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Title: Independent Child Migration and Education Nexus in sub-Sahara Africa

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Abstract

The connection between independent child migration and education has received relatively little attention in the academic and policy circles. The few scholarships on this area often depict independent child migration as detrimental to the education of the child migrant. This review paper interrogates implications of independent child migration beyond the dominant literature that largely dwells on the vulnerability of child migrants. It explores the linkage between independent child migration and educational opportunities as well as the potential benefits of independent child migration to the education of the children involved. Using empirical data collected from 10 independent child migrants in Accra and other literature from sub-Saharan Africa, the paper specifically challenges the overt emphasis on the negative impact of independent child migration on children's access to education and the postulation that the phenomenon is detrimental to the wellbeing of the children involved.

Introduction

Child migration has received less attention in the field of migration studies even though this phenomenon has endured for decades (Punch, 2007). Children in many countries in Africa are migrating either on their own or with adults for a wide range of reasons; including poverty, poor parenting or parental negligence, in search for educational opportunities and adventure (Anarfi & Thorsen, 2005; Punch, 2007; Kwankye et al., 2007). Some children also migrate because of prevailing developmental imbalances between origin and destination communities (Bryceson 2004; Awumbila et al., 2008), ill health and subsequent death of parents or their primary care-providers (Ansell & Young, 2003). There are about 50 million child migrants worldwide (UNICEF, 2015). Nonetheless, there are methodological challenges in estimating their total number of child migrants in this part of Africa (Whitehead and Hashim, 2005). These methodological challenges are often attributed to the seeming embeddedness of child migration into adult migration as well as the clandestine nature of independent child migration. This tends to reveal scantiness of data on child migration at the national, regional and possibly global levels. The insufficiency of data on independent child migrants has also culminated in the inability to unreservedly appreciate the effects of migration on children who migrate without parents or adult guardians.

Independent child migration is usually considered as a new phenomenon because issues emanating from this form of migration have been ignored until scholars began to give it some level of attention recently (Punch, 2007). Earlier studies have portrayed independent child migrants as victims. Such studies have predominantly focused on trafficked children, street children, exploitation, and abuse of child migrants as well as problems of child refugees (Punch, 2007; Edmonds & Shrestha, 2009). Matters of independent child migration gain attention only when such children are found in vulnerable and exploitative situations or become a burden on the host communities. This practise has created a dearth of literature on the positive experiences of independent child migrants and their active contribution to socio-economic development at the micro, meso and even the macro levels of society. This diminutive attention

given to the positive aspect of independent child migration in research and policy circles at the global, regional and national levels tends to portray the independent child migrant as "victims" and also conceive the practice as a social deviation and a "pathology" (Hashim, 2005; Thorsen, 2007). There is therefore the need to thoroughly interrogate and discuss this postulation further in academic circles in order to focus on issues beyond just "pathologizing" independent migration of children and also emphasise its positive aspects.

This paper focuses on independent child migration because it is the most common and contemporary form of migration among children. This phenomenon is growing steadily with scholars drawing the attention of the populace mostly to the unpleasant aspect of child migration such as: trafficking, rights abuse and exploitation and other adverse conditions often at the destination (Anarfi & Thorsen, 2005; Whitehead and Hashim, 2005; Thorsen 2007). The paper therefore interrogates implications of independent child migration beyond the dominant literature that dwells on the vulnerability of independent child migrants. It draws mainly on secondary data which was complimented by data gathered from a qualitative study conducted in Accra in the later part of 2015 on 10 independent child migrants who were purposively sampled. The sampled children constitute 5 males and 5 females, with 8 of them schooling in Accra while 2 of them only migrate for work in Accra during school holidays but attend school in their places of origin. The paper combined published works on child migration in parts of sub-Saharan Africa and the primary data to build a compendium of the positive side of independent child migration and the education nexus. It also attempted to redirect attention of researchers and policy makers to some of the benefits of independent child migration in sub-Saharan Africa.

