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RESEARCH ARTICLE

TOURISM AND ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF TOURISM ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN VICTORIA FALLS. A CASE STUDY OF MOSI-OA-TUNYA HIGH SCHOOL, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries worldwide. As a result of the labour intensive nature of this industry, school children also provide essential services in this service industry. The purpose of this study was to get the stakeholders' views on how tourism affects pupils' academic performance at Mosi-oa-Tunya High School in Victoria Falls. A sample of thirty-four respondents was purposively selected from Mosi-oa-Tunya High School community. This sample included ten Ordinary level pupils, ten Advanced level pupils, six teachers with one teacher per form selected from form one to six, five parents/ guardians and three workers employed in the tourism industry. The questionnaire was used to collect data from pupils and the interviews were used for teachers, parents and workers in the tourism industry. The research explored the positive and negative effects of tourism towards the academic performance of secondary school pupils at Ordinary and Advanced levels. The research identified positive factors like employment opportunities, income generation, attachment vacancies and cultural exchange. The negative effects that were observed include absenteeism from school, lack of concentration as a result of long working hours, drug abuse, school drop-outs and prostitution. The study recommends provision of guidance and counseling to pupils, working with employers in tourism to discourage child labour and engagement of non-governmental organizations for the provision of reproductive health to pupils.

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INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of promoting tourism in developing countries has been to earn foreign currency and create avenues of employment. It also serves as a potent instrument for promoting dialogue among civilizations and for providing channels in which streams of different cultures could meet and mingle and create a new ethic-scope on which a fair, just, humane and enlightened order could be built for the entire human race. Tourism plays an extremely important role in the economic and social development of most countries in the world. It is one of the largest generators of employment, its services include travel, accommodation, catering, maintenance of culture, preservation of eco-system as well as traditions through the handicraft industry. Travel companies and travelers do not often question who cleaned the rooms, washed the vegetables or made the craft yet from the International Labour Organization (ILO) figures it is clear that the likelihood of them unknowingly benefitting from child labour is high.

The estimates range for children working in tourism run from 13 to 19 million children under the age of 18 which counts for around 10-15% of the formal tourism labour market (Black, 1995). Whilst poverty, lack of access to education and the growing demand for cheap labour are causal factors pushing higher numbers of children into work, they are also areas that the tourism industry can help address, for example by supporting education projects and providing fair wages for adults working in tourism. Just like any other tourism destinations, school pupils in Victoria Falls are exposed to tourist life thereby resulting in imitation of this way of life. This has seen some pupils dressing like tourists, smoking and drinking alcohol. One major ill is the sight of pupils patronizing in nightclubs with tourists for beer drinking and prostitution. This greatly affects pupils' participation at school as their energy and desire to learn would have been drained by these adverse nocturnal activities. Besides this, some pupils at Mosi-oa-Tunya High school are involved in direct provision of services to tourists for example, entertainment through traditional dance, working in restaurants and selling souvenirs to tourists. The money earned is used for good and for ill, some pupils purchase learning material while others channel it towards beer drinking, smoking and prostitution.

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Apart from that, some learners take advantage of their parents who may be working the whole night in tourism. This gives them the opportunity to indulge in illicit activities during the night leading to among other adverse consequences, contraction of HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancies, school drop outs and a general deterioration in academic performance. It is the rate of how these social ills are publicized that the researchers were motivated to find out from the stakeholders how the tourist industry affects learners' academic achievement.

Research question

What are the stakeholders' constructions on tourism and academic performance at Mosi-oa-Tunya High School in Victoria Falls?

Review of related literature

The tourism industry contributes to the economic and social development of nations in a variety of ways. Notwithstanding the socio-economic benefits from tourism, a host of social ills are attributed to the industry. School children are vulnerable as they are directly involved in tourism or they are affected in a number of ways. This part of the study explores literature on the involvement of children in the tourism industry. The main focus will be on tourism and socio-cultural shift, nature of employment for children, negative effects of tourism on children and how child labour can be minimized.

