for different children within different contexts and institutions appears to be an important set of issues to explore (Chapter 2, this volume). These are likely to elucidate not only the worst forms of child work but also relate to improving working conditions in general for adults and children alike.

Successful efforts to plan, regulate or intervene in child work depend on the development of contextually specific understandings of children's lives. The implications here are for a broader range of research methodologies (Chapter 3, this volume). Policy-influencing research on education and children's work in SSA, as elsewhere, has been dominated by quantitative data from randomized control trials, quasi-experimental studies, regression analyses of household and EMIS data and impact evaluations (Cornwall and Aghajanian, 2017). The World Bank's *Facing Forward: Schooling for Learning in Africa* (Bashir et al, 2018), which reports exclusively on quantitative data, is a case in point. These studies have been matched with a plethora of 'systematic' or 'rigorous' literature reviews on key policy areas. Some only include quantitative research (for example, Guerrero et al's 2012 systematic review on improving teacher attendance). Yet, as one such review reflected, many of the 'high quality' (predominantly quantitative) studies paid no attention to the effect of context (Unterhalter et al, 2014). That said, there has been a more recent move towards the inclusion of qualitative data in 'mixed methods' research, including in impact evaluations (Cornwall and Aghajanian, 2017; Chapter 3, this volume). The studies on working children's lives from the mixed methods research of Young Lives offer more contextually situated insights (Young Lives, 2018). As part of a longitudinal research programme, these studies captured the importance of changing contexts and circumstances on children's lives. At the same time, as some qualitative researchers have noted, much 'mixed methods' research 'favours the forms of analysis and truth finding associated with positivism' (Giddings and Grant, 2007).

Thus, while acknowledging the contributions of mixed methods research, this chapter highlights the need to invest in more exploratory qualitative studies (as similarly argued in [Chapter 3](#), this volume). In particular, spatial analyses can help untangle the complex social geographies of edu-workspaces (Twum-Danso Imoh et al, 2018; Dunne et al, 2021). Such research will require more negotiated, participatory, collaborative and emergent methodologies. There is a need to understand what is going on in all its complexities and to gain insights into how and why this is the case from multiple local perspectives, including those of children. The scope of these studies may be narrowed or widened according to the research focus, its motivating questions and the processes of research. Iterations with more macro-data will also be informative. The edu-workspace that we have elaborated provides a framework for undertaking reflexive social research, which is vital for re-shaping conceptual, theoretical, methodological and empirical approaches to the study of children's education, work and harm.

Notes

- ¹ The Gender and Adolescence Global Evidence (GAGE) programme is an exception.
- ² Burkina Faso, Chad, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal, in West and Central Africa; and Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Tanzania, in East and Southern Africa. Smaller countries such as the Central African Republic, Chad, Djibouti and Mali have high numbers of school-age children not in school.
- ³ Young Lives is a longitudinal study of poverty and inequality that has been following the lives of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Peru and Vietnam since 2001. The programme is led by the University of Oxford.

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