

“We owe this noble duty to our children”: A corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis of Ghanaian parliamentary discourses around children

Kwabena Sarfo Sarfo-Kantankah¹⁶ & Ebenezer Agbaglo¹⁷

Abstract

Drawing on frame theory, corpus-linguistic methods and parliamentary Hansards data, the paper examines the discursive framing of children in Ghanaian parliamentary discourse. The analysis shows that children are framed within the context of child rights and protection, child labour, child marriage and child trafficking. While Ghanaian parliamentarians think that children should be protected from child labour, they challenge the international description of child labour; they think that child labour should be defined within cultural-specific contexts, for child apprenticeship is not child labour and child labour not child apprenticeship. Again, the MPs raise concerns about what constitutes child trafficking as described by international bodies and organisations. Child marriage is unequivocally condemned by Ghanaian MPs. While the fight against these ills affecting children is strongly advocated by the MPs, the success of such fight is unclear. These discourses around children are indications of how children are included in national discourses.

Keywords

Child Labour, Child Marriage, Child Protection, Children, Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis, Frame Theory, Parliamentary Discourse.

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¹⁶ Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Cape Coast, Ghana, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5662-2886>, e-mail: esarfo@ucc.edu.gh

¹⁷ Demonstrator, Department of English, University of Cape Coast, Ghana, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4720-0662>, e-mail: ebenezer.agbaglo@stu.ucc.edu.gh ebengola@gmail.com

Introduction

Studies on childhood discourses have essentially focused on the advanced countries such as Canada (Pacini-Ketchabaw and de Almeida, 2006; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2006), Norway (Kjørholt, 2002, 2003), Australia (Smith, 2014), Britain (Moss et al., 2000) and Denmark (Warming, 2011). A significant number of such studies have focused on issues of inclusion in childhood education (Campbell et al., 2017; Dalkilic and Vadeboncoeur, 2016; Slee, 2014; Warming, 2011). In the context of Denmark, a study by Warming (2011), which relied on interviews with five teachers of day-care institutions, revealed some ambiguity in the discourses of inclusion. Specifically, it was found that while it was the mission of schools to promote inclusion, in practice, they did not encourage inclusion. Dalkilic and Vadeboncoeur (2016: 26) similarly demonstrated how conventionalized regulatory practices used for inclusion further marginalized children “who are deemed to be different learners from their peers.” Campbell et al. (2017) have also demonstrated that in Australia, childhood educators rely on knowledge like feminism to promote gender inclusion in the classroom.

The focus has also been on some socio-political activities that children engage in as a way of constructing identities (Kjørholt, 2003) as well as children’s safety (Smith, 2014). Children’s participation in democratic processes has been a subject of childhood discourses (Kjørholt, 2002). In his study in Norway, Kjørholt (2002) identified four main themes in the discourses of participation: (a) children as bearers of rights; (b) children as future citizens; (c) children as resources; and (d) children as an endangered group. Other studies have argued for children’s participation (Chawla, 2001; Hart, 1992, 1994; Miljeteig, 1994). Miljeteig (1994) has highlighted that children’s participation enhances their identity construction and a sense of responsibility. Chawla (2001) notes that since children are critical to the development of the larger society, their perspectives on socio-political issues are important. Some studies have, however, suggested that adults often manipulate this participation rather than giving children real influence (Hart, 1994).

Another line of research has focused on racialization in childhood discourse (Brown et al., 2010; Nielsen, 2021; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2006). In Denmark, Nielsen (2021) examined media representations of the discourses of racialized children in Danish schools. The study revealed that in the media, this issue was constructed around spreading racialized children, popularly known as bilingual pupils, across Danish schools to enhance their proper integration with white Danish children. Through the discourses of integration, the nation is presented as being able to break racialized children from their racial heritage and class disadvantage, heightening a sense of belonging to the Danish society among such children. Brown et al. (2010) have also highlighted how racism has been normalised in early childhood settings in America.

The foregoing highlights the fact that studies on childhood discourses of inclusion, participation and identity construction, among others, have largely been in advanced countries such as Canada, Norway, Australia and Britain, to the neglect of Africa. In view of this, the present study investigates the issues of childhood in Ghanaian parliamentary discourse in order to unearth the MPs’ psychosocial understanding of issues affecting children in Ghana. The study seeks to explore how the law-makers conceptualize child labour, child marriage, child trafficking and child protection in Ghana so as to provide some empirical basis for tackling issues of childhood in Ghana.

The rest of the paper is divided into four sections. Section one looks at studies on children and childhood in Ghana. Section 2 discusses the theoretical approach, while section 3 describes

the methodology. Section 4 is devoted to the analysis and discussion. This is followed by the conclusion.

1. Studies on children and childhood in Ghana

To contextualise the study, this section reviews studies on child labour, child marriage, child trafficking and child protection in Ghana.

1.1 Child labour

The past three decades have witnessed an upsurge of research on child labour, with the focus on its causes (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018a; Frimpong et al., 2021; Hamenoo et al., 2018), its role in agriculture in Ghana (Berlan, 2013; Van Hear, 1982), people's perceptions about it (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018a, 2018b, 2021a; Al-Hassan and Abubakari, 2015), contributions to income generation (Koomson and Asongu, 2016), determinants (Afriyie et al., 2018) and challenges associated with stopping child labour in mining communities (Hilson, 2010).

The extant literature on the causes of child labour has identified a number of factors that push children into child labour, including poverty (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018a; Ahmed, 1999) and cultural attitudes (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018a; Zelizer, 2005). While Ahmed's (1999) cross-country study found that poverty is an insignificant cause of child labour, Adonteng-Kissi (2018a) argued that poverty is the most common cause of child labour in fishing communities in urban Ghana. Frimpong et al. (2021) advance Kissi-Boateng's argument that children get into child labour due to parents' inability to provide their needs. Other studies have attributed the rise in child labour to socio-cultural norms that support child labour (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018a, 2021a; Zelizer, 2005). On the other hand, Adonteng-Kissi (2021a) found that the cause of child labour depends on the place of residence. Specifically, he discovered that parents in rural areas attributed child labour to cultural norms, while in urban centres, child labour was perceived to be caused by economic factors. Other factors identified as causes of child labour in Ghana include parental absence and lack of poor enforcement of laws governing child education and child labour (Hamenoo et al., 2018).

An emerging body of literature on child labour has focused on its role in Ghana's agricultural and mining sectors (Berlan, 2003, 2013; Hilson, 2010; Van Hear, 1982). According to van Hear (1982), children's participation in agricultural activities has a long history in Ghana. Essentially, while children normally engage in household agriculture, some get into agricultural activities as hired labourers. He noted that pawning and child fostering were major means of getting children into child labour. Berlan (2003) agrees to the high rates of child labour in agricultural activities, indicating that about 95% of children in cocoa-growing areas work on the farms of their parents or relatives. He, however, argues that the majority of those children combine such work with schooling, although there are a few children who work fulltime without any monetary compensation because their parents receive a one-off payment. Hilson (2010) also acknowledges the prevalence of child labour in mining activities in northern Ghana, attributing it to the increasing poverty in such areas.

Parental attitudes have also featured in studies on child labour. Adonteng-Kissi (2018b) conducted a study among 60 government officials, NGO representatives, and parents whose children were/were not involved in child labour to examine their perceptions of child labour. The study was conducted in three farming communities in the Asante Bekwai Municipality (Ankaase, Anwiankwanta and Kensere) as well as three communities in Accra (Jamestown,

Korle Gonno and Chorkor). The study revealed that parents perceived child labour as a means of work socialization by which children learn work ethics. Al-Hassan and Abubakari (2015) similarly examined the attitudes of Muslims to child labour in the Tamale metropolis. On the one hand, it was found that some people empathized with children labourers and did not engage their services. On the other hand, the study revealed that some people patronized children's services and refused to pay them since the children had no one to ensure they were paid. The foregoing points to the increasing trends of child labour in Ghana (Berlan, 2003, 2013; Van Hear, 1982).

