



## Learning and Earning in the Context of Small-Scale Gold Mining: Examining the Compatibility of Schooling and Work in the Lives of Working Young People in Ghana

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### Abstract

*Dominant discourses on young people's work tend to highlight the dangers associated with their work. Childhood is seen as a time for school and play and work has been tagged as unarguably incompatible with schooling depriving them enjoying their childhood and reaping the full benefits that come with their schooling. However, far from being universally negative in young people's lives, the contribution of work particularly to their education and well-being should not be overlooked. Misleading results of policies underpinned by dominant discourses hamper the chances of some working young people to benefit from schooling and damage their chances for development. These benefits are particularly crucial to young people in difficult circumstances of poverty and impoverishment. Utilizing child-focused alongside some traditional methods, the paper gives a voice and hearing to the concerns articulated by young workers and other stakeholders. This paper attempts to highlight the creative side of their work and how some young workers are innovatively finding a balance between schooling and work. It exposes the disconnection between interventions towards young people's educational inclusion and improves well-being vis-a-vis universalised legislations targeted at abolishing their work. The paper is expected to inform a reconsideration of the conventional thinking and global policy on young people's work in the global south as some young people are indeed demonstrating work-school compatibility.*

**Keywords:** Young people, work, schooling, compatibility, mining

### 1. Introduction

In most part of human history and in the global south today, young persons are seen participating in various work activities. Relatively recently in the advanced part of the world, the principle and notion of young people's work have transformed from productive work to schoolwork (Nieuwenhuys, 2005; Bourdillon, 2015). This change has generated conceptual problems for our understanding and appreciation of the work of young persons in many other situations (Punch, 2003). With increasing economic strains on the family and individual livelihoods in the global south, there is the demand for different and adapted livelihood strategies. The work of young people has therefore extended beyond the confines of the domestic arena to include independent or unsupervised work in barred areas such as small-scale gold mining within the Ghanaian society.

The dominant understanding of childhood rooted in Western ideals emphasises childhood completely disassociated from work, with school, play, and rest envisaged as the benchmark for evaluating proper childhood (Bourdillon, 2014). School and work have been classified as incompatibles, with school being regarded as the ultimate arena for children's nurturing. This perspective predominantly constitutes the motivating force impinging most international legislations (Ansell, 2005). These global laws have been translated into regional and national legislations, and

have been the reference point for seeking the elimination of some forms of young people's work. Ghana has been a signatory to most of these international legislations, and local legislations such as Children's Act (1998) are just replica of the ideology underpinning the ratified international legislations. Ghana has therefore joined the global agenda for the abolition of young people work engagements in mining, although it woefully falters in supporting the maintenance of children relative to other advanced countries.

However, as has been emphasised, work constitutes an integral part of many childhoods in the global south (see Bourdillon, 2000, 2006; Bourdillon, Levison, Myers, & White, 2010; Liebel, 2004; Nieuwenhuys, 2005; Okyere, 2014). Many other works, such as the one by Samantha Punch (2003) in rural Bolivia, demonstrates how most young people could and do combine work and school. It is not surprising that The African Charter on the Right and Welfare of the Child made this recognition (ACRWC, 1999) and indicates in Article 31 for instance young people owe responsibilities to their families, society, and even the international community. It further indicates that children and young people shall work to ensure the cohesion of their families. Certainly, several positive accounts abound which testifies to the importance of young people's labour in different cultural context.

According to data from the national analytical report on the 2010 Population Census, among children aged 5-14 years, 11.5% are employed. The data further shows that 65.3% of these engaged children were in school. In the Ashanti Region where the research is conducted, among persons aged between 5-14 years employed, 75.0% were in school, with 78.3% and 71.6% for boys and girls respectively (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013, p. 274). The ILO and other international bodies expressed concerns about Bolivia's passage of a new law to allow and protect young workers (ILO, 2014). However, the Bolivian case triggers a pause to ponder whether preventing young people's labour serves their best interest. The Bolivian case points to the circumstantial and cultural dimension of young people's work. It highlights the inconsistencies between local realities and international conventions and standards aimed at protecting children and young people. It may, therefore, be unfair and counterproductive to universalise childhoods and thus criminalise the work activities of young people in impoverished societies without realistic consideration of their circumstances just on the basis of acclaimed incompatibility with schooling.

### 1.1 Work and School

There has been extensively publicised view for instance that young people's work and school are mismatched alternatives. This has led to the belief that preventing young people from engaging in paid work is a necessary requirement to keep them in school and to ensure that they succeed as well (see Bourdillon et al., 2010). Ray (2009) points out the emphasis of a great deal of the literature on the negative effects of young people's work, thereby trying to hurl their work as an adverse partner for their education and learning outcomes (as cited in Bourdillon et al., 2010, p. 118). This notion has been the trend on the agenda of most international organisations such as the ILO, by putting the work of young people and education at opposing ends. It is argued that the continual existence of young people's work does not serve the best interest of working young people and their households/families; neither does it serve the economic and social wealth of states (UNICEF, 1997, as cited in Admassie, 2003, p. 169). Allais and Hagemann for instance assert that "child labour [work] has to be taken seriously as an important obstacle to reaching the education for all goals" (Allais & Hagemann, 2008, p. 17).