Conceptualising Independent Child Migration

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines child as a human being below the age of 18 years (UNICEF, 2002). This notwithstanding, there are country specific definitions of a child since countries have differing categorisations of adulthood. An independent child migrant is therefore a person below the age of 18 years who migrates autonomously from his or her parents (Tienda et al., 2007). Persons under the age of 18 form more than half of the world's migrant population (Huijsmans, 2006). Sub-Saharan Africa also has one of the highest population growth rates in the world (Min-Harris, 2010) and probably one of the highest child migrant populations. Punch (2007) conceives child migration as a cultural practice as well as a passage of life. As a result, children from deprived communities in most sub-Saharan African countries migrate to relatively well-endowed destinations to access better livelihood conditions (Ansell, 2004; Hashim, 2005) for themselves and their family back home.

Theoretical Background

The Structural Differentiation Theory

Smelser (1964) employed the Structural Differentiation Approach to explain how modernization and globalization have transformed and altered the family structure. Modern societies have transformed from being the traditional societies that were mostly homogeneous with simple tribal societies in which every social interaction took place within and through the family system. According to So (1990) modernization has altered the traditional family which used to have a complicated structure where large and multigenerational kin lived together in a household setting. Traditional families were more supportive, dependable and played multiple roles such as: providing emotional support, socialization, education, welfare, and religious guidance. One distinct hallmark of the traditional family is mutual self-help and reciprocity. Children work on family farm and in turn, depend on the family for socio-economic protection. However, due to the structural differentiation of the modern society, the extended family has shrunk into nuclear families with a less complicated structure hence, unable to carry-out its expected roles (Assimeng, 1999; Nukunya, 2003; Therborn, 2004). This has rendered the family incapable of co-coordinating activities of the various new institutions and integrating them. Therefore, family no longer adequately provides for the needs of its members nor protects them as it should. This situation is more pronounced in rural poor nuclear families. Children in such families, have to seek the needed support outside the family to function efficiently. As a result, structural differentiation creates problems of integration (So, 1990) and since the family can no longer support family members, migration is adopted as a means of getting support. This explains why children tend to migrate without parents.

Independent Child Migration in the Context of sub-Saharan Africa

Although independent child migration is on the ascendancy (McKenzie, 2008), the phenomenon is very selective in nature. The propensity of a child to migrate independently is influenced by gender, age, maturity and readiness to live and work outside the home without parental guidance. According to van de Glind (2010), girls have a higher propensity to migrate independently than boys but Thorsen (2007) notes that girls can actually migrate with the consent of family compared to boys (Thorsen, 2007). This is possibly due to the social notion that girls are more predisposed to immoral and social risk including: illicit relationships, pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease (Hashim 2005). Hashim's study in Ghana reiterates

the view that when girls are allowed to migrate, they even migrate at an earlier age than boys because the productive work done by girls is of lesser value to the family, coupled with the impression that girls will eventually marry and leave the family (Hashim, 2005). This view has, however changed over the years especially in the northern parts of Ghana where some of these study were conducted. Some girls now migrate without the consent of parents. Most of these girls are working in the cities and remitting resources that contribute to the socio-economic development of the entire household (Awumbila et al, 2008) and the parents appreciate it and urge them on.

The age at which a child migrates independently and the level of maturity are very crucial to understanding the aim of migration and their ability adjust to the conditions at the destination. Studies conducted in five sub-Saharan African countries indicate that, majority of independent child migrants are between 15 and 17 years old (Kielland and Sanogo, 2002; Central Statistical Authority of Ethiopia, 2001; Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2001; Ghana Statistical Service, 2003; Castro, 2010). However, in my study, there were 12 years old children who migrated to Accra independent of their parents. Hashim (2005) found that children at this age in some sub-Saharan African countries have learnt the rudiments of working and have been socialised on their obligation to the family at the origin hence the desire to contribute to the diversification family income through migration. This informs the reason why they are mostly perceived as economic migrants (Bastia, 2005; Yaqub, 2007).

