

ENHANCING STUDENTS' CHILD LABOR PREVENTION AWARENESS AND SKILLS THROUGH THE GROUP SOCIAL WORK METHOD

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Abstract. Child labor (CL) refers to the situation where children are involved in jobs that violate legal regulations and critically impact their comprehensive development. Specifically, there is a group of children who both attend school and engage in labor activities that either violate laws or show indications of child labor violations. In response to this reality, schools have implemented several child labour prevention (CLP) activities, yet to a limited extent, particularly those utilizing group social work methods. Through this method, students can raise their awareness, proactively enhance prevention CL skills while still attending school. By utilizing a survey questionnaire and data processing with SPSS statistical software, this paper highlights significant changes when students participate in empirical programs to raise awareness and enhance skills for preventing CL through group social work methods, thereby affirming the necessity, effectiveness, and feasibility of the activities. On that basis, the authors propose several solutions to further enhance the effectiveness of the activity.

Keywords: Children, child labor, group social work, raising awareness, enhancing skills.

1. Introduction

Child labor is a violation of children's rights under international human rights law and the laws of many countries, including Vietnam [1]. It is a situation in which children and minors engage in labor activities, violating labor laws. These activities can hinder or negatively impact their physical, intellectual, personality, and emotional development [2]. It is widely observed that the world in general and Vietnam in particular are still facing the issue of child labor.

As of June 2021, the latest global estimates from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF indicated that 160 million children were involved in child labor at the beginning of 2020, accounting for nearly one-tenth of the global child population [3]. In Vietnam, various research has mentioned the situation of child labor. In particular, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) report notably emphasized that 6,3% of children aged 5–11 and 3,2% of those aged 12–14 were participating in economic activities exceeding permissible limits; 2,3% were involved in hazardous work and attending school simultaneously [4], meaning they attended school and engaged in illegal labor work concurrently, becoming child laborers while still in school.

Preventing, minimizing, and eradicating child labor requires active participation and strong coordination across all sectors and societal stakeholders, including the school. The role of schools

in child labor prevention is clearly emphasized via specific guidelines and frameworks related to implementing prevention programs and activities [5], [6], particularly those based on the school social work approach.

“Social work is a profession and a specialized activity aimed at assisting individuals, families, and communities to enhance their capacities and improve their social functioning, while promoting the social environment to help individuals, families, and communities solve and prevent social issues, thereby contributing to social welfare” [7]. Social work's fundamental functions include prevention, intervention, rehabilitation, and development. The essence of school social work is to perform all those functions, but to focus and place greater emphasis on children and adolescents in schools [8]. The support activities are carried out by social workers, who are also involved in schools, such as teachers and school administrators... [9], with teachers doubling as school social workers.

Social work for child labor prevention is the process in which social workers utilize appropriate methods and activities to raise awareness and enhance prevention skills among children, families, schools, and communities, to reduce the occurrence of child labor [10]. Social work activities for preventing child labor in schools are developed and implemented based on general child labor prevention activities as well as specific measures addressing the challenges of social work in schools. Key focus areas include: Activities supporting awareness raising to prevent child labor; and activities supporting the education of child labor prevention skills. These provisions have been stipulated in specific legal documents, with important references such as article 48, section 1, chapter IV of the Law on children (2016), enacted by the National Assembly [11]; Decision no. 782/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister outlining the objectives and tasks for child labor prevention [12]; Circular no. 33/2018/TT-BGDĐT providing guidance on social work in schools [13].

An effective method for raising students' awareness and equipping them with these skills is through club or group activities. “Group social work is an intervention method within social work. It is a process in which group members are provided with opportunities and an environment for interaction and participation in group activities to achieve collective goals, address individual purposes of members, and resolve their difficulties” [14]. Preventing difficult problems and providing necessary measures to meet human needs are emphasized by Klein (1972) as fundamental and important goals of group social work (Nguyen Thi Thai Lan, 2012) [14]. In Vietnam, this content has also been mentioned in several documents guiding the implementation of activities related to the prevention, intervention, and support of disadvantaged students, including specifically the prevention of child labor [12], [13]. Students will have the opportunity to interact in an open and friendly group environment; they can learn and develop knowledge and skills; leading to positive changes in awareness, attitudes, and behavior after engaging in activities; additionally, they will be able to share the knowledge and skills they have accumulated with other groups, such as classmates, students in their school, and the community... However, in practice, child labor prevention activities using group social work methods remain limited without much optimal effectiveness.