However, some researchers have also offered a legitimate critique to the supposed incompatibility of work and school stance and associated perceived implications. This has been done through challenging empirical evidence and opinions of some working young people themselves. To Admassie (2003), the perceived negative relationship between working and schooling exists because they are already believed to be incompatible. From this perspective, any young person who is not attending school is assumed to be likely engaging in work activities, which are also likely to produce long-term impacts (Admassie, 2003).

Contributing to the debate, Admassie and Bedi (2003) posit that if work and schooling are rival alternatives, then reducing education cost or subsidising school fees should invariably lead to a

corresponding increase in school attendance or enrolment. They further posit that, such efforts should equally lead to substantial reduction in the incidence and duration of young people's work based on the premise (Admassie & Bedi, 2003). In view of this, it is only rational to admit that other factors beyond work are also responsible for poor performance or low enrolment. In a research fieldwork in a rural district in Ghana called Kenyasi, Okyere (2014) explored the lived experiences and accounts of working young people in artisanal gold mining. He reports that most of the young workers were in school and poverty as the overriding reason for their decision to take up work in gold mining. To the young workers, accessing education is largely possible if they can make some money for that purpose and taking up mining work seems to be the plausible option (Okyere, 2014).

In a related study, Adu-Gyamfi (2014) reports from the Upper Denkyira area in Ghana on the effects of illegal mining on school attendance and academic performance. It is reported that student absenteeism records increasing figures during peak seasons for gold mining in the area. However, enough indications were not given as to why it happens this way and whether working children use the opportunity presented by the boom to make savings for their education in the course of the academic year. Although mining activities are alleged to have negative effects on attendance in school, other factors like poverty, broken homes and distance to school are also mentioned as being causatives (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014). However, the results were silent on how children's mining work helps their education. It, therefore, makes it impossible to assess cost-benefit in order to arrive at a conclusion that serves the best interest of the children concerned.

Similarly, Heady (2003) examined the linkage between work participation and learning achievements among children in Ghana. Drawing a distinction between domestic work and work outside the domestic terrain, Heady (2003) found that it is largely the incidence of work outside the home (but not duration per se) that may lead to negative impacts on learning achievements (as cited in Admassie & Bedi, 2003, pp 5-6). In Ethiopia, it has been found that school children are also more likely to work. Statistically, it is reported that about 92% of young people attending school also engage in work activities, as against about 87% of children not attending school (Admassie & Bedi, 2003, pp 5-6). However, further analysis suggests a possible negative linkage between hours worked and the probability of school attendance. Also, factors such as the quality of school and cost of school are reported to have strong effects on schooling, but however do not have an impact on the time allocated to work (Admassie & Bedi, 2003).

In pursuit of the work-school relationship, Emerson and Souza (2007) also analysed data of Brazilian household to assess young people's labour market participation and school attendance. It was found that although young people's labour participation was widespread among households, school attendance was equally significantly high, reporting 93% for males and a little over 94% for females. Even among working young people, over 81% and 84% for boys and girls respectively were still attending school (Emerson & Souza, 2007).

In Michael Bourdillon's (2000) research on an estate boarding school in Zimbabwe termed 'earn and learn', it is reported that the young workers' entry into the school was after they dropped out from their previous schools, largely due to their inability to afford charges and other expenses. It is further reported that participants in the 'earn and learn' school enjoyed relatively good examination results, and although they made some complaints, they emphasised that they don't want it to close (Bourdillon 2000). There are equally enormous evidence where the work of children and young people becomes the only available means that makes accessing education possible (see Bourdillon, 2000; Bourdillon, 2006, 2014; Bourdillon et al., 2010; Cavagnoud, 2014; Nieuwenhuys, 1996; Okyere, 2012, 2014). In effect, there is no clear cut one-sided evidence supporting the acclaimed work-school incompatibility.

## 1.2 Contesting Debates on Young People's Work

### 1.2.1 Work-Free Childhood Perspective

Underpinning international approaches towards the abolition young people's work, the work-free childhood paradigm postulates a childhood disassociated from work. Advocating for the ideal childhood often termed as the global childhood, this perspective demands a childhood devoid of

responsibility or work. It suggests that children and young people irrespective of geography, culture or national income must not work (Abebe & Bessell, 2011). In opposition to work, the work-free childhood calls for an ideal-proper childhood as contained in the State of World's Children report 2004, defining childhood as follows:

*"Childhood is a time for children to be in school and at play, to grow strong and confident with the love and encouragement of their family and . . . caring adult. [As such], childhood ... is a precious time in which children should live free from fear, safe from violence and protected from [work] abuse and exploitation" (as cited in Abebe & Bessell, 2011, p. 767).*

This perspective propagates childhood characterised by schooling, play, dependence, innocence, care-recipient, vulnerability, etc. as the idealized-universal norm. The work-free childhood standpoint contends that children are exploited through work and that work detracts from children's optimal educational, mental and physical development. Consequently, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) in article 32 calls for protection of children from economic exploitation and prohibition of work interfering with children's schooling and development. And Article 28 also demands that primary school be made free and compulsory (UNCRC, 1989). Similarly, the minimum age convention (138) of ILO fixes the appropriate age for employment at an age where compulsory education is expected to have completed (ILO, 1973).