Independent child migration has been conceived from different perspectives which tend to result from variations in spatial and temporal orientations. Some schools of thought view the migration of children as detrimental to the development and wellbeing of children (UNICEF, 2002; Kielland, 2000). Children are at a greater risk when they are separated from their families due to the assumption that the needs, interest and rights of children are best guaranteed within the confines of an institutionalised family or under the surveillance of parents (Davidson, 2011, Glind, 2010). Other scholars perceive migration of children without parents or an adult relation as not African because, in sub-Saharan Africa, childhood denotes a period of dependency, socialisation, training and education in the family (Nieuwenhuys, 1996). African cultural practice however allows child fostering under certain circumstances where children are natured in the homes of a kin (Nukunya, 2003). Children have no obligation to work outside the home for money either for their education or even support the family back home. The only instance where children can move out of the family to work is to fulfil a familial obligation with a kin

which is usually none economic (Hashim, 2005). However, the family in this current dispensation does not have the wherewithal to effectively perform this function due to the breakdown of the extended family system (Nukunya, 2003; Therborn, 2004). Migrating out of the family is therefore a practise that can rarely be controlled.

In the same vein, some scholars are of the opinion that independent child migrants principally become vulnerable because migration dispossesses them of familial protection making them susceptible to abuses and rights violations due to the nonexistence of a home, family or agents of protection (Edmonds & Shrestha, 2009; Lange, 2006). Countries such as Benin which subscribe to this view have promulgated laws to criminalise movement of children without biological parents (Howard, 2008). Much as these claims may be valid, their validity do not conform to current socio-economic transformations that families in sub-Saharan African societies are going through. Patterns of independent child migration are more of rural-urban because agriculture, which is the predominant occupation in rural areas, is losing its ability to provide sustainable income for the family (Ndoa, 2008). With these changes in the family, children see themselves as socio-economic agents with a responsibility to diversify and contribute to the family income by working outside the home (Hashim, 2006; Yaqub, 2007).

The converse school of thought is that the family is not a safe haven for the protection of the child. The breakdown of the family structure has weakened the family's ability to provide the kind of support it is known for (Bigombe and Khadiagala, 2003: Therborn, 2004). There are instances where children are deprived and maltreated in familial settings (Edwards, 1996; Ansell and Young 2002), besides, in poor and deprived communities children are not guaranteed of protection even from their families. It has to be stressed that child migration is not an abnormality or classically portraying a social breakdown or a chaotic society (Hashim 2005, Thorsen, 2007) but a long standing human behaviour which children are partaking as a way of life (van Hear 1984). Independent child migration affords children the opportunity to increase their self-worth which is critical in their transition from childhood to adulthood. The stereotyping of child migrants emanates from egocentric Euro-American set of literature and Western developmental psychology with anti-migration orientation (Whitehead et al., 2007; Mann, 2001). This explains why they emphasise their normative ways of family structure and organisation. The "voices of some independent child migrants" disclose the positive aspect of migration that they experience. Although they face some challenges, they see these challenges as good platforms for their life transition process.

"...when we walk around in search of customers, we see lots of things that we'd never seen in the village and we also get a better understanding of how life is. If you're hungry back home, you can make some millet porridge but here you'll need to get out your money, otherwise you won't eat. In my opinion, this is why migrant life in the city is a way to mature, because you'll know that without sweat you can't eat" (Anarfi & Thorsen, 2005: 2).

The findings from my study of independent child migrants in some parts of Accra are not different from the views expressed above. A respondent from my study added that:

Living in Accra without my parents is difficult but I can manage with these difficulties because, I know why I came to Accra; I have an aim that I want to achieve and that is to complete my education and get a good job. I can achieve that only in Accra and when I achieve that, I will forget all these difficulties (Mensah, 15 years old JHS 3 Pupil in Accra. Fieldwork, November, 2015).

The above voices are extracts from a study by Anarfi & Thorsen, (2005), "Voices of migrant children, understanding how life is" and my study in November, 2015. These studies confirm the findings in other studies that the movement of children from home rather offers them essential equipping tools and skills such as the sense of adventure, independence and a broader outlook on life which prepare them for adulthood in future (Imorou 2008, Ndao 2008, Hashim 2005). Migration of children also affords rural child migrants a sense of pride and respect as their status in the family changes with migration (Min-Harris, 2010). Considering the arguments discussed above, it is possible that a person under the age of 18 years may be at risk when migrating autonomously since this age group has a propensity to become victims of child labour, as they migrate without parents. Conditions of child labour could also affect their access to education, (Flemm, 2010). However, research findings also prove that some independent child migrants have surmounted these possible hindrances and are enrolled in school (Staunton et al., 2007). Thus, whether migration will be detrimental to the education of independent child migrants or not depends on the context of the migration and other factors such as the agency of the child migrant.