1.2 Child marriage

The existing literature on child marriage has examined its correlates (Ahonsi et al., 2019; Groot et al., 2018; Yaya et al., 2019). Yaya et al.'s (2019) study among 34 sub-Saharan African countries revealed that 54% of women in the sub-region experienced child marriage, with cross-country variations. De Groot et al. (2018) found that child marriage was associated with negative outcomes such as poverty and increased child mortality among first-borns. A study by Ahonsi et al. (2019), which utilized the 2014 Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS) as data, found that 20.68% of women experienced child marriage. In addition, it was found that child marriage was driven by factors such as poverty, teenage pregnancy and betrothal marriage.

A study by Afranie et al. (2019) has documented the institutions tasked to respond to the issue of child marriage in Ghana as well as the effectiveness of the interventions and programmes instituted by such institutions. The study identified a number of state and non-state institutions working to eradicate child marriage in Ghana. These institutions include the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP); the Ministry of Health; Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU); Girl Child Education Unit of the Ghana Education Service (GES); the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) and UNICEF Ghana, Ark Foundation, Gender and Human Rights Documentation Centre, ActionAid Ghana, and Muslim Family Counselling Service. The study further discovered that these institutions undertook programmes such as community sensitisation and empowerment training for girls, reproductive health services, support for girls' education as well as rescue and management of victims of child marriage. It was found that the work of these institutions was militated against by the absence of a national policy to direct the course of the fight.

Sarfo et al. (2020) have examined how the construction of gender, adolescence and sexuality affects the practice of child marriage in Ghana. In terms of gender construction, they note that by culture, Ghanaians place premium on male supremacy, relegating women to the background. This construction of gender promotes child marriage, as the female child is expected to obey the parents who want to marry her off at a younger age, and many parents marry off their daughters to generate income. The study also found that the construction of sexuality among Ghanaians promotes child marriage. In particular, like many patriarchal societies, men take most decisions even if such decisions have ramifications for women's sexuality. Thus, girls are hardly allowed to make decisions about whom and when to marry. The study, in addition, reported that in the past, most Ghanaian ethnic groups encouraged early marriage and childbearing, which still persists in some rural areas and poor communities in urban areas.

1.3 Child trafficking

Child trafficking is one of the most serious problems governments and countries all over the world, especially sub-Saharan Africa, are fighting. It is considered as “one of the worst forms of child maltreatment” (Hamenoo & Sottie, 2015). It is defined in Ghana’s Human Trafficking Act, 2005 (Act 694) as the “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child purposely for exploitation even if it does not entail the use of coercion, fraud or deception” (Sertich & Heemskerk, 2011). The Act additionally considers children as immature and unable to give consent in cases of child trafficking. However, Koomson et al. (2022) have found that children themselves are instrumental in their trafficking, with their roles including consent giving and negotiating.

Research shows that child trafficking has been in existence since time immemorial and many aspects of it are shrouded in secrecy. Salah (2001) and Hamenoo and Sottie (2015), for instance, have noted that research on intra-country child trafficking hardly reports on the perspectives of victims. This results from the inaccessibility of the voices of the victims. According to Salah (2001), the secrecy surrounding human trafficking is partly as a result of the belief that child trafficking is part of child socialization in Ghana. Salah, therefore, calls on the need for studies to focus on all aspects of child trafficking. We find this call important and argue that it is even more significant to investigate how law-makers, that is, parliamentarians, frame childhood issues, in general, and child trafficking, in particular, to be able to see how it is conceptualized and the solutions proposed.

Some studies have found that child trafficking is driven by poverty and socio-cultural factors (Afenyadu, 2010; Agbenya, 2009; Bales, 2005; Koonson et al., 2021). According to Koomson et al. (2021), who studied the trafficking of children from Breku to Yeji, the practice generally began as a way of sending children to family members to be trained on the practice of fishing on the Volta Lake. Then, it later degenerated into child trafficking. Similarly, Afenyadu (2010) has reported that children are trafficked to work on the Volta Lake, as a way of training them to become industrious in adulthood. At an early age, it is required of such children to be trained to become fishermen. In particular, parents give out their children to fishermen and boat owners to work to defray some debts of their parents. Golo (2005) also adds: “[o]ut of poverty, parents become comfortable with sending their children into bonded labour as the shortest means of solving their own economic and social hardships”.

Studies have also revealed that trafficked children suffer maltreatment in the hands of their masters (Afenyadu, 2010; Agbenya, 2009; Bales, 2005; Homenoo and Sottie, 2015; Koomson et al., 2021, 2022). Homenoo and Sottie’s (2015) study reveals that trafficked children suffer physical, psychological and emotional abuse from their masters. The children suffer starvation, sleep denial, non-provision of clothes and health care, and denial of access to education. In addition, some suffer physical and verbal abuse as well as sexual harassment from their masters.

1.4 Child protection

There is a rich body of literature on child protection in Ghana. The focus has often been on children’s participation in protection practices (Abdullah et al., 2018; Cudjoe et al., 2020a), people’s experiences in child participation meetings (Cudjoe et al., 2020b), parental perceptions of children’s participation in protection practices (Manful et al., 2020), parental involvement in child protection (Cudjoe and Abdullah, 2019), child welfare policies in Ghana

(Issahaku, 2019), and laws against child protection (Adonteng-Kissi, 2021b; Ibrahim and Komulainen, 2016).

Abdullah et al. (2018) investigated the impediments to children’s participation in child protection practices. The qualitative study, which relied on interviews with fifteen child protection practitioners, identified intimidation, parental influence, communication problems, and confidentiality as factors that prevent children from participating in child protection practices in Ghana. From the perspective of child protection practitioners, Cudjoe et al. (2020a) similarly examined factors that could promote children’s participation in child protection. They found that practitioners needed to consider the age of children, providing separate rooms for children as well as creating a child-friendly environment in order to promote children’s participation in child protection.

Manful et al. (2020) examine parental opinions regarding the incorporation of children’s opinions in child protection discourse. Manful et al.’s study was triggered by the fact that children’s opinions concerning child protection were usually pushed to the periphery. The findings from interviews with 21 parents in contact with the Department of Social Welfare suggested that children feared involvement in discussions of children protection, due to the likelihood of being labelled as behaving culturally inappropriate. It was further revealed that in order to encourage inclusiveness of children in such engagements, there was the need for improved interviewing skills, out-of-office engagement, humour, and one-on-one engagement.

While studies reviewed so far have focused on children’s participation in child protection, there is an emerging body of literature that focuses on parental involvement in child protection. Cudjoe and Abdullah (2019) investigated the experiences of parents in child participation. It was revealed that parental participation generally concerned their involvement in decision-making during case meetings, and their opinions were considered in the implementation of interventions. The parents also noted that their involvement encouraged them to seek assistance from child welfare agencies. The study also identified a number of factors that militated against parental involvement, including worker’s lack of privacy, heavy workloads and the demeanour of workers during case meetings. In particular, parents noted that workers frowned their faces during meetings, made unnecessary intrusions and failed to recognise their opinions during case meetings.

Issahaku (2019) has examined child welfare policies in Ghana. The Child and Family Welfare Policy (CFWP) of Ghana is an example of the strident efforts West African countries are currently making to provide protection for and promote the wellbeing of children. With such policies these countries demonstrate familiarity with contemporary understandings of children and childhoods as well as compliance with the UNCRC. In some measure, the CFWP depicts children as vulnerable subjects needing or receiving care from competent adult guardians. However, to a great extent, the policy provides a balanced view of children as a vulnerable social group juxtaposed with the view of children as social actors and full persons with agency and human rights. The CFWP spells out broad-based objectives, with specific and detailed strategies for their achievement as well as a clearly defined organizational structure and administrative procedures for implementation, monitoring and evaluation. To this extent, the policy can be described as comprehensive and has great promise for protecting children and promoting their wellbeing. The foregoing suggests that child welfare policies in Ghana would be strengthened to yield the desired impact if adequate fiscal and human resources were committed to implementing strategies that empower families and communities.

Finally, there are studies on laws of child protection. Adonteng-Kissi (2021b: 472) found that “economic constraint is one factor that challenges the enforcement of UNCRC principles of

rights to provision, protection, and participation for children engaged in child labour.” In the urban areas, it was found that since UNCRC principles were based on Western norms, their application in Ghana becomes problematic and practically impossible. This observation by Adonteng-Kissi echoes the views of Ibrahim and Komulainen (2016) that socio-cultural variations have made it difficult to have a universal punishment for juvenile delinquency. This has made it difficult to institute child protection measures in non-Western societies like Ghana.