Conforming to the global ideology of work-free childhood, Ghana has adopted international legislations and set a number of national legislations and policies. Interestingly, Ghana was the first country to sign the UNCRC and is a signatory to conventions such ILO's Convention 182 on worst forms of child labour, minimum age convention (No. 138), and convention 29 on forced labour, among others. Ghana's 1992 constitution and Children's Act also contain provisions to protect children, keep them in school and ensure their optimum development. This stance discounts the immense contribution of young people to their families in the global south through their work. It ignores the visible variations in the social and economic contexts and structures in developed and developing countries.

### 1.2.2 Socio-Cultural Perspective

The socio-cultural paradigm asserts that young people's work is inseparably connected to the social and cultural contexts where they occur with its own socio-cultural meanings and contextualisation (Abebe & Bessell, 2011). It emphasises the socio-economic variations in societies, pointing that different material and cultural conditions necessitate young people's work. Their work ought to be understood in view of the different material and cultural circumstances giving rise to it (Abebe, 2008).

This perspective sees childhood as continuing into adulthood and sees work as initiating or socialising young people into adulthood, where they learn vital skills for both present and future life (Abebe & Bessell, 2011). It projects the benefits of work as empowering to young people and argues against the irreconcilability of work and schooling. The socio-cultural perspective stresses young people's work as a natural phenomenon and demands for children's rights to the benefits arising from work suitable to their age. Contrary to the ideals of western childhood, work is seen as significant part of children's daily activities in Ghana. Preventing impoverished young workers from work may harm rather than protect them as it constitutes their means to cope with hardships and poverty (Abebe & Bessell, 2011).

### 1.2.3 The Political Economy Perspective

Children and young people's work is argued from the political economy approach to be "grounded in specific ecological, economic and politico-historical contexts" (Abebe & Bessell, 2011, p. 772). The political economy perspective emphasises the inseparability of children's lives from macro economic and political structures, systems and processes that create and perpetuate poverty and inequality. In other words, the lives of children and young people are constantly affected by varying

and complex economic and political transformations. These include "poverty, debt, corruption, war, geo-political conflicts, epidemics, unfair trade; structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), inappropriate policies, and ineffective legislation" (Abebe & Bessell, 2011, p. 773). Similarly, the devastating impacts of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank imposed macroeconomic policies on the lives of young people in such economies cannot be underestimated (Abebe & Bessell, 2011).

In the present circumstances, Ghana has instituted a number of political-economic structures and policies which are affecting the lives of the entire population in many ways, particularly young people. The country is consistently faced with serious economic challenges leading to a deceleration in economic growth, accumulating public debt, high unemployment rate among the youth in particular, and depreciation of the national currency - leading to high cost of living. For instance, Ghana's recent agreement with IMF in 2014 and the implications of the resulting conditions such as removal of subsidies and full-cost recovery for public services such as health and education have far-reaching impacts on the lives of young people and their families. It is therefore not surprising rates young people's work are higher in countries facing economic challenges.

## 2. Methodology

The study utilised a qualitative strategy to facilitate the gathering of in-depth data and knowledge on the issues under investigation in connection with the study's objective. The young participants/workers constituted the principal informants, along with other significant adults, most of whom were gatekeepers. Multiple participatory methods/tools were used to obtain data from the research participants. These include traditional research methods such as focus-group discussion, individual interviews, observations, as well as child-focused tools namely recall chart and essay writing. The fieldwork for the study was conducted in the Amansie West District of Ghana, using three schools located in three different communities.

Non-probability sampling techniques, including purposive sampling and snowball sampling were employed to, as far as possible; control the biases of both researcher and gatekeepers in the recruitment of participants. Similarly, these sampling techniques ensured that relevant participants who could adequately respond to the issues of interest were recruited. Purposive sampling was used to select the first young participant from each of the three schools, after which the researcher employed snowballing to recruit other young participants, parents and other relevant local stakeholders. By explaining the criteria for inclusion, the first young worker(s) from each of the participating schools were selected. This was followed by the use of snowballing approach where participants recommended or referred other participants who meet the criteria for inclusion. A total sample of 21 participants, comprising of 10 young workers, 4 parents, 3 teachers, and 4 other local stakeholders were selected.

