

Research Article

An Appraisal of Educational Implications on Students in Small Scale Mining Activities in Ghana

Eric Sitsofe Deh ^{1,*}, Theophilus Kweku Bassaw ², Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim ², Eric Sekyi ²¹ Department of Social Sciences, Agogo Presbyterian Women's College of Education, Agogo Asante Akim, Ghana² Department of Social Science, Komenda College of Education, Komenda, Ghana

*Correspondence: Eric Sitsofe Deh (bordohlity@yahoo.co.uk)

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to assess the educational implications of children involved in small scale mining activities at Kyebi in the Abuakwa South District of Ghana. Qualitatively, case study research design was adopted for the study. The population for the study consisted of junior high school head teachers in the Abuakwa South District of Ghana. Purposive sampling technique was used to select all the thirty (30) junior high school head teachers who have taught in the district between 25 to 30 years. The main instrument for data collection was Semi-structured interview guide. Data collected by the researchers from participants was analysed through the use of the interpretive method based on the themes identified at in the data collection. The themes were related to the research question and interpreted based on the number of issues raised by participants. The study concluded that, students' academic lives are being hampered as a result of their continuous engagement in small scale mining activities at the expense of their schooling. The study also revealed that students always score below pass grades during the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) due to the menace caused by illegal mining activities, hence the poor academic performance. It is recommended that the Ghana Education Service, in collaboration with other stakeholders must institute strict measures to curb absenteeism in schools. This would go a long way to ensure that the pupils would attend school on a regular basis. It is also recommended that government intervention programmes such as School Feeding and Free School uniforms be made available to these children in order to keep them in school.

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1. Introduction

Education, in its general sense, is a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills, and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training, and research. Generally, it occurs through any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or behaves in society [1]. However, notwithstanding its numerous benefits, it is sometimes looked down upon, either directly or indirectly. A lot of children miss school, which goes a long way to affect them and the entire country within which they live. One of the major activities that children engage in so as to eschew schooling is small scale mining. Child labour in mines damages not only young bodies and minds but also means that schooling is missed [2]. They posit further that in some poor communities, girls are more likely than boys to be taken out of school to make a living from mining. Webster's Dictionary defines attendance as "the act of habitual practice of attending or being present". School attendance therefore refers to the habitual practice of being present at school [3]. The "gross" school attendance rate represents the number of children, regardless of age in a given country that are in

attendance at a specific school level, such as primary or secondary, divided by the total number of children in the country that are of official age. As such, “gross” attendance rates can exceed 100 percent [1]. They generally suggest that either those children are not in school at the official age or that children are repeating years of schooling.

However, the U.N. Economic Commission for Africa contends that the “net” school attendance rate is the number of children of the official age of a schooling level who are in attendance at that level, divided by the total number of children in the country that are of the official age for that level of schooling. Unlike gross attendance, net attendance cannot exceed 100 percent [4]. The U.N. Economic Commission for Africa also contends that attendance rates at school are often used as indications of positive tool for monitoring. While truancy is frequently mentioned in student debates, there is a scarcity of data on its prevalence. It is possible to infer all trends that showed a gradual increase in attendance rates from the dip experienced in the year following the raising of the school leaving age. According to him, these surveys, however, were not able to distinguish between absence due to illness and absence due to trancies, and therefore, could only provide a general indication of an improved “average” attitude, such as the proportion of pupils chosen to remain beyond the statutory leaving age or attend a further education college. [4].

Children who lack education or drop out of school, usually lack knowledge and are more vulnerable to exploitation [5]. As a result, they become uneducated or unskilled labour. A number of agencies, such as IPECILO, UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank are fighting against child labour by trying to provide access to education for all children [6]. They consider that education is first a priority. Thus, UNICEF is working with other aid agencies, governments and UN agencies to meet the UN Millennium Development Goals by 2015 to ensure primary education to all children. Today, many countries have already achieved the goal of universal primary education. But, the progress is still very slow in low income countries, for example in Sub-Saharan Africa [6]. The number of primary and secondary schools remains low in developing countries because millions of children are being forced to work instead of going to school. Although there could be different reasons other than child labour, which affects primary school enrollment [7]. Parental unemployment, poor quality of teachers and high cost of education, unfortunately have affected enrollment rates in low income countries [8].