Therefore, this paper focuses on highlighting the results achieved when students participate in empirical learning to raise awareness and enhance prevention CL skills through the group social work methods. The research employs the survey method with a questionnaire and analyzes data using SPSS software to compare the results before and after the empirical activity, thereby affirming the necessity, feasibility, and effectiveness of group social work activities in preventing child labor in schools. Based on these findings, the authors propose solutions to further improve the effectiveness of child labor prevention activities from the perspective of school social work, specifically through the group social work method.

2. Content

2.1. Research Participants and Methodology

The participants of this study include 13 students from Nam Khao Secondary School, Muong Te District, Lai Chau Province. These students, aged between 11 and 15, comprise 6 female students and 7 male students. They are of Cong and La Hu ethnic groups, attending school while also participating in labor activities, but have not yet exhibited signs of legal violations related to child labor. The participants participated in club activities using the group social work method. Because this is a supportive group social work model targeting at-risk students, aiming to provide foundational knowledge and enhance skills for preventing CL, thereby reducing the risk of CL involvement, the researchers adopted a standardized group size of 13 students to facilitate the implementation of initial support activities. The group members engaged in club activities aimed at raising awareness and enhancing CL prevention skills through the group social work method. Before and after engaging in the empirical activity, students completed a survey evaluating their awareness, skills, and attitudes regarding CLP.

The questionnaire survey method is utilized in this study. The author collected and evaluated information of students' level of awareness, certain child labor prevention skills, and attitudes toward before and after the empirical activity. Specifically: (1) Regarding students' awareness, the research assesses their awareness before and after participating in the empirical activity across several dimensions, including: Awareness of the concept of children, children's rights, child labor (5 items); Awareness of the causes and consequences of child labor (6 items); Knowledge in identifying child labor (7 items); and Understanding of the responsibilities of the stakeholders in preventing child labor (5 items). (2) Regarding the CLP skills, the research evaluates students' understanding and practice of skills before and after the empirical activity in the following areas: Skills for identifying risks of child labor (4 items); Skills to participate in communication to prevent CL (4 items); Help-seeking skills (4 items); and Motivational skills in learning (4 items). (3) Regarding students' participation attitude, the research assesses students' participation attitudes in awareness-raising activities (2 items) and skill-enhancing activities (2 items) before and after the empirical activity. The evaluation scores were ranked with four levels: Level 1 (Weak – mean score from 1 to below 1,75), Level 2 (Moderate – mean score from 1,75 to below 2,5), Level 3 (Fair – mean score from 2,5 to below 3,25), and Level 4 (Good – mean score from 3,25 to 4,0).

Subsequently, the data was processed with SPSS software to describe and compare the collected data, specifically: Calculating the Mean to determine students' levels of awareness, skills, and attitudes to participate in preventing CL; Conducting the Paired Samples T-test to identify differences between mean values in terms of students' awareness, attitudes, and skills before and after engaging in the empirical activity (with a significance level of $\text{Sig} < 0,05$).

2.2. Results

2.2.1. Child labour prevention activities using the group social work method

The participants participated in club activities using the group social work method, through which they received support in raising awareness and enhancing skills for preventing CL, thereby reducing the risk of becoming child laborers. The group activities were conducted following the four-stage process of the group social work method: (1) Setting up the group; (2) Group activities initiation; (3) Intervention and task implementation; (4) Group termination [14], [15].