Agency of the Independent Child Migration

There are statistical correlations between child agency and independent child migration among rural children (Castle and Diarra 2003; Whitehead and Hashim, 2005). However, children migrants are often assumed to have no agency, are passive with no intrinsic desire for migration or are incapable of migrating independently (Howard, 2008). They are perceived as not involved in the migration decision making but migrate as accompaniment of their parents or adult guardians (Farrow, 2007). In some instances, it is assumed that they move under the coercion of parents or are trafficked by adults (Hashim, 2006). This posture of analysis situates independent child migrants as an analogous of trafficked children with parallel migratory processes and experiences. In contrast, Mitchell (2011) asserts that, independent child migrants have agency and control over their migration decision making. Studies have shown that, some children assessed their socio-economic situation, make the migration decision and then planed their journey and moved out of home either in consultation with kin or independently but devoid of parental influence or coercion. Earlier studies by Hashim, (2005), de Lange (2007), Imorou (2008) and Staunton et al. (2007) on the migration of children in Ghana, Burkina Faso, Benin and Southern Africa respectively support this assertion. This voice reveals the agency and independent decision of a child migrant:

> I came here with my friend and his father. I first passed through Obuasi to visit my uncle and to ask him for some money for my travel down south. The friend I came with was about 15 years and the dad about 75. People who have been to Accra all say life is good here. Some friends also told me there is work here and this influenced my migration to Accra. My maternal uncle encouraged me when I told him of my intentions. I did not tell my parents I was going to Accra. I told them I was going to Obuasi to visit my uncle (Sampson, a food processor in Accra Ghana, Voices of Child Migrants, Anarfi & Thorsen, 2005).

This voice reveals how children can rely on their resources such as personal networks for migration information, the actual migration and then migrate independently of their parents and the possibility that children can even migrate without the knowledge of parents.

However, just a couple of studies have been able to make a clear link between propensity of a child migrating and child agency (Edmonds & Shrestha, 2009). The independent child is an agent who rationally calculates the potential rewards for participating in the possible activities and chooses the activity with the best reward. There is a reward when the child schools at home or migrates to seek work and education. A higher net return will therefore influence the child

to choose the activity which provides a higher net return. Thus, children will choose to school at home if an encouraging environment is created for them to achieve a greater net return on schooling. Otherwise working will be the next option. When work in the home community is either unavailable or not rewarding, the child will have to migrate to seek employment. Some may choose to migrate to access education because educational identity has a link with increased social status (Jeffrey et al., 2004). But schooling in the rural areas may hamper the achievement of this status since schools in rural areas are mostly under-resourced couple with poor quality of teaching, young people may migrate to better schools in urban centres (Bey 2003). Min-Harris (2010) highlighted this in a rural-urban child migration scenario by ascribing the drifting of rural children to urban areas to the high population growth and lack of education and job opportunities in rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa. A small scale ethnographic study in northern Ghana finds that some children migrate to urban centres to access formal education, job training, or work to earn money needed to attend school upon return (Hashim 2003). This is often done after personal assessment of their situation. One of the respondents in my study notes:

> I was schooling in my home town but I knew that, staying in the village and schooling will not help me to become what I want to be in future, there are no role models there, no one to look up to who will motivate you, all the girls either finish JHS, get married or drop-out of school and get pregnant, but I didn't want to be like them. I told my parents about my plans, my mum agreed but my father refused. But I am in Accra now, my teachers and the people around motivate me. I am more motivated when I see the women driving their big cars in traffic and talking on TV. I want to be like them (Mawuena, 15 years SHS 1 student).

The extract above is an indication that the intrinsically motivated independent child migrant will find ways of dealing with structural impediments. Mawuena's case is a typical display of the agency of the independent child migrant who will take initiative to resolve her own problems rather than being surmounted by the prevailing conditions that will limit her progress in life.