Researchers posit that research have established that parental attitude and encouragement has a great deal of weight on students’ education and the height of success attained in education. Parents’ and communities’ attitudes towards education are largely influenced by traditional beliefs. Ghanaian children continue to face barriers to accessing and completing education that result in drop-outs, whereby children fail to complete their full cycle of basic education [9]. Communities, Artisanal, and Small-Scale Mining (CASM) posit that the ILO has indicated that the prevalence of children in mining is growing. The Organization’s background document for the World Day Against Child Labour was on eliminating Child Labour in Mining and Quarrying on 12th June 2005. Children in mining have become a focus of attention as its links to many of the worst forms of child labour on the African continent which has become very obvious. Children are in mining for several reasons – family disintegration through poverty or HIV/AIDS as well as war and conflict; traditional expectations of children as income earners; negligence and premature independence from parental control [10]. Similarly, a study has it that IPEC-ILO has undertaken a number of quite detailed studies into child labour in Ghana, as part of multi-nation studies [11]. Local communities at the fringes of mines have suffered and continue to suffer various degrees of adverse impact of mining operations. Some communities have suffered militaristic attacks, others have had their water sources polluted, their land destroyed, and many of them continue to suffer low and inadequate compensation packages. Concerns have also been expressed about inadequate housing, youth unemployment, family disorganization, school dropouts, prostitution, and drug abuse

associated with the mining boom. In most cases, these impacts affect people of different age groups and gender differently [12].

Heemskerk also observes that due to the sub-sectors' remoteness, informal character and mobility, the number of children involved in mining and quarrying activities is difficult to measure [13]. However, the ILO estimates that nearly 1 million children under the age of 5 to 17 work in mines and quarries [13]. A study of junior high students stipulates that there is a positive correlation between achievement and attendance. One article explains, "When many are absent or chronically tardy, achievement levels suffer" [14]. The study indicates that enhanced rates of class attendance were connected to enhanced academic performance, and the stresses on the academic remuneration of class attendance were also efficient [14]. The researcher also pointed out that a study of attendance and achievement in Ohio schools indicates the positive impact of high school attendance on academic attainment might be greater than people in the past believed.

Notwithstanding, governments the world over have a number of educational facilities which are fairly resourced, both in terms of infrastructure and staff, to ensure that all children are in school. Approximately, there are 125 nursery and kindergartens, 135 primary schools, 97 junior secondary schools, 6 senior secondary schools, 2 technical and vocational schools, and 1 teacher training college in the Kyebi enclave. Kyebi also has a school for the deaf, which has a population of about 213 students by 2015 [15]. Basically, sixteen schools in the municipality are currently benefiting from the School Feeding Programme. All public schools are enjoying the Capitation Grant in the municipality. Besides, free school uniforms have also been distributed to some schools in the municipality, as implemented by the Government of Ghana, yet children of school-going age choose to engage in small scale mining activities at the expense of schooling. This goes a long way to affect these children and their communities negatively [14].

A study identified a tough negative correlation between absences and final grades. Furthermore, he says that students who desire to succeed academically ought to attend class, and teachers must promote attendance [16]. There is a positive correlation between exam performance and attendance [16]. The development of education in Ghana since independence has been and continues to be guided by various education acts and programmes, the most fundamental being the Education Act of 1961. The Education Act of 1961 is the principal legislation on the right to education, and it states in Section 2(1) that "every child who has attained the school - going age as determined by the Minister shall attend a course of instruction as laid down by the Minister in a school recognised for the purpose by the Minister." [14]

A study commented that the 1992 Constitution gives further impetus to the provision of education as a basic right for all Ghanaians. They continue to cite Article 38, sub-section 2 states that "the Government shall within two years after parliament first meets after coming into force of this constitution, the draw up a programme for the implementation within the following ten years for the provision of a free, compulsory universal basic education". They posit further that in 1996, the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education Programme was launched. This is a 10-year programme (1996 – 2005) designed to establish the policy framework, strategies and activities to achieve free and compulsory basic education for all children of school going age [16]. To better understand the government of Ghana's commitment to reduce absenteeism among school children, Boadu points out that, before 2002, preschool education was not part of the formal system; it was introduced as a result of recommendation made by the President's Committee on Review of Education Reforms (October, 2002). Article 39 (1) stated that, the state shall provide educational facilities at all levels and in all regions of Ghana, and shall to the greatest extent feasible, make these facilities available to all citizens". Articles 38 (3c) also indicate government's intention of providing a lifelong education [14]. The over objective education policy as spelt out by the Vision 2020 document is: "to ensure