Eighteen (18) individual interviews were conducted to explore the perspectives and lived experiences of the participants. These were made up of 8 with young workers, 3 with teachers, 4 with parents, and 3 with local government workers. Non-participant observation was undertaken with a focus on the young workers in order to obtain first-hand information on the socio-economic conditions of participants, working environment and nature of work, as well as their interactions within the family, communities, and school. Two (2) separate focus-group discussions were organized with 4 parents and 4 local government workers respectively. Being more child-focused, all the 10 young workers participated in essay writing and recall method/chart. Specifically, the recall method was used to explore their working days and hours as well as how they manage or find a balance between work and schooling. The data obtained through these tools were analysed based on selected patterns and themes. Ethical issues of informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, and protection were given necessary consideration. Similarly, issues of power differences between the researcher and participants were properly managed.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Family/Household and Living Conditions of Young Workers

The family and living conditions of young workers in small-scale gold mining discovered through observation and interviews indicate interesting but worrying scenarios. Observation at the family circumstances of most of the young workers shows that unlike normal Ghanaian homes where the father is mostly the major income earner and breadwinner, the cases encountered here were slightly different. In most cases, the young worker is either living with a single parent/guardian, usually the mother or grandmother. This has largely been necessitated by marital separation, occupational conditions and urbanisation. The frustration of a 46 year old single mother attests to this; *In these times when you give birth with a man, he leaves everything on you and entirely neglects his responsibilities....* This single mother obviously is overburdened by the responsibility of caring for her children as the father has neglected his responsibilities.

Only three of the young participants in this study were living with both parents. One young participant lives with the father's friend, but he is virtually responsible for his personal upkeep. One other young participant also lives alone with no close relatives. Below is an excerpt of the accounts from the field; *I live with my mother with other five siblings and she takes care of my needs. She is a farmer but she sometimes works in the small-scale mining (A 15 year old male miner).* Another guardian also noted that; *His parents are working in the city so I live with him and his younger sister (A grandmother of young worker).*

The accounts give a picture of the household and familial conditions of most young workers in mining in this area and some reasons why it is so. It gives a hint that the conditions pertaining to the nuclear family of most young miners are, at least, below the ideal type that most people are familiar with. Most of the families/households of young workers are made of the parent(s)/guardian with about two to five other siblings. The majority of the siblings of young workers are in most cases also enrolled in school thereby increasing the burden of care. The families in most cases occupy two bed/sleeping rooms, and in some cases with an extra room serving as both kitchen and store room. Most of the buildings are made up of mud-bricks and sometimes plastered with cement mortar on the floor and sides of the walls, with aluminium roofing sheets.

The occupation of most adult income earners in young workers' families is mostly peasant farming. Some of the adult income earners are also working in the small-scale gold mining while some combine both farming and mining. Only two guardians are petty traders selling foodstuffs. Modernisation, urbanisation and increasing economic hardships have also affected the nature of the extended family system in the research setting as known in the Ghanaian society. Members of the extended family are in most cases coping in their own small ways, and are not adequately capable to offer support as the young workers would expect from their immediate adults such as uncles, aunties, among others.

#### 3.2 Reasons and Benefits of Work to Young People

Considering the fact that people often do the same things for different reasons, the study sought to investigate the very reasons accounting for young workers participation in mining from the young participants and their parents/guardians. There are a number of reasons found to account for the young workers engagements in small-scale mining work. Similar to other studies with working young people in the global south, poverty was reported as the primary reason underpinning young people's participation in mining work (see Admassie, 2003; Bourdillon et al., 2010; Okyere, 2014). This finding reflects the national economic situation. In the face of worsening economic conditions, small-scale mining work has become a necessary response for most adults and young people in the study communities.

In addition, other silent but influential factors were discovered to contribute to young people's mining work. These factors at least contribute to the worsening economic plight of young workers' households/families. Among such contributing factors are the unreliable occupation and/or irregular income, worrying household/family size, parental separation and migration, as well as reasons



bordering on socialisation. As opined by Young and Ansell (2003), young people's mining work has become one of the ways of contributing to rising household income needs and dealing with the economic hardships.

Responding to the push factors, young workers in mining derive a number of valuable benefits from their small-scale mining work. These benefits can be conceived as economic, social and psychological benefits. These benefits often transcend beyond the individual young workers to even help other members of their households. Firstly, the direct economic benefits of the work to young workers in the form of monetary gains are worth noting. It is obvious to imagine what this economic value could mean to and do in the lives of the young workers. This financial gain from young people's mining work further translates into other benefits for young workers and their households.

One important area where young workers invest their mining earnings is their education. They utilise the bulk of their mining cash to acquire school materials and settle other relevant costs in line with their schooling. Besides the personal economic benefits to the young workers, there were several accounts where young miners sometimes supported, at least, their younger siblings with money from their work. Moreover, some young workers are saving part of their earnings to partially cater for their next level of education or facilitate their entry into apprenticeship. Adding to the wealth of benefits from young miners work is the social recognition or psychological gains. By virtue of their work, young workers get recognised by their households and neighbours as contributing to the struggle to overcome poverty. Young workers equally feel proud and respected by the acknowledgement of this contribution. Thus, their mining work and its earnings benefit their education, gives them intrinsic worth, enable them to support their households as well as attend to other welfare needs.

### *3.3 Effects of Small-Scale Mining Work on Education*

The small-scale mining engagements of the young people produce some effects on their lives particularly their schooling or education. Here, the paper examines young workers' time use and how they combine their mining work and schooling. It as well analyse the attendance and performance of working young people from available documents and the perspectives of their class teachers. It finally looks at the two-way effects of mining work (positive and negative) on the education of the young workers.