For some children, by exercising agency through migration has rekindled lost hope for education. The case of 17 years-old Azara illustrates that some children who migrated with no intention of attending school in the urban areas end up being in school. According to Azara as discovered in my study:

> I completed Junior High School in Walewale but my result was not good. I came here to do kayayo to get money to buy a sewing machine and go back to learn how to sew

at my hometown. But there was a woman I carry her things anytime she comes to the market, she is a teacher in this school. One day she said I am a good girl and she wants me to come and help her as a house girl. I agreed and worked in her house for three months and after some time, she brought me to this school, I started from class six and I am now in form 3. I am still helping her in the house after school (Azara, Fieldwork, November, 2015).

Azara will be writing the Basic Education Certificate Examination for the second time next year and this time, she is confident of passing well and going to the secondary school and then to the teacher training college because she wants to become a teacher like her benefactor. The above discussion is a classical display of the little emphasis on the link between the agency of the child, migration and education.

Poverty and Migration for Education

The work of de Lange (2007) in rural Burkina Faso alludes to the notion that poverty and the economic status of a household does not influence child migration. This postulation is supported by the work of Staunton et al. (2007) that some children within Southern Africa migrate to South Africa even though they come from rich families that have the wherewithal to meet all their needs. Thus, poverty does not necessarily cause child migration. However, studies in other countries in sub-Saharan Africa also reveal that children from impoverished communities who desire to have education are not having access because of prevailing high poverty rates. This makes it difficult for parents to provide the financial support required to keep their children in school (Anarfi & Thorsen, 2005; Whitehead & Hashim, 2007; Edmonds & Shrestha, 2009). A study in northern Ghana further revealed that, although there is free basic education in Ghana, parents even lack the wherewithal to afford the meagre miscellaneous levies charged by the schools. As a result, 64 per cent of children have dropped out of school (GSS, 2003 cited in Hashim, 2005). Similar cases abound in the literature in some sub-Saharan African countries (Anarfi & Thorsen, 2005:7). The views in these earlier studies do not depart from those in my study which took place a decade later. The children in my study saw migration as a poverty alleviation strategy and sure way of not just accessing education but quality education which would have been hampered by poverty in the home community. Some of them made these statements:

> I come from a poor family, we are farmers but now there is not profit in farming. When I finish Junior High School, I knew I cannot go to secondary school because my father cannot pay my fees. I came to Accra to work and support my family. I started selling

Ice Cream and by the time my results came, I have save money that can pay for my fees at secondary school and buy some of the thing that I will use in school. I stopped selling and went to secondary school. I still come here only to sell Ice Cream when I am on vacation, I am in the second year now (Musah, Fieldwork, November, 2015).

I suffered so much in secondary school because of poverty. When I finished Senior High School, I came to Accra to work because I knew I will not pass my exams. If I even pass, I don't know where to get the money to school. Furthering my education was out of my mind. I was selling Ice Cream and sending money home for the education of my younger siblings for about eight months. Until some friends told me that I can do evening classes and better my SHS results. I said ok and joined them in the evening classes. I could pay for the classes and the exams from the work I do. Now I have results that can take me to Polytechnic. I am now saving money to go next year (David, Fieldwork, November, 2015).

The ability to move out of an impoverish community has afforded some independent child migrants the ability to pay for the cost of education in rural areas and even urban communities (Min-Harris, 2010). The dreams and aspirations of these children could have been cut abruptly if they had remain in their home communities.

The cities provide opportunities which are lacking in rural areas. Children in less endowed areas drop-out of school and either idle about or work for their families. But due to high rate of rural unemployment and poverty (Min-Harris, 2010), they are not able to find work, hence they are compelled to migrate to opportune destinations within and across national borders to seek better livelihood.

My study also revealed that some children who drop out of school in the rural areas due to poverty are not able to enrol in school when they migrate to another poverty endemic area with less economic opportunities. The story of Margret explains this:

I lost my mother and father when I was small in the Volta Region, my grandmother sent me to my auntie in Tamale to go to school but she could not afford the levies for my school, so I stopped school and I was helping her in her trade. After a year, I decided to come to Accra to work because my auntie's daughter who is just three years older than me is also working in Accra, so that when I get money I return and go to school. But when I came here, I got to know that I can sell my pure water and go to school here because the girls I sell water with also go to school. So I told my auntie's daughter that I have some money so she should send me to school and I came here because there was a girl I sell the water with who is in this school (Margret, 14 years Primary 6 Pupil. Fieldwork, November, 2015).