that all citizens, regardless of gender or social status, are functionally literate and productive at the minimum” to provide relevant education to all Ghanaians to make them functionally literate, productive, and acquire the necessary skills to cope successfully in the modern world”. Boadu further adds that the 1998 Convention on the Rights of the Child further states that the Ministry of Education has chosen an approach for achieving this particularly for pre-tertiary education, which is the „whole school development concept“. This concept consists of activities and policies planned with schools, communities in response to their expressed needs. Ghana is signatory to the international convention of the rights of the child that declared education a right of every child of school age. The ministry of education has long been aware that education is a basic right in Ghana [14].

In the wake of the numerous policy frameworks and conventions; researchers pointed out that an estimated 246 million children are engaged in child labour in the form of small scale mining. Nearly 70 per cent (171 million) of these children work in hazardous conditions – including working in mineral mines, working with chemicals and pesticides in agriculture, or with dangerous machinery. They are everywhere, but invisible, toiling as domestic servants in homes, labouring behind the walls of workshops, hidden from view in plantations. The vast majority of working children – about 70 per cent – work in the agriculture sector [17]. Millions of girls work as domestic servants and unpaid house helps and are especially vulnerable to exploitation and abuse [17]. Millions of others work under horrific circumstances. They may be trafficked, forced into debt bondage or other forms of slavery, forced into prostitution and/or pornography, or recruited as child soldiers in armed conflict [17].

A study indicates that regional estimates indicate that:

- the Asia and Pacific region harbours the largest number of child workers in the 5 to 14 age group, 127.3 million in total (19 per cent of children are working in the in mines in the region);
- Sub-Saharan Africa has an estimated 48 million child workers. Almost one child in three (29 per cent) below the age of 15 is economically active;
- Latin America and the Caribbean harbours approximately 17.4 million child workers (16 per cent of children in the region are working); and
- 15 per cent of children in the Middle East and North Africa are working; approximately 2.5 million and 2.4 million children are working in developed and transition economies respectively [18].

The Researchers observe that construction and land use or acquisition is vital for mining activity, as it is for all industrial development. If not managed well, however, it can create significant socio-economic impacts to which children may be most vulnerable. At the exploration phase, this could include temporary land acquisition for drilling, leading to the loss of agricultural crops. At the construction phase, it could include permanent land acquisition, leading to the loss of livelihoods and homes, and reduced access to social infrastructure such as health-care facilities and schools [19]. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, a 2006 national survey in Suriname found that approximately 6 percent of children ages 5–14 were involved in child labour activities. The differences between urban, rural coastal, and rural interior areas were considerable though, with 3 percent, 6.5 percent, and 17.8 percent respectively. Of the 94 percent of the children ages 5–14 years of age attending school, 5.6 percent were involved in mining activities (17.8 percent of children involved in child mining are living in rural interior areas). On the other hand, the majority of the 6 percent of children classified as child laborers were also attending school (87.7 percent nationwide and 77.5 percent in rural interior areas) [4]. Another researcher observes that mining activities have either

prevented or retarded the schooling of most children. He contends that one in five (21.1 percent) of the children of secondary school age are attending primary school when they should be attending secondary school, with significant disparities between urban areas (17.4 percent), rural coastal areas (21.9 percent), and rural interior districts (47.7 percent). Of children of secondary school age (12–17 years), 18 percent are not in any school, and a difference exists between boys (20 percent) and girls (15 percent). The situation is most extreme in the rural interior districts, where nearly half (44 percent) of all children of secondary school age are out of school (they dropped out or did not attend school at all), and where almost as many girls of secondary school age (44 percent) as boys (46 percent) are out of school [20]

Household work activities that teach children to become skilled adults, mining activities exist as a harmful activity to most children that partake. “Child labor” is seen as work that deprives children of their childhood, potential, dignity, and that is harmful to their physical and mental development. It refers to work that;

- is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and
- interferes with their schooling by
- depriving them of the opportunity to attend school;
- obliging them to leave school prematurely; or
- requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work [21].