#### *3.3.1 Time Use of Young Workers in Mining*

Since young workers in this study were all in school at the time of the fieldwork, it was important to explore whether there is a good fit between the work routines of the young student-workers and their desire to succeed in school at the same time. The main source of data for understanding the work routines of the young participants was the recall chart. Here, the young workers were asked to shade the number of days they worked in the past two weeks (each chart for one week). Interpretation was sought from the young participants afterwards interesting revelations were made with examples given below.

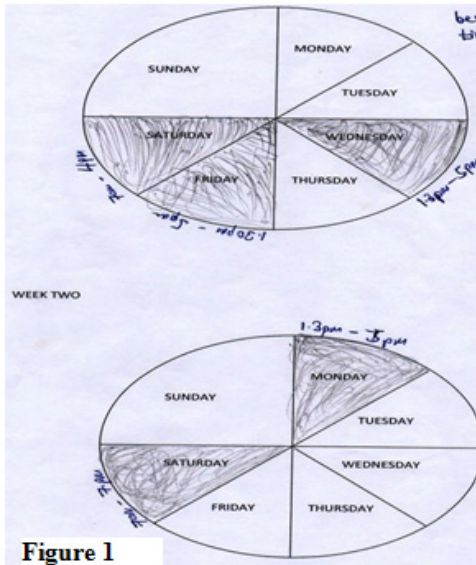


Figure 1

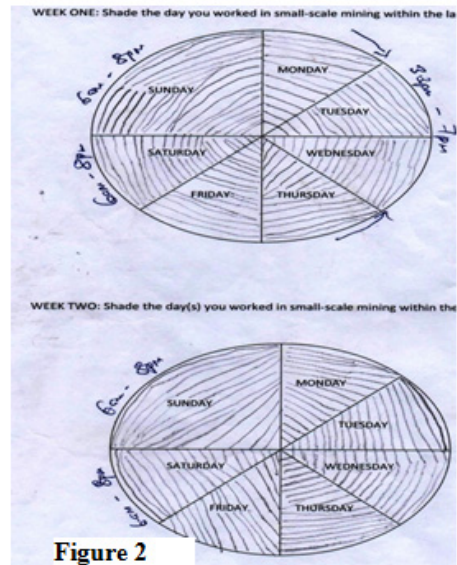


Figure 2

Source: Fieldwork (2015)

At hindsight, one may conclude that the young worker in Fig. 2 in particular does not attend school at all. But further probing indicated otherwise. Young participants here work averagely for about two to four days in a week. Most young participants in this study work only after school on weekdays in most of the cases. Schools at the basic level (pre-primary, primary and junior high school) in Ghana start officially at 8.00am in the morning and closes at 2.00pm. Pupils usually have to report to school earlier around 7.00am to tidy up the school compound before formal classes begin. In some cases, pupils stay in school after the official closing time till about 3.00pm for extra classes (they pay for it). Some young workers sometimes avoid the extra classes on their working days to start work at the mining site around 2.30pm, but they do attend the extra classes at least two days in a week. Indicatively, for the shaded weekdays where the young workers worked at the mining site, they actually attended school and only worked after school.

The peak time for young people's mining work in the study area falls on weekends and vacation. During these periods, schools are out of session without holding any classes to occupy young workers' time. Young workers in mining spend four or more days in a week at work during vacation. These young student-workers, especially those who are solely responsible for their upkeep in school, usually use the vacation period to save money to prepare for the impending school term.

Young workers in small-scale gold mining usually work from two to six hours and may close as late as 8.00pm on some busy days. This, however, depends on the nature of the work and their fortunes in terms of gold winnings for the day. Young workers do as well fulfil other household responsibilities such as fetching water, fetching firewood, among others. They sometimes accompany their parents/guardians to farm on weekends. A 16 year old male worker explained that;

*I work on Saturdays and after school on weekdays many times. When we are on vacation, I can work four days or more because I don't go to school. ...this is the time I save money (A 16 year old male young worker).*

The above quotation shows when young people's mining work peaks, which in most cases does not coincide with school sessions. Most young workers have a keen interest in their education and manage their time in a way to avoid missing school sessions. As such, most of the young



participants work in mining at weekends to prepare financially for the following school week. The money earned on weekends and the few work on weekdays are used to cater for recurrent expenditure in the course of the week. A Class teacher of some young participants also noted that: *...you can get a week that they (young workers) will always be in school and work after school...but they absent sometimes*, confirming the working routines of the young miners.

The results from this study correlate with other consultations on the opinions of young workers where most of them failed to confirm the view on the mutual exclusivity of work and school alternatives (see Bourdillon et al., 2010). The study further supports arguments suggesting that young people's working times are not necessarily drawn from the time allotted for school work. Rather, it may be drawn from peripheral activities outside the time allocated for school work such as leisure, watching television, etc. (Bourdillon, 2006).