Child employment in tourism

Plüss (1999) points out that children are omnipresent in the tourism industry but not always in places where we can notice them. Highly visible are those children who are actively scrambling for a share in the trade (for example: children selling fruit on the beach or craft at markets). However, the children behind the scenes are virtually invisible (for example: children cleaning rooms in hotels). In the 2002 ILO report '*A Future without Child Labour*' it was noted that many children work in the informal economy which surrounds and supports the formal tourist industry. Usually when we think of child labour, we think of children slaving away in sweatshops, factories or mines or of children working on the streets in the informal sector. Bliss, (2006:3) propounds that these are the 'visible' forms of work children do but the focus of the media and politics on these types of work has obscured the fact that there are also 'invisible' forms of work that children do hidden away from the public eye, at home, on farms or behind closed doors that also support the tourism industry. According to the IPEC (2009), many of the children working in tourism are young girls. Black (1995) thinks the total number of children working in tourism is much higher than the rough estimate of 13 to 19 million children because the children doing 'invisible' work in the informal sector are excluded.

Types of work children do in tourism

Despite the domination of multi-national companies in the tourism industry, the labour market is characterised by jobs in small businesses often family-run.

A lot of these jobs are in the informal sector and employment conditions vary greatly. According to the ILO (2011), working conditions in tourism are generally not good, working hours are generally long, jobs are not secure, employment is seasonal, wages are low, very little unionisation and collective bargaining is possible, labour laws are often broken and there is a lack of opportunities for training for tourism workers. Job possibilities in tourism are however plentiful and children are employed in different tourism sectors such as accommodation, catering/food and beverage, excursions/ activities/ entertainment, tour operating/transport, souvenir production and souvenir sales (Plüss, 1999). Plüss (1999) however notes that the majority of children and young people working in tourism do not experience good working conditions.

Children's health is affected due to bad working conditions and the lack of schooling and training in tourism puts their future at risk. In the worst case working in tourism puts the children into a vulnerable position where there is a chance of being sexually abused and exploited. EED Tourism Watch (2002) agrees with Plüss, (1999) that even though not all young employees in tourism are exploited, jobs in tourism prevent millions of children from going to school. Tourism Watch (2002) confirms that the work is often difficult and dangerous, pays little or nothing and prevents chances for proceeding with education. It was further noted that, in many cases the work is considered hazardous and exploitative.

Socio cultural impacts of tourism

Tourism may have many different effects on the social and cultural aspects of life in a particular region or area depending on the cultural and religious strengths of that region. According to Mathieson and Wall (1982), the interaction between tourists and the host community can impact on the socio cultural life of the host community as tourists may not be sensitive to local customs, traditions and standards. Tourism can lead to increased crime, prostitution and other social problems. Children working in tourism experience a lag in schooling and a lack of training opportunities in the field (Plüss, 1999). Commenting on the social ills associated with the tourism industry, Black (1995) points out long working hours for very little pay, unstable employment and the performance of dangerous work.

On the other hand, through mixing with people from diverse backgrounds with different lifestyles, host communities benefit from developed lifestyles and practices from tourists. Mathieson and Wall (1982) also point that there can be an improvement in local life through better local facilities and infrastructure (developed to sustain tourism) which could lead to better education, health care, employment opportunities and income. Moreover, more cultural and social events available for local people such as entertainment and exhibitions will result in the host community appreciating its culture. In some cases work done by children supplemented schooling, was considered educational, was conducted under fair conditions and even helped the child to reach maturity with more work options (Black, 1995:39). It was stressed that for older children the impacts of working in tourism could be positive just as they are for children in industrialized countries.

The worst consequence is that child labour merely leads to more poverty for both children and adults. Like many other tourist destinations, Victoria Falls receives people of different cultures, languages and races every day. Most tourists interact with the local community which also includes secondary school students through township tours organized by tour operators, school visits and in the purchasing of various goods and services like foodstuffs in supermarkets and other places. As a result of interacting with tourists at different levels for example during cultural dances, school visits and in night clubs, tourism has a role to play in shaping the general behaviour and academic performance of secondary school pupils.

Research methodology

This study employed an interpretive research paradigm mainly because of the data needed to answer the research question. Related to the chosen paradigm, a descriptive survey design was used. Babie (1993) says surveys can be used for studies which are descriptive, exploratory and explanatory. This design yields data that can be analyzed qualitatively. Williamson et al (1982) in Chiota (2003) view a survey as a systematic attempt to collect information to describe and explain beliefs, attitudes, opinions, values and behaviour of selected groups of people. Leedy (1985) in Chisi et al (2004) asserts that the descriptive survey reveals the actual picture of the situation through the emerging trends from the study. The advantage of the survey design is that it provides a relatively simple and straight forward approach to the study of attitudes, values, beliefs and motives like in the case of investigating the role of tourism on the performance of secondary school pupils. Open ended questionnaires and interviews were used for data collection. The stratified random sampling technique was employed in coming up with the Ordinary level pupils who constituted the sample. Ordinary level pupils are already in classes (strata), ten in total and one pupil per class chosen using purposive sampling. A quota system was employed with regards to 'A' level classes. The lower and upper sixth classes provide an equal number of respondents. For the parents and those in employment, the convenience and purposive sampling techniques were used.