2. Theoretical approach

The present study relies on frame theory for the analysis of the data. Frame theory was originally developed by Bateson (1954) and later adopted by Goffman (1974) in his study of communicative encounters. Though there are various conceptualisations of “frame”, it is generally believed to be concerned with how the same topic can be portrayed in different ways, emphasising some aspects while remaining silent on some other aspects of it (Entman, 2004; Schuk and de Vreese, 2006). Through framing, the audience are made to interpret information in a particular way, by making some information appear more important than others. In framing a topic, decisions are then made on which word choices to be made, which part of the news to be emphasized, which sources should be used and which way the text is supposed to be organised (Reese, 2001). In framing an issue, the issue is defined and evaluated, its causes are identified and solutions offered (Entman, 2010).

The frame theory has enjoyed a wide applicability in a variety of discourses, including mediatized political discourse (Entman, 2010; Lawrence, 2000; Schuk and de Vreese, 2006; Strömbäk and Dimitrova, 2006) and parliamentary discourse (Mchakulu, 2011; Sarfo-Kantankah 2018). Entman (2010) argues that media framing of political disputes tends to favour one side over another. He substantiates his argument with an analysis of the 2008 presidential campaign coverage on the Republican Vice-Presidential nominee, Sarah Palin, to show that media framing of the interactions was skewed over time. De Vreese et al. (2001) conducted a cross-country investigation of framing of news concerning the introduction of the European currency, the euro, on 1st January, 1999. The study revealed differences in framing economic and political news. In particular, it was found that news on the launch of the euro placed more emphasis on conflicts rather than their economic ramifications. Aalberg et al. (2011) have also reviewed studies on media framing of politics as a strategy and game. They found that media framing of politics as a game was common, though there were some diachronic variations.

While the studies reviewed thus far have focused on framing of political issues in the media, some studies have focused on parliamentary discourse or a combination of parliamentary and political discourse, particularly in Africa (Mchakulu, 2011; Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018). Mchakulu (2011), for instance, compared framing in post-election newspaper editorials and parliamentary speeches in Malawi. The study specifically focused on editorials and parliamentary speeches in the first hundred days following the 1994, 1999 and 2004 Malawian elections. It was found that in the 1994 and 1999 elections, the newspapers framed issues to reflect the political standpoints of their owners and in the 2004 elections, the framing of issues reflected the political realignments of the owners of the newspapers and did not differ from parliamentary framing. Of more relevance to the present study is Sarfo-Kantankah’s (2018) study of the framing of corruption in Ghanaian parliamentary discourse. Sarfo-Kantankah relied on corpus linguistic methodologies to reveal that corruption was

framed as a serious social problem that had affected the socio-economic development of Ghana.

Of all the studies, Müller’s (2016) examination of the framing of childhood in the periodicals *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, *The Guardian*, *The Female Tatler* and *The Female Spectator* is the most relevant to the present study since it also focuses on the framing of childhood. Müller’s analysis focused on the presentation of children’s bodies and educational debates as well as how these periodicals represented public scenes using child figures. Muller argues that these periodicals make significant contributions to the evolution of the concept of “Romantic child”. Barry et al. (2011) similarly examined framing of childhood obesity in American media from 2000 to 2009. They found diachronic differences as well as differences in framing across media platforms. In particular, it was found that, while television news recommended behavioural change as a remedy to obesity, newspapers recommended systemic solutions.

This understanding of framing is crucial to the present study, because by emphasising some aspects of childhood, parliamentarians define childhood, identify its associated problems and propose solutions. The present study, therefore, advances the literature by examining the framing of children and childhood in Ghanaian parliamentary discourse.

3. Data and methods

The study uses as data Hansards of Ghanaian parliamentary debates from 2012 through to 2020, that is a 9-year period, which were obtained from the Ghanaian parliamentary website (<https://www.parliament.gh>). It amounts to a corpus size of over 11.4 million tokens/running words¹⁸. The data were processed and converted into text files so as to make them computer-readable and computer-manipulatable (cf. McEnery, Xiao & Tono, 2006). The study employs corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis (CDA): it incorporates corpus linguistic techniques into the analysis as and when appropriate (cf. Partington, 2010).

Through the application of *Wordsmith Tools* (version 6) (Scott, 2012), two main tools of corpus linguistic methods were employed in this study: concordance and collocation. Concordance refers to examples of particular items/words in context, a display of all examples of a searched-for item (Evson, 2010), or “a collection of the occurrences of a word-form, each in its own textual environment” (Sinclair, 1991). In other words, concordance displays all the instances of a specified word or other search term in a corpus and provides a given number of words on either side of the specified word or search term (McEnery & Hardie, 2012), as shown in Figure 1.

¹⁸ The data were first used for two studies: Sarfo-Kantankah (2021) *The Discursive Construction of men and women in Ghanaian Parliamentary Discourse: A corpus-based study*, *Ampersand*, 8, 100079, which was sponsored by the Directorate of Research, Innovation and Consultancy (DRIC) of the University of Cape Coast, grant reference RSG/INDI/CHLS/2020/111, as well as Sarfo-Kantankah, K. S. (2022). *Gender-based violence in Ghanaian parliamentary debates: a corpus-assisted discourse analysis*, *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines*, 14(1), 1-21.

N	Concordance
1	, Ms Betty Nana Efa Krosbi Mensah, on “Alleged Child Slavery on the Volta Lake.” Yes, Hon
2	enough to add, “Alleged”, so it read, “Alleged child slavery” which was very well noted. Mr
3	labour. There should not be any excuse to allow children to be engaged in child labour. We
4	narrative that Ghana and La Cote d’Ivoire allow children to be trafficked, they might not
5	in this House as supporting people who allow children to engage in child labour especially
6	completion of the construction works. Alleged Child Labour phenomenon on Cocoa Farms in
7	under the theme, “Protecting the rights of all children ” were also celebrated. The Ministry
8	under the theme, protecting the rights of all children were celebrated. The 2017 National
9	and also visited the lake. We found out that all children were in school. They cited the School
10	(FCUBE) is a right that must be enjoyed by all children without bias. However, in many remote

Figure 1. Sample concordance of *child* and *children*

Figure 1 is a sample concordance of the lemma *child*. Lemma refers to the composite set of word forms (Sinclair, 1991). In the Figure, centred vertically is the lemma *child*, and on either side of *child* or *children* are collocates of the two word-forms. The collocates, that is, words that are adjacent to or occur in the neighbourhood of a search term (Scott, 2012), provide contextual information for the interpretation of how the two lemmas have been used.

Often called key-word-in-context (KWIC), concordance analysis involves collocation analysis (cf. Evison, 2010). Forming the context/co-text of a specified word, collocates are words that typically co-occur with a specified word, and examining the collocates of the search term in a concordance line provides the semantic/discourse prosody of the said term (Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018). Semantic/discourse prosody refers to the “consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates” (Louw, 1993). In this study, our search terms were the lemmas *child* and *children*. We concordanced the lemmas *child* and *children* in order to examine their collocates and associated semantic prosody and explored the “subtle element[s] of attitudinal” and “semantic meaning[s]” (Sinclair, 2004) which Ghanaian MPs associated with children. The KWIC approach allowed us to identify patterns of the use of the lemmas *child* and *children* informed by the theory that “meaning is discovered in language situated in context, not in words in isolation” (Hunston, 2010; cf. Sinclair, 2004). Thus, to interpret the discursive framing of children as noted in the corpus, we considered both the corpus itself and the socio-political context of the corpus, which included published academic research, media reports and socio-political commentaries on children and children’s rights. In other words, we shifted between corpus-internal data (that is, the concordance/collocates) and corpus-external data (that is, the wider social, historical, political, mediated contexts, etc.) (Partington, 2003; Sarfo-Kantankah, 2022). This synergy between corpus-internal and corpus-external data analysis leads to corpus-assisted CDA. This is important because the “traditional corpus-based analysis is not sufficient to explain or interpret the reasons why certain linguistic patterns were found (or not found)” as it “does not usually take into account the social, political, historical, and cultural context of the data” (Gabrielatos and Baker 2008). The corpus-assisted CDA helps to include the wider situational context of the data in the analysis, since it mediates between the social and the linguistic, combining linguistic and sociological approaches (Weiss and Wodak, 2007).