### 3.3.2 School Records of Young Workers

Drawing on the understanding of education as espoused by Spittler and Bourdillon, it is largely associated with formalised or institutional schooling (Spittler & Bourdillon, 2012). Education in Ghana is conceived as fundamental to the lives of young people and as an avenue for them to develop relevant skills. It is believed that through education young people would be able to fit well into and constructively contribute to their societies. Ironically, however, this understanding depicts only one side of the education envisaged by the UNCRC. As it reflects only Article 28 of the convention. It, however, neglects Article 29 of the same convention which enjoins parties to direct the goals of education to the young person's development in tune with his/her "personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential" in different spheres of life (UNCRC, 1989, p. 9).

Even with the current institutionalised understanding of education, young participants in this study were not doing badly in terms of attendance and performance relative to non-working colleagues. Data for this purpose was gathered from the schools through a review of the class registers and cumulative records on young workers. It was found in one of the schools that, two of the three young participants had attended school for all the 38 days that the school was officially opened as at the time even he is actively working as well. The attendance of third young worker in this school was 32, which was above the class average. Class teacher of the young participants in this school indicated that: *The attendance of those pupils (working pupils) is not bad. They manage to come to school most often*. This attest to the strive some young workers are making to keep their educational hopes in spite of their mining work. This teacher sharing her opinion on whether their work should be abolished retorted: *who takes care of them in that case?* Another class teacher explained that:

*The implications can be good or bad. Good in the sense that it may make them (young workers) be punctual in school and they will also get time to study. But will you provide for them? ...it may be difficult for most of them to continue school.*

In another school, the attendance of young participants was 43, 31, 46, 40 and 44 out of 47 school days. Indicatively, even where some young workers do absent themselves from school, the reality here is significantly at odds with what we are made to believe in some reportage. This revelation is similar to other studies disputing the widely held view on the work-school dichotomy, that working children do have somewhat better attendance than some non-working children in some cases (see also Bourdillon et al., 2010). Similarly, the performances of most young participants are encouraging. You have some young participants being 1st, 3rd, and 5th in terms of ranking or position in their class. In most of the cases, the worse performing pupils were not necessarily working in small-scale gold mining.

Another class teacher talking about the academic performance of some young workers noted that; *...on average, it is okay because the entire performance is not that good*. The concern of this teacher indicates that, even where school performance of pupils is generally not good, we cannot single out young workers as being solely responsible. The falling standards in education could not

entirely be attributed to young people's participation in mining. Contrary to Bourdillon's hint that unsustainable incomes of the poor often result in the withdrawal of children from school to work (Bourdillon, 2006), young workers here have rather not withdrawn from school. These young workers are still in school and have sought to find a suitable balance between completely dropping out due to hardship and sustaining their progress in school through work in small-scale gold mining. They are equally making substantial gains in their education, with hopes and conviction of progressing on the educational ladder beyond their current levels.

### 3.3.3 Negative Effects of Mining Work on Education

Underpinning the prohibitionist stance on young people's mining work, in addition to risk and harm, is the widely held view of the work-school competition for young workers' time. International organisations, for instance, the ILO consider work and school as rivals and unquestionably unpartnering, situating young people's work and education as opposing interests at extreme ends. Consequently, it is argued that work has no place in the lives of children.

Conceivably, it was apparent that the effect of the work on the schooling of young workers is a matter of concern to most local actors. This is particularly one area of the study where almost all participants in this study expressed similar concerns. The main concern herein has to do with the attendance of young workers and their focus or concentration, which may consequently translate into poor academic performance. Inasmuch as the attendance and performance of working pupils may not be bad or the worse, and the fact that they should not be singled out for the general falling standards, there were indications that they could have done more without the mining work. But as to whether they could survive in school without the work is a matter for later discussion. Young workers expressed their views on how the work sometimes affects their schooling as evidenced here;

*When I don't have money, even when it is a school day, I may have to absent myself from school to work. ...sometimes you get injured through the work and cannot come to school (A 16 year old male worker).*

It can be noted from the above quotation that for some young workers, particularly those who independently take care of themselves, they sometimes have to absent themselves from school or leave school earlier before closing time to work. Also, injury through the work may keep young student-workers away from school for a day or more. Some young participants also hinted that the nature of the work makes them tired after work, and may not be able to study as normal after work or even be late to school the following morning. They may also come home late from work and which also affects their studies.

It is in the light of these articulated concerns that young workers, guardians, teachers, and other local actors believe that the school attendance and performance of working students could be improved in the absence of the work. Apparently, there should be something in place of the work if we are to ensure their sustenance in school in the first place. This can be noted in the view expressed by a 15 year old male worker that; *If my family get something for me and I stop or reduce the work my performance can improve.* These young participants assert that even when mining work does not necessarily cause them to absent from school, it may likely drain some of their energy. It may as well deprive the working students of adequate sleep, which in the long run may lead to poor performance (see also Bourdillon et al., 2010).

The United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), for example, argues that children's mining work carries the tendency to prevent or interfere with their education and threaten their development in many ways (UNICEF 2001, as cited in Okyere, 2014, p. 92). Admittedly, although student-workers may not necessarily be the worse pupils relative to their non-working colleagues, it is believed that their attendance and performance could have been better without work. The argument should however not be conditioned as if all is well for the young workers and that they have just opted for work instead of education.