After migrating to the city of Accra where there are economic and educational opportunities, Margret decided to access education in the city and abandoned her initial plan of going to the north to attend school. These children therefore find migration as a means of escaping poverty and accessing the opportunity to personal development since they cannot find education or work in the place of origin to support the family income and their education or training in a

vocation. Migration therefore offers them the opportunity to work and educate themselves in a formal school or attain skills training in an informal setting. Migrating to urban areas therefore serves as a safe haven for independent child migrants to find other livelihood activities to support their education in situations where access to education is hampered by poverty in the home community or origin.

Challenges and Opportunities in Accessing Education at the Destination

Migration of children from less endowed areas to relatively more endowed areas for education or skills training is a common practise in sub-Saharan Africa. This phenomenon has existed for decades. Children from rural areas migrate to cities for several reasons including education and vocational training (Beauchemin, 1999). Migration affords children better educational opportunities (Siddiqui 2003) because they are more likely to move to places that have better educational opportunities that are either lacking or are insufficiently supplied at their home communities. Children from deprived or rural communities will naturally have the disposition to drift to areas with quality educational facilities that offer better tuition than what they have at home (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011). Hence, better educational opportunities in the cities attract children from rural and deprived communities to such privileges at destinations whilst the poor educational infrastructure, inadequate teaching resources and teachers which culminate into poor quality of teaching precipitates the desire of children to leave home and seek education elsewhere (Hashim, 2005) through migration in places outside their immediate localities.

Glind (2010) asserts that, in their attempt to access formal education to increase their human capital, the independent child migrants end up working in addition to schooling whilst others choose not to go to school at all. Unlike fostered children who have familial or friendship support systems (Notermans 2008; Bledsoe 1990), independent child migrants would have to bear the cost of education through the meagre income they earn and also manage their time for work. Work therefore could adversely impact on access to school among some independent child migrants even when the opportunity to access education is available at the destination. This implies that migrating to an area with educational opportunities may not guarantee access to education to independent child migrants.

Most child migrants are mostly occupied with economic activities leaving them with no time for schooling because it is also an activity that requires time (Huijsman, 2006). Time constraint emanating from work is an impediment to accessing school. Girls who are domestic workers are often engaged for long hours of time and are not able to go to school. For instance, a UNICEF Report on child migrants states that in Zimbabwe, domestic workers who are mostly migrant girls work for 10-15 hours a day and in Tanzania it can be as long as 16-18 hours (Edmonds & Shrestha, 2009). Long working hours coupled with the hazards in the kitchen, poor wages or remuneration, risk of physical and sexual abuse, and foregone access to school (Whitehead and Hashim, 2005) tend to impact on the education of migrant girls who engage in domestic work.

Access to education tends to be challenged as domestic workers are generally poorly paid across the sub-Saharan African Region (Andvig 2002; Edmonds & Shrestha, 2009). Kifle's (2002) study in Ethiopia shows that the wage of child domestic workers is not sufficient. The insufficiency of their wages could additionally affect their ability to enrol in school and pay for the full cost. The challenges associated with domestic work serve as a stumbling block to their likelihood of accessing education. Besides, studies have found instances where some employers deliberately keep the girls out of school to maintain their willingness to work and even those who are allowed to be in school whilst working are not able to participate fully in school activities because they are too tired to benefit (Edmonds & Shrestha, 2009). Such conditions impact on their performance in school and their future educational aspirations as well.