4. Analysis and discussion

This section examines MPs’ discursive framing of children in the parliamentary data under study. The section is divided into five. Section 4.1 discusses the thematic issues associated with children; section 4.2 deals with children’s rights and child protection, while 4.3 talks about child labour. Sections 4.4 and 4.5 discuss child marriage and child trafficking respectively.

4.1 What are the thematic issues associated with children?

Using Figures 2 and 3 below, this section explores the pattern and thematic associations of children in the data. Figure 2 is a sample concordance of the lemma *child*, showing some linguistic contexts of its use (cf. Scott, 2012). In order to identify the themes by which children are framed in the data, we consider the collocates/the contexts of the lemma *child*. Over all, there were 5,107 “hits” (cf. McEnery & Hardie, 2012) of the lemma *child*, the first 26 of which are shown in Figure 2. At the centre of each concordance line of Figure 2 is the term *child* (with its variants *children*, *childbirth*). At either side of each of *child/children/childbirths* are the collocates/linguistic contexts, which tell us about the issues raised about children. By reading through the collocates, we are able to decipher the semantic/discourse prosody of the terms *child/children/childbirth*. However, since it was difficult to read all the 5,107 concordance lines and put them into themes, we needed to use Figure 3 to identify the prominent themes that were associated with children.

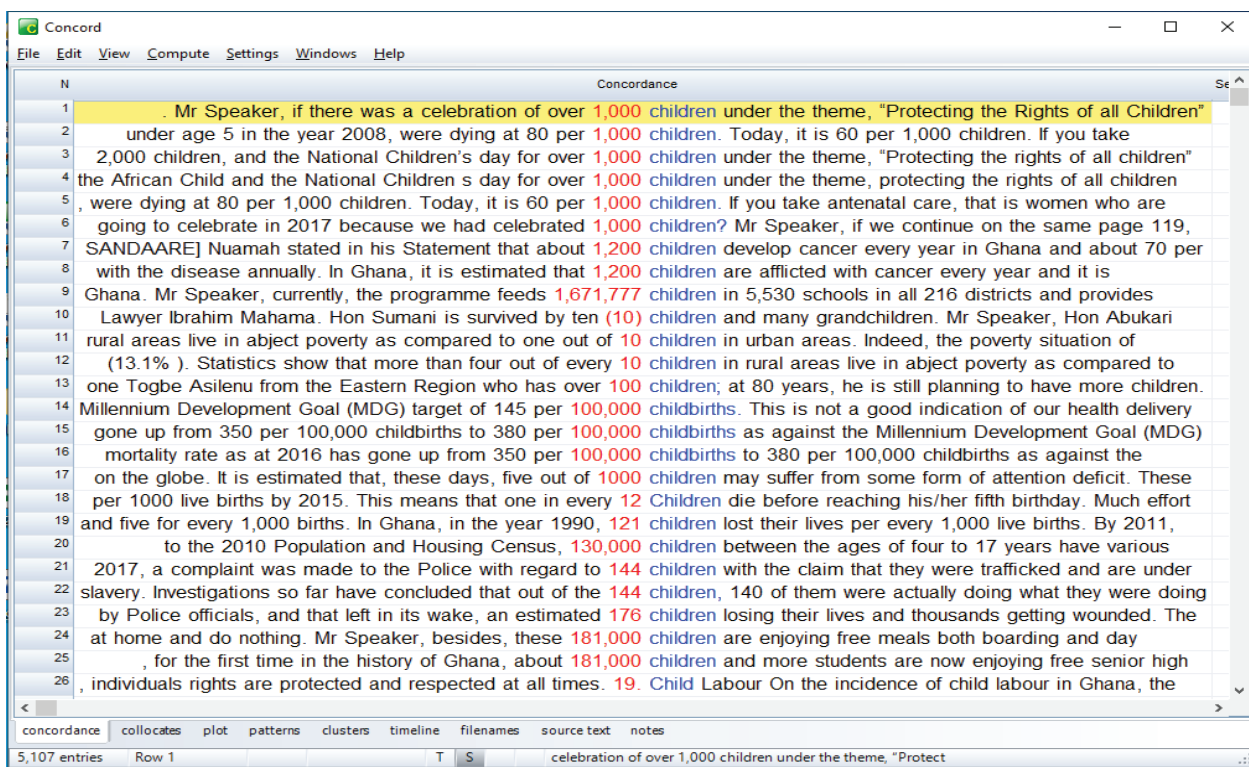


Figure 2. Screenshot of the first 26 concordance lines of the lemma *child*

Figure 3 represents the patterns of the lemma *child*. Patterns show the collocates organised in terms of frequency within each column, where the top word in each column is the

most frequent word found in that position, and the second word being the second most frequent (cf. Scott, 2012). The patterns tool makes it easier to read and interpret the collocates, as it displays the most frequent collocates in the neighbourhood of the search term and shows the lexical patterns in the concordance (cf. Scott, 2012). At the centre of Figure 3 is the term *child* (with its variants *children*, *childhood*, *childbirth*, *children's*, *child's*, *childless*, *childbirths*, *childlessness*, *childbearing*, *childslavery*, *childmarriage* and *childcare*. At the left and right sides of the centred items are the collocates, that is, the words that occurred in the neighbourhood of the lemma *child*, labelled as L1-L5 and R1-R5 respectively. To identify the thematic labels of children, we consider the most salient content words among the collocates which carry the most significant semantic loads among the collocates that characterise children (cf. Sarfo-Kantankah, 2021), even though function words can also reveal a lot about discourses (cf. Pearce, 2014).

N	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	Centre	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
1	THE	THE	THE	OF	THE	CHILDREN	AND	SOCIAL	PROTEC	THE	THE
2	TO	TO	TO	FOR	GENDER	CHILD	TO	THE	THE	TO	TO
3	OF	OF	OF	TO	OUR	CHILDHOOD	IN	IN	TO	AND	AND
4	AND	AND	MINISTER	THE	OF	CHILDBIRTH	LABOUR	AND	AND	OF	OF
5	THAT	HON	MINISTRY	THAT	AND	CHILDREN'S	ARE	IS	IN	IN	IN
6	IN	THAT	AND	AND	THEIR	CHILD'S	WHO	ARE	IS	MR	THAT
7	IS	IS	THAT	WOMEN	THESE	CHILDLESS	IS	BE	THAT	IS	IS
8	FOR	FOR	ON	GENDER	GIRL	CHILDBIRTHS	MR	SPEAKE	OF	ARE	SPEAKER
9	WE	WE	WE	IN	SCHOOL	CHILDLESSNESS	WITH	NOT	WE	THAT	MR
10	ON	IN	IS	WHEN	THAT	CHILDBEARING	OF	TO	ARE	WE	WE
11	ARE	COMMITTEE	CARE	ON	FOR	CHILDSLAVERY	WOULD	WE	NOT	FOR	IT
12	IT	ARE	FOR	AN	UNBORN	CHILDMARRIAGE	MARRIAGE	HAVE	SPEAKE	NOT	ARE
13	AS	TAKE	CHILD	HAVE	TO	CHILDCARE	THE	SCHOOL	MR	BE	HAVE
14	NOT	ON	IN	WITH	EARLY		FROM	MR	CHILD	IT	NOT
15	WOULD	HAVE	RIGHTS	IS	ON		AS	THAT	BE	THEY	BE
16	WITH	BE	NOT	OR	HIS		WE	THIS	THIS	AS	WOULD
17	HAVE	NOT	ARE	CHILDREN	GHANAIAN		HAVE	THEY	IT	SCHOOL	AS
18	MR	IT	WOULD	WHERE	MY		THAT	THEIR	AT	SPEAKE	THEY
19	BE	SPEAKER	THEY	WE	EVERY		TRAFFICKING	WOULD	ON	ON	THIS
20	OR	WITH	SOME	ARE	IN		AT	OUR	COUNTR'	HAVE	WITH
21	CHILD	WOULD	PARENTS	MR	AFRICAN		IT	ON	HAVE	THIS	SCHOOL
22	THIS	AS	OUT	AS	HAVE		SO	FOR	AS	SO	FOR
23	SPEAKER	DAY	EDUCATION	THESE	YOUNG		WERE	IT	FROM	WOULD	CHILDREN
24	THEY	WHO	ENSURE	NUMBER	AGAINST		PROTECTION	OF	THEIR	CHILD	OUR
25	OUR	CHILD	ESPECIALLY	IF	YOUR		BUT	CHILD	WITH	WITH	ALSO
26	ABOUT	MR	HAVE	THEIR	WITH		THEY	ALSO	THEY	SHOULD	THEIR
27	WHO	WHEN	WITH	OUR	AS		SHOULD	ACT	THEM	OR	AT

Figure 3. A screenshot of the first 27 patterns of the lemma *child*

Looking at Figure 3 shows that the most significant content words that provide information about everyday local and international concerns about children's rights are *labour*, *marriage*, *trafficking* and *protection* (that is, *child labour*, *child marriage*, *child trafficking* and *child protection*) (see R1) and *rights* and *education* (L3) (cf. the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). The rest of the analysis and discussion concentrates on the topical issues of child protection and child rights, child labour, child marriage, and child trafficking, as framed and discussed by Ghanaian MPs.