### 3.3.4 Positive Effects of Mining Work on Education

It has been held that a large amount of literature emphasises the negative effects of young people's work, and therefore tries to pitch work as an unfavourable partner to schooling (see Bourdillon, 2006, 2014; Bourdillon et al., 2010; Nieuwenhuys, 2005). However, emphasising on the negative effects alone leads to failure to appreciate the very positive ways in which work impacts on young people's lives especially education. Young participants recounted how mining work helps their education as explained below;

*I buy textbooks with the money. I also pay PTA dues, computer fees, and examination fees with the money. When we are going for a football match or excursion, I pay for the charges myself (A 15 year old male worker).*

It is evident from the above quotation that, the bulk of young workers mining earnings are allocated to satisfy relevant educational needs such as buying books, school uniform, sandals, school bags, pens, pencils, mathematical set, etc. In addition, most young workers depend on their small-scale mining earnings to settle minor debts in school such as PTA fees, extra classes fees, ICT fees, examination fees, sports fees and excursion fees, among others. How young workers are going to find money to settle these inevitable costs in the absence of their mining work remains unknown. Even local government workers, who unreservedly express opposition to their work, pointed to some cases where young workers used their mining money for educational purposes such as to pay their registration fees.

Aside the direct usage of young workers mining earnings to settle educational expenses, there are equally indirect benefits as far as their education is concerned. Some of these indirect benefits can be deduced from the view expressed by a class teacher that; *no child wants to come to school dirty*. This claim by the teacher points to the fact that, for teaching and learning to be effective, both teachers and students should be happy and in good condition. The fact that young miners use their mining money to buy food and water, and as well dress well to school must be noted. These subtle benefits ultimately make young workers feel happy in school, which is a precondition for their education success.

Again, the concerns expressed by few young workers taking care of themselves need to be articulated. This can be found in the expression of a 15 year old male worker that; *I pay for everything in school from that money*. This indicates that there are some young participants who solely cater for their educational needs from their mining earnings. For such young workers, the mining work and money from it virtually accounts for the very reason for which they are still in school and/or keeping their educational hopes. It is through this very means that they are able to be in school and as well be happy in school.

These positive accounts of young workers were corroborated by other participants. Some parents giving evidence in support noted that: *.....because of the work he doesn't usually lack with school materials even when we (the parents) don't get for him. ...we see him as a responsible child*. Another parent also hinted that: *There are times that he buys food and sachet water for his siblings... especially in the morning when they are going to school*. The above quotations indicate that in addition to relieving their households from the burden of their personal upkeep, young worker's earnings also directly benefit their households.

A local government worker also noted that; *Some use the money to pay their school fees, especially those in SHS. ...I know one guy like that*. Teachers of young participants similarly backed the claims of the benefits of work to young people's education by pointing that:

*They use the money to pay for extra classes, buy books, uniform, sandals, etc. Most of them look after themselves and no child wants to come to school looking dirty, so it helps them to get their basic needs in school... and make them interested in coming to school (A class teacher for some young participants).*

Although basic education (pre-primary, primary and junior high school) is supposed to be free to all young people at these levels, the sad reality is that the cost of education goes beyond tuition fees. It is also a sad fact that there are many impoverished households that are struggling to cater

for their children's education due to extra unavoidable expenses. These decorated expenses seek to threaten many poor young people's education by attempting to deny them access to and/or success in school. Most parents admit that they are unable to provide all the things that the children need in school. Most young workers, therefore, work to either cater for themselves in school or to supplement the efforts of parents/guardians in meeting their educational needs. This is necessarily so if they desire to be in school and progress on the educational ladder as well.

The ILO classifies young people's work in mining as a worst form of child labour (Convention 182). This has been incorporated in the Children's Act of Ghana where mining work is regarded as hazardous work and young people can only be engaged when they turn 18 years. This is because it is perceived that mining work among other things "affect the child's attendance at school or the capacity of the child to benefit from school work" (Children's Act, 1998, p.28). Juxtaposing these international and local legislations with the socio-economic realities of working young people remains unanswered. Importantly, by buying food and water, as well as settling other educational costs with their mining money, young workers are able to keep themselves 'alive' in school and the very earnings is responsible for the very 'survival' of most young workers in school.

### 3.4 Perspectives on Addressing Concerns on Young People's Mining Work

In the midst of the nuanced views expressed on the phenomenon, the paper sought to inquire from the local actors on how to possibly address the perceived menace of young people's mining work. Here also, the views of participants reflected their perception of the phenomenon. I have grouped the perspectives of the participants according to their position on the matter.

#### 3.4.1 Perspectives of Young Workers and Parents

Young participants called for support for themselves and their parents as antidote to the expressed concerns. This support, they explained as follows; *Some form of support to help my education is good and can help to solve the problem* (A 15 year old male worker). Another 16 year old male worker also indicated in addition to the support for themselves that; *The government should also help our parents with jobs so that they will be able to cater for us* (A 16 year old child worker).