The specific activities aimed at raising awareness and enhancing skills for preventing CL among the student group were implemented during Stage 3 of the group social work process - the task-focused phase. In this stage, the social worker organized 10 group activity sessions focusing on support topics, including:

Awareness-Raising Support (5 sessions): Awareness of the concept of children, children's rights, child labor; Causes and consequences of child labor; legal regulations on child labor violations; responsibilities of participants in preventing child labor and related knowledge systems.

Skills-Equipping Support (5 sessions): Skills for identifying risks of child labor; Skills to participate in communication to prevent child labor; Help-seeking skills; and Motivational skills in learning and related knowledge systems.

After the 10 activity sessions conducted during the task-focused phase and following the overall evaluation of all group social work process activities, the social worker assessed changes among the students after their participation in the club. Prior to this, during Stages 1 and 2 of the process, the social worker surveyed the students' awareness, skills, and attitudes before their participation in the empirical research, in order to ensure the most objective comparison.

To evaluate the result of the empirical activities, the research analyzed and compared the levels of awareness, child labor prevention skills, and students' attitudes before and after engaging in these activities.

2.2.2. Results of the prevention CL intervention using the group social work method

**** Changes in students' awareness before and after the empirical activity***

The survey on students' level of awareness regarding prevention CL before and after the empirical activity assesses four aspects: (1) awareness of the concepts of children, children's rights, and CL; (2) awareness of the causes and consequences of CL; (3) awareness of indicators for identifying CL; and (4) awareness of participants' responsibilities in CLP. The research findings reveal:

Students' awareness levels of the concepts of children, children's rights, and CL significantly improved from 2,48 pre-intervention (moderate level) to 3,23 post-intervention (fair level). The mean scores of awareness level for all content groups related to the concepts of children, children's rights, and CL increased following the empirical activity. Among these, awareness of the concept of CL and the CL consequences reached the highest level (level 4), with mean scores of 3,31 and 3,38, respectively; for other aspects, the students achieved a good level (level 3) after the empirical activity. The test results indicate a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of awareness level regarding the concepts of children, children's rights, and CL before and after the empirical activity, with a significance level of $p = 0,000 < 0,05$ and a mean difference of 0,75.

The survey on students' awareness of the causes and consequences of child labor before and after the empirical activity also clearly demonstrates the results presented in Table 1:

Table 1. Students' awareness levels of the causes and consequences of child labor before and after the empirical activity (N=13)

No.	Awareness of the causes and consequences of child labor	Pre-intervention Results		Post-intervention Results	
		Mean	Level	Mean	Level
1	Causes related to students' families	2,77	3	3,38	4
2	Causes related to students themselves	2,00	2	2,92	3
3	Limitations of schools in implementing prevention activities	2,15	2	3,00	3
4	Causes related to the community	2,08	2	3,08	3
5	Impact of child labor on children	2,54	3	3,31	4
6	Impact of child labor on families, schools, and society	2,23	2	3,15	3

7	Mean	2,29	2	3,14	3
8	Standard deviation	0,361		0,253	
9	P-value	0,000			

The results presented in Table 1 show that students' awareness levels increased from 2,29 pre-intervention (moderate level) to 3,14 post-intervention (fair level). The mean scores of awareness across all content groups improved after the empirical activity. Among these, awareness of causes related to students' families and the impact of CL on children reached the highest level (level 4), with mean scores of 3,38 and 3,31, respectively; for the remaining aspects, students achieved a fair level of awareness (level 3) after the empirical activity. The test results indicate a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of students' awareness regarding the causes and consequences of CL before and after the empirical activity, with a significance level of $p = 0,000 < 0,05$ and a mean difference of 0,85.