An important reason children started working at an early age was that they had dropped out of school. Particularly in the districts of Sipaliwini and Brokopondo, where virtually all gold mining takes place, dropout rates were high. The 2006 MICS mentions that only 39.1 percent of boys and 53 percent of girls had completed elementary school at or before reaching age 12. The number of school children from Northern Ghana districts who had completed elementary school education was no more than 6.5 percent. In line with this finding, these districts had the highest numbers of repeaters at the level of Normal Lower Education [22]. However, about half of the 200 interviewed dropouts had quit elementary school prior to completion of sixth grade, which is the highest grade in Northern Ghana elementary school. Forty percent of these dropouts went to work immediately after leaving school. Up until 2011, there were no possibilities for vocational training in this district, as is still the case in some large districts [22]. Researchers observed that there are few possibilities for children who had dropped out of school [23]. They found that most working children were still in school, but reported a significant gender difference for school attendance: 98 percent of the working girls in their study were still attending school every day, while this was only 68 percent for the working boys. These figures suggest that the great majority of child miners, particularly girls, work primarily after school, on the weekends, or during holidays [23].

According to Spiegel for every primary school age child that is out of school and working there are another ten struggling to combine education with employment. These children are more likely to drop out, to complete fewer years in school, and to achieve lower test scores. The evidence that is available suggests that child laborers may suffer a 17 per cent achievement gap with other children in language and maths. And because children who face restricted opportunities for education will receive lower wages as adults, child labour is one of the most powerful motors transmitting poverty across generations [24]. Research carried out by the Rome-based Centre for Understanding Child Work (UCW) has highlighted the damaging interaction between child labour and education. While the data is patchy, UCW estimates that around one-quarter of the world’s out-of-school primary age population is involved in child labour. In sub-Saharan Africa, the region with the largest out-of-school population, 10 million children are working in mines [25].

When mining activities become rampant in a district, it is likely to entice the children of school going age to partake. The International Labor Organization observed that small-scale mining and quarrying districts often suffer from high school dropouts because of the work of children [26]. Families face a dilemma of their children's earning versus learning. Miners can seldom afford education, and children are sent to work because their children's contribution is perceived as essential for family survival [26]. A previous study commented that no or difficult access to good and adequate education, especially secondary education, is also common, and children with no access to education have little alternative but to enter the labour market [27].

Primary schools in this Tanzanian mining area were characterized by poor facilities, such as lack of classrooms, desks, textbooks, and other necessary teaching equipment. In addition, not many of the children had access to secondary education. Thirteen per cent of the children working at the three mining sites had completed their primary education, but were not selected to join governmental secondary schools. He continues to add that in one village, between 1990 and 1997, only two students were selected to join secondary education, which was discouraging for the children and parents. Indeed, discussions with the children revealed that they were forced into working in the mines because of lack of alternatives and opportunities for further training [28]. In addition, the nature of the primary education does not equip the pupils in the mining areas with skills that are directly useful to them when finishing their primary education [29].

A study pointed out that a majority of the surveyed Nepali children working in mines and quarries start to work before the age of 14, and 11% start before the age of 8. This illustrates that during the children's primary to lower secondary education, they are already working. Either they combine the work with school, or they have completely dropped out of school [12]. On the other hand, poverty and lack of facilities are not the only reasons why parents send their children to work instead of school. World Bank observes that the fact that child work is often considered part of the socialization process result in a high prevalence of child labour instead of schooling in many countries. The parents tend to consider their children's work as a social asset [30]. In Colombia for example, mining is an old activity, inherited from one generation to the next, where the son learns the only work his father has known and the only one in the family's history.

A majority of the family run mines have been configured by their own working dynamics, which have structured solid social and cultural patterns and legitimised the division of work based on age and gender, accepting the presence of children in the mines [12]. The author contends that well-rooted traditions tend to consolidate values that justify and rationalize the formative value that parents attribute to child labour in the mines. In this context, it is interesting to note that out of 1341 boys and girls working in small-scale mining in Colombia, over 85% say that their own families have trained them for the mining work [12].