Findings and Discussions

This study revealed both positive and negative effects of tourism on pupils' academic performance. The positive effects were pointed out as employment, creation of learning opportunities, cultural exchange, academic scholarships and infrastructural development. Thus, from the data collected from the respondents, it is clear that tourism provides employment opportunities to pupils especially those doing Advanced level. Some school pupils work in the tourism industry especially in hotels where they work as bedroom hands and waiters. Besides working in hotels pupils also work in souvenir production, sales and entertainment (traditional dance groups). Most of the responses show that tourism contributes positively to the performance of secondary school pupils in the sense that pupils feel motivated to be paying their own fees in order to further their studies. Also school pupils are able purchase the resources that are needed during their studies for example exercise books, textbooks, calculators and

mathematical sets among others. Besides being able to purchase learning resources, the income that pupils earn by working in tourism on part-time basis is used to complement the inadequate income earned by their parents. Concurring with the above assertion, Inskeep (1995) points out that the major direct benefit of tourism is employment. Pluss (1995) goes on to identify workplaces and types of work for children in different tourism sectors such as accommodation, catering, entertainment, souvenir production and souvenir sales. Mathieson and Wall (1992), also postulates that tourist activities can reduce poverty through employment creation, foreign currency earnings and promotion of handicrafts.

Creation of learning opportunities (Conservation knowledge)

Pupils usually take part in the clean-up campaigns. All pupils noted that clean-up campaigns have a positive effect towards their academic performance in the sense that this activity also relates to some of the topics that they cover at school in subjects like Economics and Geography. Cooper et al (1994), suggest that tourism will result in the conservation of wildlife and increased income for the upkeep and preservation of facilities. For instance pupils will be able to identify the effects of pollution and the ways of combating it. If these pupils find such questions in the examination they will be better informed than pupils who are not exposed to this environment and their chances of performing better will be high.

Cultural exchange

The study revealed that Mosi-oa-Tunya High school holds a cultural exchange programme between its pupils and the pupils from Singapore. The cultural exchange programme has resulted in pupils at Mosi-oa-Tunya learning the culture of the people from Singapore and also their language. This cultural exchange programme has resulted in the school benefiting in form of textbooks, sports regalia and art equipment. The availing of textbooks and equipment used in the art department has greatly improved the pass rate at Ordinary level in this subject. Apart from that, the cultural exchange programme has resulted in some pupils appreciating their own culture as they see foreigners appreciating it. In keep (1995) notes that the interaction between the host community and the foreigners lead to good relations which facilitate cultural exchange.

Securing academic scholarships

The study found that pupils learning at Mosi-oa-Tunya High School stand high chances of securing scholarships from some of the tourists who visit the school. The fact that the scholarships are awarded to best performers creates competition at different levels as pupils work hard in order to qualify for the scholarships. Currently, a number of school pupils are sponsored by foreign tourists and tourism companies. For instance, there are three (3) A level students and more than ten (10) ordinary level pupils whose fees are being paid by tourism companies in Victoria falls namely Victoria Falls hotel, Safari Lodge and Wild Horizons. Other fortunate pupils get sponsorship from Ordinary level up to university especially those from disadvantaged families.

Infrastructure development

It emerged that tourism also enhances the performance of secondary school pupils as it supports infrastructure development. For example Mosi-ao-Tunya High School had its infrastructure upgraded by The Victoria Falls Hotel which painted, renovated its classrooms and installed air conditioners in the computer laboratory. The Victoria Falls hotel also adopted the school in terms of its infrastructural needs and pledged to build classroom blocks and buy furniture for the school. It is strongly held that a safe and clean learning environment, free from risk and diseases enhances pupils' academic performance. Mathieson and Wall (1982), support the above positive effect of tourism by noting that the economic importance of tourism in national economy can be appreciated with reference to its contribution in infrastructure development.