4.2 Children's rights and child protection

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the most important document on the rights of the child worldwide. It defines a child as someone under the age of 18. There are several rights of the child listed in the UNCRC, which speak to four main

principles, namely: non-discrimination against the child (Article 2), the best interest of the child (Article 3), the right to survival and development (Article 6), and respect for the views of the child (Article 12). Ghana is a signatory to and recognises the Convention (see Figure 4, lines 4-11, 18, 21, 22) and therefore Ghana is obliged to ensure the full implementation of the principles of the Convention. As noted by an MP,

Example 1: Hansard: 20 Nov. 2018/Col.2087¹⁹

... the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most signed and ratified UN Convention in the world, and it is interesting to note that, Ghana made history by being the first Member State to ratify the United Nation’s Convention on the rights of the child.

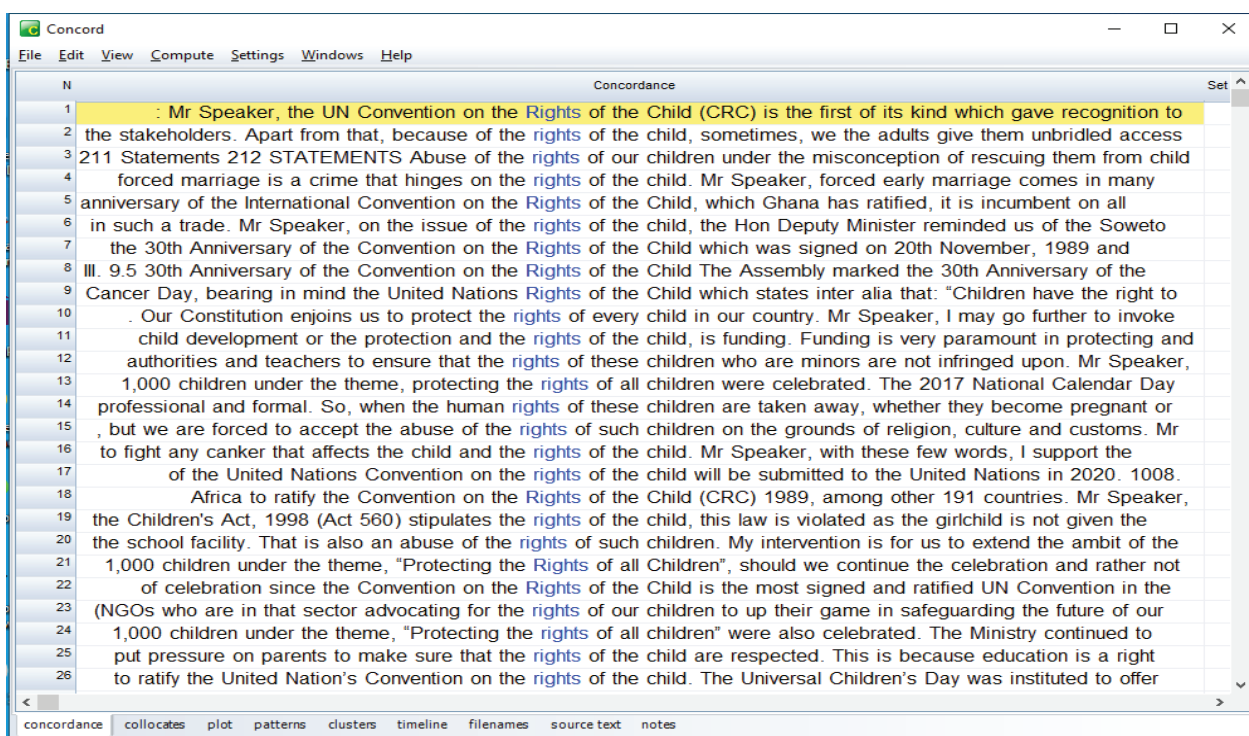


Figure 4. A screenshot of the first 26 concordance lines of child *rights*

Figure 4 reinforces the view that Ghanaian MPs recognise the rights of the child and the need to protect them. There is a call for the protection (see lines 2, 7, 9, 20) and respect (line 26) for the rights of the child. Several protective measures are proposed by MPs for the protection of children and their rights, including: a recognition and ratification of the UNCRC (lines 4-11, 18, 21, 22), involvement of stakeholders such as authorities and teachers (lines 2, 12), enforcement of laws against child labour (line 19) and putting pressure on parents to respect the rights of the child (line 25).

Figure 5 below shows that the MPs do not just recognise the rights of the child, but also demonstrate the need to protect children and their rights. These include the implementation of Child Protection Compact Partnership Agreement (see lines 2, 9), education, sensitisation and advocacy (lines 6, 7, 20, 21). In addition to these calls, there are several acts of Parliament

¹⁹ This indicates the date of the debates/statement and the column of the Hansards where the excerpt can be found.

aimed at protecting children in Ghana, who are considered as a vulnerable group (Sarfo-Kantankah, 2021). These acts include the Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560); Labour Act, 2003 (Act 651); Human Trafficking Act, 2005 (Act 694); Criminal and Other Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29); Juvenile Justice Act, 2003 (Act 653); Domestic Violence Act, 2007 (Act 732) (cf. Taylor Crabbe, Forest Trends and Fern, 2020).