Mining activities have led to a major drop out among most children in the mining towns in Ghana. For instance, in Akwatia, out of a total of 88 students enrolled, only 42 were able to complete school. The total percentage of school dropouts was 52.27%. In terms of Apinamang which is also one of the towns in the Kwaebibirem district of Ghana, the percentage dropout was 42.28%. a research conducted with 6 illegal miners who were among the dropouts from school gave their main reason as lack of support from family members to finance their education [31]. They believe that the illegal mining gives them all the money they need to start life. While the precise mechanisms of work are complex and influenced by a range of unobserved factors such as household preferences and family behavior, the clear message to emerge from the research is that child labor is keeping many children out of school. Meanwhile, millions of children in school are fighting a losing battle to balance education with employment [31]. The underlying difficulties include but are not limited to:

- The impact of child labor on school attendance, including global out of school numbers
- The characteristics of children in employment, with a focus on parental wealth and education
- Time-intensity effects and the trade-off between child labor and education
- Evidence on the effects of child labour on learning achievement
- The impact of household chores and sibling care on school attendance among Girls [31].

Education disadvantages associated with hazardous employment and the worst forms of child labour. Notwithstanding, it appears the small-scale mining had led to a lot of problems as far as the education of children engaged in the small scale mining activities are concerned. A conversation with a Head teacher at Kibi pointed out that the activities of small scale mining activities have led to adverse effects on the performance rate of these children. There is therefore the need to conduct a study into the impact of small scale mining activities on Junior high school students' education. The purpose of this study was to assess the educational implications of children involved in small scale mining activities at Kyebi in the Abuakwa South District of Ghana. The study was guided by this research question - What are the educational implications of children's involvement in small scale mining activities?

2. Materials and methods

Qualitatively, case study research design was adopted for the study. The population for the study consisted of junior high school head teachers in the Abuakwa South District of Ghana. Purposive sampling technique was used to select all the thirty (30) junior high school head teachers who have taught in the district for between 25 to 30 years. The researchers were able to select participants based on internal knowledge of said characteristics. Sarantakos contends that sampling enables the researcher to study a relatively small number of units in place of the target population and to obtain data that is representative of the whole population. Basically, the purposive sampling technique was used to select the entire sample for the study [32]. Purposive sampling is selecting a sample on the basis of your own knowledge of the population, and its elements. In the purposive sampling, the population is "nonrandom selected based on a particular characteristic. The researcher is able to select participants based on internal knowledge of said characteristics. This method is useful if a researcher wants to study a small subset of a larger population in which many members of the subset are easily identified but the enumeration of all is nearly impossible [33]. The main instrument for data collection was Semi-structured interview guide. Interview is regarded as an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest. Interviews are particularly useful for getting a story behind participants' experiences. This allows the interviewer to peruse in-depth information around the topic. It is widely used because it is a powerful means for obtaining information and gaining insight [34]. Data collected by the researchers from participants were analysed by the use of the interpretive method based on the themes arrived at in the data collection. The themes were related to the research question and interpreted on the number of issues raised by participants. These were based on questions on the semi-structured interviews on educational implications in small scale mining activities. Also, narrative samples of text and statements from the individual interviews were used to provide rich description to further illustrate specific conclusions.

3. Results and discussion

This section presents results and discuss on the research question - *what are the effects of small scale mining activities on the education of students'?* In finding answers to the research

question, the researchers yearned to know the respondents' views as far as the effects of small scale mining activities on the educational needs of pupils at Abuakwa South District is concerned. Majority of the respondents posits that; *when children engage in small scale mining, it prevents them from attending school on regular basis.*

A head teacher revealed that;

“poor academic performances as a result of chronic absenteeism is the result of their interest in small scale mining”. “the children who engage in small scale mining always lag behind their peers. This is as a result of the fact that they miss classes for majority of the school term. There is a clear indication that almost all students do illegal mining during class hours and this affects academic performance and school attendance”.

Similarly, another respondent indicated that “there is no way that a student who has missed school almost the whole term can come back only to write examinations and pass better than the regular ones”. Four head teachers also contended that; all the students who troop to the mining site on a regular basis do not perform well. All the above responses are consistent with the previous studies of Boadu found that there is a positive correlation between achievement and attendance [14]. A Previous study found that enhanced rates of class attendance were connected to enhanced academic performance, and the stresses on the academic remuneration of class attendance were also efficient [14, 15]. A study of attendance and achievement in Ohio schools believes the positive impact of fine school attendance on academic attainment might be superior to people have in the past believe [15].