Prevailing conditions at destination areas are also key determinants to accessing education and these vary from one community to the other. Although there may be better educational opportunities at a destination area, the possibility of enrolling in school and accessing education as an independent child migrant hinges on some policies at the destination. The literature highlights the extent to which national immigration policies deny children's access and rights to education. A study of child migrants in South Africa reports that 65% of unaccompanied child migrants in some parts of the country including those living in the border zone were unable to enrol in school. However, 96% of independent child migrants in Johannesburg, had the opportunity to enrol in school (Staunton et al., 2007). This incidence further confirms the fact that the impact of migration on the education of child migrants is context-specific because the disposition to access education as an independent child migrant depends on the prevailing

social, economic, political and their intervening circumstances at the destination and not just the availability of educational facilities. The challenge of accessing education is further compounded when the independent child migrant crosses an international border irregularly which is a common practise with many independent child migrants (Glind, 2010). Glind further stated that, upon their arrival at destination, child migrants are not only denied access to education but basic social services including health care. This increases their vulnerability to child labour and exploitation. Some children also go into hiding in a bid to escape deportation because of their illegal status but are eventually exposed to exploitation and child labour (Glind, 2010) which impacts on their access to education. Thus, the aspiration of these children to seek education to develop their human capital is affected by their irregular status (Bloch & Zetter, 2009). Meanwhile, several existing national and international immigration laws, agreements and policies seek to address migrants' rights, including independent child migrants, to social services including education. It is worth noting that education is a right irrespective of children's economic or migration status. However, international laws such as: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families all seek to ensure that the rights of child migrants are protected but the literature so far has been silent on why the United Nations and its agencies, other international bodies and state actors are unable to ensure that the provisions of these instruments are complied with to promote the rights of child migrants to have access to education and other social services.

The challenge of accessing education at destination areas is not universal. The literature does not paint a totally gloomy picture about independent child migrants and access to education. When children leave home unaccompanied, there are some absolute consequences that come with it which can either be negative or positive. Even though some child migrants are in exploitative conditions there are other independent child migrants who are in very caring and supportive working conditions. Edmonds & Shrestha (2009) found that, in southern Africa, some employers of independent child migrants engaged in domestic work assist them to access education, food and other necessities. In Ethiopia, some employers even pay for children to attend school whilst others encourage the children to use their wages on school fees (Kifle 2002). The Case of Azara in my study is a typical example in Ghana, where an employer supported an independent child migrant engaged in domestic work through her education even

to the higher level. Others are also assisted to go through skills training and become self-employed. Some of the girls who researchers interact with were happy and positive about their experiences as domestic workers (Somerfelt 2001; Castle and Diarra 2003). Though these cases exist in sub-Saharan Africa, there is less emphasis on them. Academic discourses have rather focused on the problematic aspects of independent child migration. Studies on independent child migration ought to give a complete picture of the phenomenon rather than presenting lop-sided information on the subject.

Conclusion

Independent child migration exist and is gaining attention in the migration literature (Anarfi & Thorsen, 2005; Whitehead and Hashim, 2005; Thorsen 2007) but there has not been much linkage of this phenomenon with access to education in the positive direction and how the agency of the children comes into play. Children migrate from areas with less economic and educational opportunities to cities where they could assess these opportunities. Independent child migration mostly to urban centres is always not detrimental to their education and well-being of the children. It rather enhances their future aspirations by offering them diverse views on life and the world at large even though there can be unpleasant experiences. Independent child migration is often associated with child trafficking and perceived as have negative repercussions on the children involved. The agency of the children in initiating their own migration process distinguishes independent child migration for child trafficking.

Some children seek education as a guarantee to a successful future. Migrating to access education among other goals is therefore a safety net and a response to development inequalities that hinder children from accessing quality education at home. The migration process also presents diverse experiences for child migrants including desirable and undesirable experiences though culminating in studies suggesting studies suggest that the effects of migration on children are context-specific. Notwithstanding, the available research is more skewed towards children who work in the most harmful and abusive situations. The knowledge about child migrants and school enrolment at the destination communities is also very limited.

Future studies should also highlight the positive experiences of independent child migrants especially at the destination. Researchers should endeavour to look beyond just focusing on

independent child migration as a social deviation and "pathology" and rather develop a holistic approach in the analysis of child migration issues. Greater emphasis ought to be given to the social, cultural, political and economic context within which child migration takes place (Huijsmas, 2006) as a way of avoiding stereotyping child migration. These studies should also adopt child-centred research approaches to highlight the important and active roles child migrants play using children's own migration experiences.

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