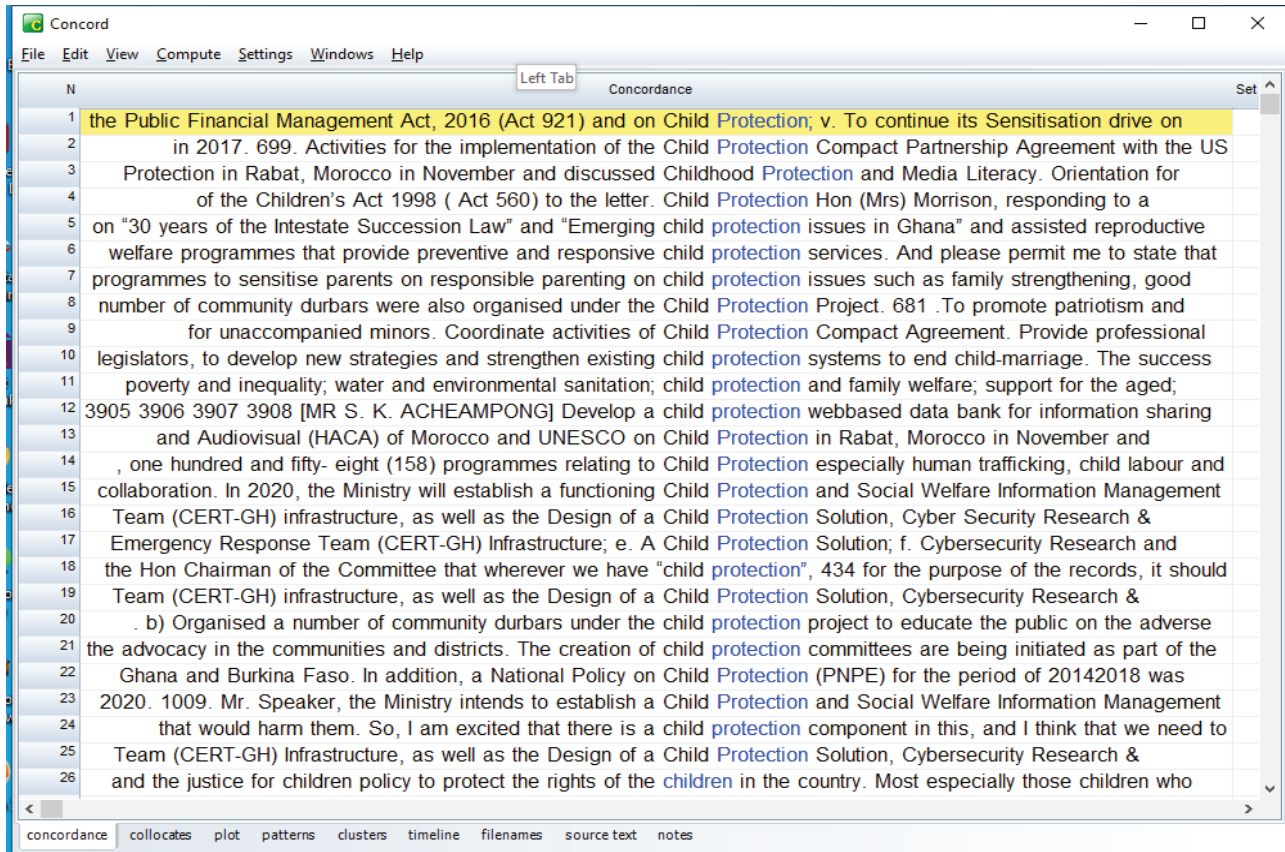


Figure 5. A screenshot of the first 26 concordance lines of child protection

Since the Parliament of Ghana is the law-making arm of government, we expect that MPs' conversation about children will reflect how these rights of children are breached. As one MP states:

Example 2: Hansard: 18 June 2013/Col.442

We all have a duty to ensure that all practices within our social, cultural, political and religious setting that adversely affect our children are eliminated. And we owe this noble duty to our children and the future of this country, and Africa at large. We dare not fail!

There are several social, economic, cultural, political and religious practices that are said to be inimical to the rights and development of the child. However, as noted in Figure 3, the most prominent ones that MPs talk about are child labour, child marriage and child trafficking. The rest of the paper focuses on these three in turn. Our concentration on these is not to discount the issues of child health, poverty, cancer and mortality, among others. We do so because of space limitation and the need for in-depth analysis and discussion.

4.3 Child apprenticeship not child labour; child labour not child apprenticeship

One of the crucial issues of concern regarding children’s rights and development is child labour. Child *labour* occurred 220 times in our concordance lines, the first 26 of which are shown in Figure 6. It is an issue that has gained local (see lines 10, 20, 22), national (lines 2, 4, 6, 7, 14, 21, 23), regional (lines 13, 21) and international (lines 1, 3, 5) attention over the years. Child labour is seen as a concern (lines 2), a menace (line 4), dangerous (line 10), exploitative (line 13) and culturally related.

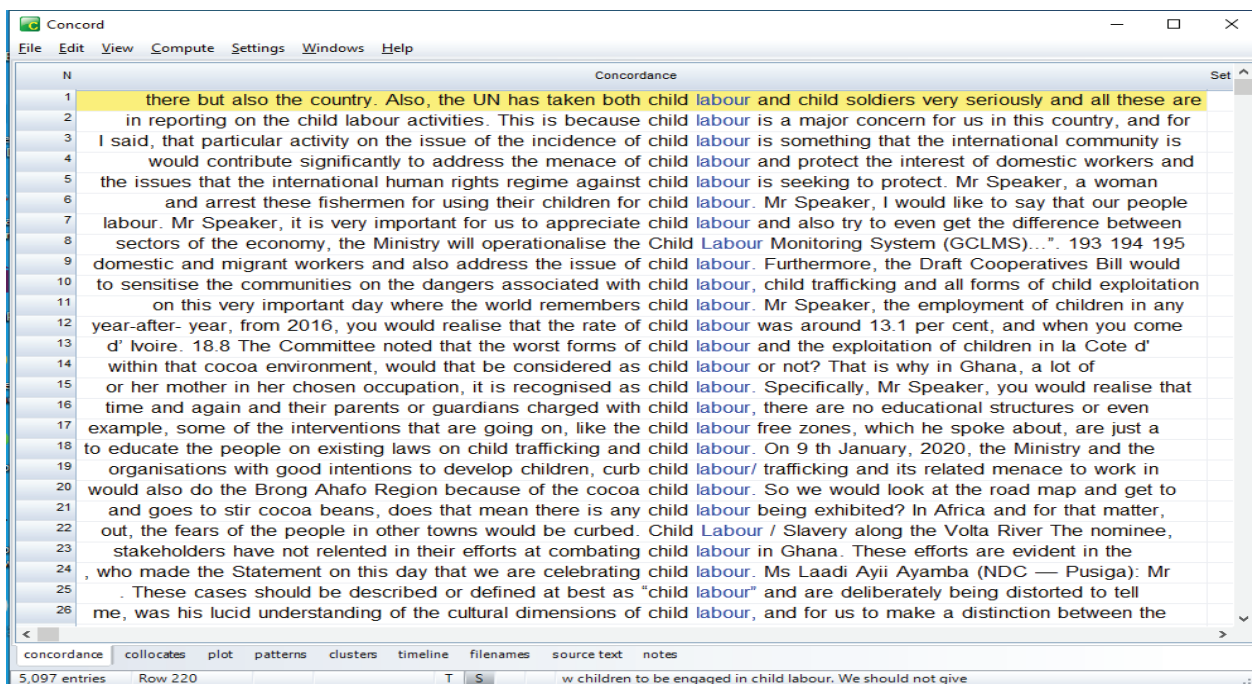


Figure 6. A screenshot of the first 26 concordance lines of *child labour*

On 12th June, 2020 (see Hansard: 12 June 2020/Col.064-068), the Minister for Employment and Labour Relations (MELR) and MP for Sunyani West, Mr Ignatius Baffour Awuah, made a commemorative statement on the floor of Parliament on the 2020 World Day against Child Labour. The Minister noted among other things that:

1. about 1.9 million children, representing 21.8% of the total population of children in Ghana were estimated to be in child labour;
2. the underlining cause of child labour included: poverty, limited access to decent work opportunities for families, ignorance, lack of access to quality education, irresponsible parenting and many others.
3. successive governments and stakeholders had not relented in their efforts at combating child labour in Ghana, which were evident in the numerous legislations, policies, programmes and projects as well as strong institutional arrangements that sought to protect children’s rights, promote their development and prevent them from getting trapped in child labour.
4. strategies to fight child labour included effective collaboration between government agencies, tripartite constituents, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, private sector, international organisations and many others.
5. the Ministry, in collaboration with the National Steering Committee on Child Labour and other stakeholders secured the approval of Cabinet for the implementation of the

Second National Plan of Action for the Elimination of Worse Forms of Child Labour (MPA 2). The plan had four broad strategic objectives, namely:

- a. reinforcing public awareness of child labour and its impact.
 - b. improving collaboration and coordination for resource mobilisation.
 - c. providing effective monitoring of social services and economic empowerment programmes of local government units.
 - d. promoting community empowerment and sustainable action against child labour.
6. there were measures to ensure that Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) put in place measures, structures and systems to monitor, prevent and withdraw children from child labour in their areas of jurisdiction.

The foregoing is a clear indication of the recognition of the fact that child labour exists in Ghana and that there are measures to combat it, in line with Article 32 of the UNCRC, which entreats state parties to protect the child from all forms of “economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development”.

Notwithstanding the acknowledgement of the existence of child labour in Ghana, there are arguments about what constitutes child labour. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines child labour as “work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development” or work that “is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children” and/or interferes with their schooling (ILO, n.d., n.p.). While this definition is internationally accepted, what constitutes child labour has often been debatable as a result of socio-cultural differences between and among countries. For example, Ghanaian MPs have had occasions to question what certain multinational and international organisations describe as child labour. According to Mr Baffour Awuah, Ghana and La Cote d’Ivoire as at June 2020 were:

Example 3: Hansard: 12 June 2020/Col.068

contesting the conclusions of a study funded by the United States Department of Labour (USDOL) and undertaken by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) of the University of Chicago to determine the prevalence of child labour in the two countries, especially in the cocoa growing areas.