High incidence of teenage pregnancy

The study found the major ill in tourism industry as prostitution among school pupils resulting in them contracting various sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This is because some of the pupils are lured by their peers and relatives to visit bars and night clubs anticipating to hook up with tourists. Some of the foreign tourists hire pupils for sexual escapades working in cahoots with hotel staff. The study found that most tourists prefer going out with young girls than mature adults. When these pupils patronize bars and clubs they will be tied in the morning when they come to school resulting in some pupils sleeping in class as they lack adequate time to rest at home. Secondary school pupils suffer from 'demonstration-emulation effect'. This is when pupils imitate the behaviour and dressing of tourists. Mathieson and Wall (1982), support this idea by suggesting that the interaction between tourists and the host community can be one of the factors that may affect a community as tourists may not be sensitive to local customs, traditions and standards. Victoria Falls receives the highest number of foreign visitors compared to the other places in Zimbabwe. This results in pupils emulating some of the foreign habits like. Even at school, authorities are confronted with the challenge of pupils especially girls refusing to wear skirts of a reasonable length preferring to put on mini-skirts and cosmetics which are not allowed at school.

Drug and alcohol abuse

In Victoria Falls, there are people working in the tourism industry who befriend tourists to an extent that they accommodate them in their houses. However, these tourists do not change their behaviour to suit the environment they stay. They will continue using drugs and consume alcohol in the locations which will be imitated by the school pupils. There are high levels of indiscipline at Mosi-ao-Tunya High school linked to pupils consuming drugs and alcohol. If pupils are drunk or come to school under the influence of drugs they will not perform well academically. Besides poor performance as a result of coming to school drunk, some pupils become violent with teachers and even fellow pupils resulting in disruption of some lessons at school. For instance, there are cases of pupils as young as form one bringing beer to school both boys and girls.

School drop-outs

The study revealed a high dropout rate at school. As mentioned above, informal jobs in tourism do not require any academic qualification for example selling souvenirs and performing traditional dances. Pluss (1999) observes that many jobs in the tourism industry need minimal academic qualifications. The existence of such jobs in abundance in Victoria Falls has resulted in some pupils dropping out from school in order to undertake such jobs. Besides, some pupils deliberately do not put enough effort in their school work expecting to secure formal jobs in tourism which do not require any academic qualification for example gardening and entertainment.

Intervention Strategies

The majority of the participants suggested offering Guidance and Counseling lessons as a way of reducing some ills brought by tourism. This would make pupils realize other job opportunities which lie outside the tourism industry. The general view was that school authorities should organize comprehensive guidance and counseling sessions regularly which would among other positive things, enlighten pupils on other jobs opportunities and courses outside the tourism industry.

All the respondents agreed on the fact that the school authorities should seek sponsorship for orphaned pupils and those from disadvantaged families. It was indicated that if these pupils work in the tourism industry they will not be able to participate and concentrate on their academic work as they will be committed to work. It was felt that orphaned and disadvantaged pupils working in the tourism industry are more vulnerable to exploitation misinformation to an extent that they will not pursue professions of their dreams. Environmental education and training should be increased, particularly in schools, for future hotel and tourism staff. It was felt that the school should join sector-wide multi-stakeholder initiatives and partnerships in the tourism industry that can tackle child labour in a holistic manner. Parents should also be part of the initiative to discourage school children from working in tourism before they complete their studies. Parents should also be consulted on ways of handling cases of children who engage in 'tourist induced' wayward behaviour like visiting night clubs, engaging in prostitution, drug abuse and working informally in the tourism industry.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding adverse effects of tourism on pupils' academic performance at Mosi-ao-Tunya High School positive effects are appreciated. Tourism creates employment opportunities, when employed, parents will be capacitated to sponsor for their children's education. Learning opportunities are created as school pupils are involved in clean up exercises, this exposes them to curriculum topics related to the environment. It makes the pupils develop an environmental ethic which will see them developing into good citizens who see the benefit obtained from environmental conservation. Those doing courses related to the hospitality industry have opportunities for industrial attachment.

Pupils are enriched socially and academically through cultural exchange programmes. The main players in the industry always cherish to be visible locally and internationally. They realize this good through expansion of infrastructure so that they adequately provide for their services. They also support the local community through the provision of social services like health and education. Some schools get infrastructural support which enhances academic achievement. The social ills associated with tourism impact adversely on pupils' academic performance. These include prostitution, drug abuse, school drop-outs, and sexual abuse. Maximization of the benefits from tourism with minimal socio-cultural harm to the host community is every government's dream. Intervention strategies can be used to minimize the negative effects of tourism towards the academic performance of secondary school pupils like career guidance and counseling, securing scholarships for disadvantaged pupils and working with the tourism industry to discourage child labour. This would see school pupils getting maximum benefit from tourism reflected by high academic achievement.

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