From the accounts of young workers, efforts should be directed at the provision of support for them by the government or concerned NGOs. These forms of support they request are meant to cater for their needs, most of which are education-related. The understanding is that this kind of support young workers require may not be different from the one articulated in Article 18 and 19 of the UNCRC, and as exist in most advanced countries. Therefore, the call of the young workers also has its basis in legislation. Additionally, asking for provision of jobs for parents to boost their earnings implies that young participants acknowledge the irregular and unreliable income as well as struggles their parents/guardians are enduring to fend for them. To young workers, this would ensure that the parents are equipped and capable of fulfilling their basic responsibilities to their children. The young workers expressed the view that, when these are in place, there may not even be the need for their work and they will not wait for anyone to drive them out of the mining work.

On the part of parents/guardians, they indicated a multi-faceted approach to addressing the phenomenon. These are contained in their expression on the matter that; *There should be some deliberations by all stakeholders including parents, teachers, government representatives to find a solution to the issues* (A parent of a young worker). Most of the parents call for broader stakeholder consultations instead of the government taking a unilateral decision to abolish the work. Other parents also pointed to difficulties in the political economy and expressed similar views that; *The government should make things better so that we get good work to do and earn money to cater for them (the children)*. These parents admit that they have the responsibility to provide for the needs of the young workers. To these parents, their inability to accomplish these responsibilities to their children is not due to unwillingness, but rather due to incapability. They point to the need for the government to address with the challenges in the national economy through the creation of jobs or investing in agriculture (which is their main source of livelihood). This, as they envisage, would enable them to adequately cater for the needs of their children and help get the children out of mining work.

### 3.4.2 Perspectives of Other Stakeholders

Teachers are of the young workers emphasize the need to help parents get the understanding of their responsibilities towards the children by noting that; *...it is a matter of parents accepting and performing their responsibilities*. In the same vein of making parents understand that they have responsibilities for the upkeep of their children, another teacher suggested that; *...we embark on outreach and education programmes to sensitise parents the need to understand that they have to suffer to provide for the children*. According to the teachers, therefore, the substantive issues are not about the young workers themselves, but rather the parents. There is, therefore, the need to tackle the phenomenon from the parental level to ensure that the need for young people to work does not arise in the first place.

Similarly, local government workers hinted that they are already embarking on community interactions and campaigns with the public, with a particular focus on parents. This, according to them, is meant to create awareness on the immediate as well as long-term impacts of mining work on the young workers as well as the dangers to society. This notwithstanding, they expressed their views on how to find a lasting solution to the phenomenon as follows;

*It must be addressed from the national level in the form of legislations, which should enjoin parents and all concerned to ensure that children don't work in mining. The perpetrators should be severely penalised (A local government worker).*

As can be seen, local government workers point to legislation in spite of existing various national legislations and Ghana being a signatory to many international conventions on children and young people. They believe that there is the need to first tackle the issue from a legislative angle since the issue is national in nature. They call for a strict enforcement of national legislation banning young people's engagement in mining work, in accordance with international standards. They further stress the need to punish any adult, be it a parent, employer or anyone in connection with young people's mining work. Moreover, they share the opinion of teachers on the call for sensitization efforts on the need for parents to accept and perform their responsibilities to their children.

## 4. Conclusion

Evidently, some young people are involved in small-scale gold mining in Ghana. The majority of these young workers are at the same time attending school and seeking to ingeniously find a balance between the need to earn and educational pursuits. Although there are admitted concerns about young people's participation in small-scale gold mining, the work basically, in most cases, makes education possible or at least attractive to them.

Contrary to the claim that preventing young people from remunerative work would make them better students, young workers' own accounts indicate that abolition could rather lead to withdrawal from school. The cost-benefit analysis of young people's mining work here reveals that implications of abolition could be dire or fatal, rather than desirable. The immediate abolition of young people's mining work, at least in the study area, may not be feasible or favourable in view of the significant role of the work to critical areas of their lives particularly their education. There could, however, be a start, which should be prior interventions necessary to facilitate subsequent practicable elimination of young people from small-scale gold mining work devoid of the tensions that usually characterise such actions.

Inasmuch as young people are expected to be in school, their ability to afford education is an indispensable prerequisite since education comes with a cost. Efforts at eliminating young people's small-scale gold mining work must first be targeted at reducing poverty and other livelihood constraints. Since poverty and related concerns such as employment were found to significantly contribute to the phenomenon, measures towards poverty reduction and sustainable development such as job creation by the state are vital in this regard. For education to turn out to be a truly effective means of combating young people's participation in small-scale gold mining work in Ghana, interventions such as the free compulsory universal basic education (FCUBE) and the Capitation Grant must be improved to take care of other unavoidable school costs. Strengthening



these educational interventions by the government to take care of the extra unavoidable costs could relieve the resulting financial stress on young people and their households.

As it stands now, the work of the young workers can be said to be at least a necessary evil as it provides them access to education in most cases. In the interim, therefore, and in their best interest, it is important that we support their efforts to concurrently work while schooling rather than chasing them out of work on grounds of incompatibility with schooling which could largely lead to their withdrawal or dropping out of school.

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