Challenging what has been said to constitute child labour, one MP states:

Example 4: Hansard: 2 April 2019/4560-4561

Mr Speaker, if one takes his cameras today to the Volta Lake, one would find children who assist their parents in fishing. I would not call that child slavery or child labour. It is not everybody who is born into a family that is capable of supporting such children fully with resources from their parents. Some children support their parents in diverse ways. Child apprenticeship should not be seen as child labour. Mr Speaker, yes, we would admit that, in some few cases, some of these children are abused. We must all condemn the abuse but the spin that the international community puts on this kind of assistance or training of our children to take up after us as child labour or child trafficking, Mr Speaker, I beg to differ.

The sentiments expressed by the MPs echo the socio-cultural differences in what constitutes child labour as well as some parents’ view that children helping their parents is a means of

work socialization and training (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018b; Afenyadu, 2010; Salah, 2001). The foregoing also reflects what academic scholars have identified as the causes of child labour, especially, in Ghana, including cultural attitudes (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018a; Zelizer, 2005), the poverty levels and economic status of some families such that they need the support of children to be able to generate enough income to feed themselves (cf. Adonteng-Kissi, 2018a; Ahmed, 1999; Frimpong et al., 2021). As another MP articulates:

Example 5: Hansard: 2 April 2019/Col.4556-4557

... the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has some statistics on Ghana, but much of it, like the team from House of Commons, Westminster, UK – we do not have modern slavery in Ghana. We find those words abusive and insulting to our culture and the training of young children. What we do know exists in Ghana are packets of abuses of children who are working but ought not to be working. The solution lies in Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), and Free Senior High School (FSHS) for us to encourage children to take full advantage of.

The issues and questions posed by MPs about what constitutes child labour raise fundamental questions about the fight against child labour in Ghana: it makes the problem of child labour complex. While it is good that the MPs admit that there is, at least “packets of abuses of children who are working but ought not be working” (Example 5) and they “admit that, in some few cases, some of these children are abused” and “we must all condemn the abuse” (Example 4), this way of framing child labour can negatively affect the fight against it. The expressions “packets of” and “in some few cases” appear to underestimate the incidence of child labour and child abuse in Ghana, which can negatively affect the scale of measures needed to fight child labour. When problems are seen as enormous, stronger measures and commitment are needed to solve them, but when perceived otherwise, measures will be milder (cf. Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018). This is important because, how MPs frame child labour affects the attention they will pay to it, for “framing affects what we pay attention to and how we interpret it” (World Bank Group, 2015) and “the way a problem is defined has a major effect on the kinds of ‘solutions’ that are proposed to cope with it” (Mayer, 1996). Thus, underestimating the incidence of child labour has the potential to undermine the existence, the fight against it and reduce the commitment of stakeholders in the fight, because:

The language of parliamentarians does not only reflect social structures and practices, but also creates them, for social structures do not only determine discourse, but they are also a product of discourse, i.e., they are socially constitutive (Fairclough, 1989). Thus, understanding the language of MPs is crucial for appreciating the social problems it reflects, upholds and which it can change.

Sarfo-Kantankah (2022: 4)

The question is: where do we draw the line between child “apprenticeship” (Example 4) and child labour/child abuse? Who monitors the “apprenticeship” engagements of these children? Since the majority of child labour activities in Ghana occur in the agricultural sector (cf. Taylor Crabbe, Forest Trends and Fern, 2020), the major part of which is found in rural areas, with parents who know little about hazards of exposing children to hazardous activities, how are they going to determine the amount of work that is not dangerous to the child’s health? If

Parliament intends to help fight child labour, then there must be monitoring mechanisms and education of parents on the issues of child labour and its detriments.

4.4 One in five girls suffers child marriage in Ghana; it destroys the future of girls

Child marriage is one of the core issues that MPs raise about children. Child marriage is considered a global problem (see Figure 7, lines 1, 18). It is rampant in Ghana (line 1), as one out of five girls in Ghana marries before the age of 18 years (line 6). As stated by one MP:

Example 6: Hansard: 3 July 2019/Col.2619-2620

Indeed, Mr Speaker, child marriage is truly a global problem that cuts across countries, cultures, religions and ethnicities. Statistics show that worldwide, each year, 12 million girls are married before the age of 18. That is 23 girls per minute, and nearly one girl per two seconds. The prevalence rate of child marriage is, however, very high in Africa than in most areas... The picture in Ghana is not very much different. Even though child marriage ... is illegal in the country ... child marriage is a practice estimated to affect one in five girls. According to UNICEF, 21 per cent of girls in Ghana are married before their 18th birthday.

Considered as a menace (line 12), a serious matter (line 11), child marriage seen as deep-rooted in Ghanaian socio-cultural norms and traditions (lines 4, 12, 21) and partly caused by economic factors and poverty (line 18): “Mr Speaker, child marriage is very often fuelled by gender inequality, poverty, traditions, and insecurity; but these causes are not insurmountable problems” (Hansard: 3 July 2019/Col.2620). The above-stated issues have largely been noted in scholarly literature on child marriage. As Yaya et al.’s (2019) study of 34 sub-Saharan African countries reveals, 54% of women in the sub-region experience child marriage, with cross-country variations. In Ghana, it has been found that 20.68% of women experience child marriage, which was occasioned by factors such as poverty, teenage pregnancy and betrothal marriage (Ahonsi et al., 2019).