Another question that was asked by the researchers was, “How do small scale mining activities affect the rate of attendance of the pupils in this district?” In response, the respondent stressed that; the mining activities have caused the students to lose a lot of school days”. “The mining activities in the town have made a lot of the students loose productive time of the school”. This development is good since and consistent with contention of U.N. Economic Commission for Africa that attendance rates to school are often used as indications of positive tool for monitoring [4]. Whilst truancy is frequently a feature of pupils' debate, there is a lack of available data on its frequency. It is possible to infer over all trends that showed a gradual increase in attendance rates from the dip experienced in the year following the raising of the school leaving age [4]. According to them, these surveys, however, were not able to distinguish between absence due to illness and absence due to trancies and therefore, can only provide a general indication of improved „average“ attitude such as the proportion of pupils chosen to remain beyond statutory leaving age or a further education college [4].

Respondents further postulates that;

“children engage themselves in illegal mining for personal up keep and their family gains, they are also involving in this due to influence from their peers. Students that engage in illegal mining activities are mostly boys whiles few are girls”

Head teachers (respondents) revealed once again that students absent themselves from school for at least four (4) weeks in a term, others too one or two weeks in the term which have adverse effects on their academic performances. A head teacher quickly added that; some of the students end up to be dropped out of school as their friends begin to laugh at them when they manage to come back to school. A head teacher revealed that, a class teacher's weekly report concluded that “two brilliant students are out of school due to this illegal mining activity in which these students engaged in for their survival”. Another respondent indicated that “those students' who even come to school are even coming to rest by sleeping during teaching period and sometimes complain that they are

sick so they want to visit the hospital by second break". Majority of the head teachers' remarks that their respective students always score below pass grades during the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) due to the menace caused by illegal mining activities, hence the poor academic performance. A researcher cited in his study of junior high students shows a positive correlation between achievement and attendance. One of the articles explains "when many are absent or chronically tardy, achievements suffer" [35]. Similar studies explain that the result of his research signify that enhanced rates of class attendance were also efficient, there is a positive correlation between exam performance and attendance [36, 37]. A study conducted in Ohio, shows that attendance and achievements in Ohio schools believes the positive impact of fine school attendance on academic attainment might be superior to people have in the past believe [38]. This implies that attendance in school improve students' academic performance in class. It also helps teachers to monitor the progress of students.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The study concluded that, students' academic lives are being hampered as a result of their continuous engagement in small scale mining activities at the expense of their schooling. The study also revealed that students always score below pass grades during the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) due to the menace caused by illegal mining activities, hence the poor academic performance. It is recommended that the Ghana Education Service in collaboration with other stakeholders must institute strict measures to curb absenteeism in schools. This would go a long way to ensure that the pupils would attend school on regular basis. It is also recommended that Government intervention programmes such as School Feeding and Free School uniforms should be made available to these children in order to keep them in school. It is recommended again that there is the need for both central and local governments to institute frantic measures to ensure that school going age students need to refrain from illegal gold mining activities in order that they can retain some amounts of their energies in order to partake in effective schooling that would ensure that the future of the nation is secured. To achieve this, teachers and other related stakeholders must have the utmost duty of using numerous strategies to curb the situation to ensure that children are constantly present at school. Notwithstanding, there are other causes like poverty, broken homes, distance to school, inadequate parental control is also contributing factors which need to be look at closely.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: ESD, TKB, AWI and ES.; Methodology: ESD, TKB, AWI and ES.; Software: ESD, TKB, AWI and ES.; Validation: ESD, AWI, and ES.; Formal analysis: ESD, TKB, AWI and ES.; Investigation: ESD, TKB, AWI and ES; Resources: ESD.; Data Curation: ESD, TKB, AWI and ES.; Writing – original draft preparation: ESD and TKB.; Writing: CFA, GGF, and IA; Visualization: ESD, TKB, AWI and ES.; Supervision: ESD and TKB.; Project administration: ESD, TKB, AWI and ES; Funding acquisition: ESD, TKB, AWI and ES

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