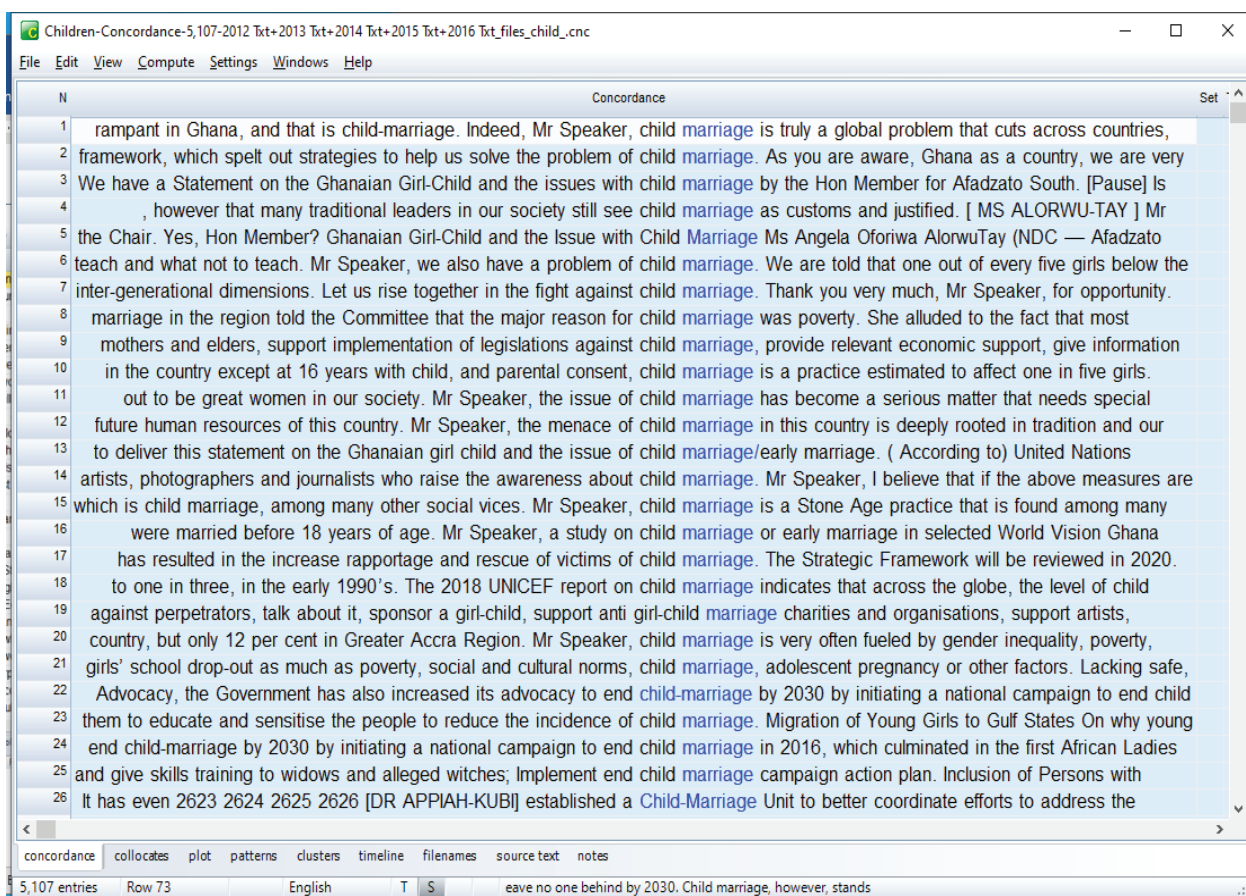


Figure 7. A screenshot of the first 26 concordance lines of child *marriage*

Unlike the issue of child labour, MPs have no argument against what constitutes child marriage; they condemn it outright. The MPs implore each other to rise together to fight against child marriage (line 7): “We must tackle them seriously, given their devastating impact on the girl-child, society and the economy of our country” (Hansard: 3 July 2019/Col.2620). The MPs often bemoan the consequences and impact of child marriage, as exemplified in example 7.

Example 7: Hansard: 3 July 2019/Col2619-2621

Mr Speaker, the impact on the girl child should be seen as a human rights violation that could produce devastating repercussions on a girl’s life, effectively ending her childhood. These also include the huge challenges that child brides face because they are married as children. They often feel isolated and with limited freedom, feel disempowered. They are deprived of their fundamental rights to health, education and safety. Child brides are neither physically nor emotionally ready to become wives and mothers. They are therefore likely to experience dangerous complications in pregnancy and at childbirth, contract HIV/AIDS and suffer domestic violence. With little access to education and economic opportunities, they and their families are more likely to live in poverty and to be trapped in the trans-generational cycle of poverty. Moreover, child marriage usually destroys the future marital life of the girl-child, as available evidence suggests that child-marriage almost always ends in failure.

There are several ways in which MPs think the problem of child marriage can be addressed, including: campaign, education and sensitisation against child marriage (lines 14, 22, 23, 24, 25); increased reportage (line 17); passage and implementation of legislation (line 9) and action against perpetrators (line 19). Article 34 of the UNCRC abhors sexual exploitation of children and charges state parties “to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse”. According to Afranie et al. (2019), the fight against child marriage in Ghana has been spearheaded by several state institutions, which include the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP); the Ministry of Health; the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU); the Girl Child Education Unit of the Ghana Education Service (GES) and the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), UNICEF Ghana, Ark Foundation, Gender and Human Rights Documentation Centre, ActionAid Ghana, and the Muslim Family Counselling Service. These institutions undertake programmes such as community sensitisation and empowerment training for girls, reproductive health services, support for girls’ education as well as rescue and management of victims of child marriage. However, these institutions appear to have been ineffective in the fight against child marriage due to the absence of national policies to coordinate their activities as well as certain socio-cultural practices that are highly difficult to fight against (cf. Sarfo et al., 2020).

4.5 Child trafficking, child slavery or child labour?

Child trafficking is another fundamental issue about which MPs talk. Child trafficking is an international problem affecting millions of people (Johansen, n.d.) and one of the fastest growing and most lucrative criminal activities in the world (Rafferty, 2013). Child labour refers to an illegal procurement and recruitment of children and relocating them for the purpose of either sexual or labour exploitation (cf. Smolin, 2004). The definition implies that the mere sale of children does not constitute child trafficking (Smolin, 2004). Thus, the definition of child trafficking encompasses child labour and sexual exploitation: “child labour is a major issue and it relates to human and child trafficking” (Hansard: 6 June 2017/Col.218). This reflects how Ghanaian MPs frame child trafficking: it mostly occurs in the context of child labour (see Figure 8, lines 8, 10, 12, 16, 17, 19, 20, 27) and child slavery (lines 3, 16, 18, 24).



Figure 8. A screenshot of the first 26 concordance lines of child *trafficking*

Ghanaian MPs recognise that there is child trafficking Ghana: “Mr Speaker, in a situation of hopelessness, child trafficking has become a phenomenon which has been somehow ‘regularised’. This cannot continue” (Hansard: 31 May 2013/Col.115). Recognising the issue of child trafficking in Ghana (lines 2, 5, 6, 11, 12, 18, 20), Ghanaian MPs commemorate the World Day against Human/Child Trafficking every year (line 1). Child trafficking is seen by the MPs as a danger (lines 5, 12) and a menace (lines 8, 13), as, for example, “while reported cases of human trafficking increased by 60.9 per cent from 36 to 92 in 2015, the number of reported cases of child trafficking rose from four in 2014 to 11 in 2015” (Hansard: 21 March/Col.3262) and “human or child trafficking is all over in this country” (Hansard: 15 June 2017/Col.762-764). The MPs express the need to fight against child trafficking or combat it (line 14). They have, therefore, identified a number of ways in which it can be fought against or combatted (lines 5, 8, 13, 25). Consider the metaphorical use of the words “fight” and “combat”, which suggest a warfare, implying that stronger measures are needed to address child trafficking (cf. Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018). The various means of combatting child trafficking include: sensitization (line 6), empowerment (line 14) and education (12, 20, 22, 23). The support of international development partners and NGOs is also sought (lines 17, 25), as envisaged by Article 35 of the UNCRC, which enjoins state parties to “take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form”.

While the afore-mentioned recognition is expressed by the MPs, they seem to sometimes question the description and reportage of the magnitude of child trafficking in Ghana, as an MP explains in example 8.

Example 8: Hansard: 3 April 2019/Col.4543

Mr Speaker, I challenge CNN's 'Freeing the child slaves of Lake Volta' and any other actor alleging "pervasive" child trafficking and child slavery in communities along the Volta Lake to provide independent evidence to corroborate these claims. These cases should be described or defined at best as "child labour" and are deliberately being distorted to tell stories of "child slavery" and "child trafficking", feeding into stereotypes of supposed primitiveness and backwardness of African communities.

As noted previously, such framing of child trafficking may hinder the fight against it. This is because, by framing child trafficking as shown above, MPs are selecting, emphasising and excluding aspects of child trafficking to satisfy specific interests, thereby legitimising and illegitimising issues of concern (cf. Gitlin, 1980; Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018).

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to examine the discursive framing of children in the discourse of Ghanaian Members of Parliament (MPs), using Hansards as data. The analysis shows that Ghanaian MPs frame children as vulnerable people who suffer mainly from child labour, child marriage and child trafficking. As a result of children's vulnerability to these socio-cultural problems, the MPs think that certain measures should be put in place to protect children. These measures include: campaigns, education and sensitisation against child marriage, increased reportage, passage and implementation of legislation, and action against perpetrators, empowerment of children and the support of national, bilateral and multilateral bodies and development partners.

Whereas the MPs condemn child labour, they question the international communities' definition of what constitutes child labour as a result of certain socio-cultural differences between what can be considered as child "apprenticeship" and child labour. The MPs believe that if children help their parents on the farm and it does not prevent them from acquiring education or pose danger to the child's health, it cannot constitute child labour. The MPs share similar sentiments on the issue of what constitutes child trafficking and child slavery. They think that the definition of child labour and child trafficking or child slavery must be considered according to culturally-specific circumstances. Some MPs feel that international bodies and organisations sometimes deliberately distort the definitions of child labour and child trafficking to stereotypically paint Africans as primitive and backward. However, the MPs raise no argument(s) about what constitutes child marriage.

The arguments about what constitutes and the framing of child labour and child trafficking can blare their actual existence in Ghana, such that it can negatively affect the implementation of legislation and other measures geared towards the fight against these problems affecting children. This is because the way a problem is framed affects what kinds of measures are needed to fight the problem (Reese, 2001; Entman, 2010). As Sarfo-Kantankah (2018) notes, if problems are seen as huge, it suggests that stronger measures and more formidable commitment are needed to fight such problems.

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