The survey on students' knowledge in identifying CL also reveals that their awareness levels increased from 2,25 (moderate level, before the empirical activity) to 3,20 (fair level, after the empirical activity). The mean scores of awareness across all content groups related to indicators for identifying CL improved after the empirical activity. Among these, awareness of the work time for children under 15 years old and the categories of permissible work for children aged 13 to 15 years old reached the highest level (level 4), with mean scores of 3,46 and 3,38, respectively; for the remaining aspects, students achieved a fair level (level 3) of awareness after the empirical activity. The test results indicate a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of students' awareness regarding the indicators for identifying CL before and after the empirical activity, with a significance level of $p = 0,000 < 0,05$ and a mean difference of 0,95 (Table 2):

Table 2. Students' awareness levels of indicators for identifying child labor before and after the empirical activity (N=13)

No.	Child labor identification	Pre-intervention Results		Post-intervention Results	
		Mean	Level	Mean	Level
1	Working hours of children under 15 years old	2,62	3	3,46	4
2	Working hours of children aged 15 to 18 years old	2,08	2	3,15	3
3	Categories of work permitted for children under 13 years old	2,15	2	3,08	3
4	Categories of work permitted for children aged 13 to 15 years old	2,38	2	3,38	4
5	Categories of work prohibited for children under 18 years old	2,31	2	3,00	3
6	Working conditions are prohibited for children under 18 years old	2,23	2	3,23	3
7	Prohibition of engaging children under 18 years old in the worst forms of child labor	2,00	2	3,08	3
8	Mean	2,25	2	3,20	3
9	Standard deviation	0,262		0,362	
10	P-value	0,000			

The survey on students' knowledge regarding participants' responsibilities in child labor prevention reveals that students' awareness levels increased from 2,51 pre-intervention (fair level) to 3,31 following the empirical activity (good level). The mean scores of awareness level across all content groups related to participants' responsibilities in CLP improved after the empirical activity. Specifically, students' awareness of the responsibilities of themselves, their families, and their schools reached a good level; for the remaining aspects, including the responsibilities of the community and enterprises, students achieved a fair level (level 3) after the empirical activity. The test results indicate a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of students' awareness regarding participants' responsibilities in prevention CL before and after the empirical activity, with a significance level of $p = 0,000 < 0,05$ and a mean difference of 0,80.

Thus, students' awareness of prevention CL experienced a significant change before and after the empirical activity. Previously, students' awareness across all surveyed aspects was at a moderate level, with a mean score of 2,38; and subsequently improved to a fair level, with a mean score of 3,22 after the empirical activity. The test results confirm a statistically significant difference in the overall mean scores of students' awareness regarding CLP before and after the empirical activity, with a significance level of $p = 0,000 < 0,05$ and a mean difference of 0,84 (Table 3):

Table 3. Changes in students' awareness of child labor prevention before and after the empirical activity (N=13)

No.	Changes in students' awareness of child labor prevention	Pre-intervention Results		Post-intervention Results	
		Mean	Level	Mean	Level
1	Concepts of children, children's rights, and child labor	2,48	2	3,23	3
2	Awareness of the causes and consequences of child labor	2,29	2	3,14	3
3	Awareness of indicators for identifying child labor	2,25	2	3,20	3
4	Awareness of participants' responsibilities in child labor prevention	2,51	3	3,31	4
5	Mean	2,38	2	3,22	3
6	Standard deviation	0,293		0,157	
7	P-value	0,000			

*** Changes in students' skills in child labor prevention before and after the empirical activity**

The survey on students' skills in CLP before and after the empirical activity assesses four aspects: (1) Skills in identifying the risks of CL; (2) Skills in engaging in prevention CL communication activities; (3) Skills in seeking assistance for prevention CL; and (4) Skills in building motivation for learning about CLP. The results regarding each aspect are reported as follows:

Firstly, the students' skills in identifying the risks of child labor were found to significantly improve from 2,27 (moderate level) to 3,37 (good level). The mean scores of awareness and practice across all skill groups related to identifying the risks of CL improved after the empirical activity, with the most notable increases observed in the skills of identifying working conditions and types of work that are against legal regulations (both of which improved from level 2 to level 4). The test results indicate a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of students'

awareness and practice regarding skills in identifying the risks of CL before and after the empirical activity, with a significance level of $p = 0,000 < 0,05$ and a mean difference of 1,10.

Regarding skills in engaging in prevention CL communication activities, the findings reveal that before the empirical activity, students' awareness and practice levels were moderate with a mean score of 2,19; subsequently, this increased to 3,12 (fair level). All aspects related to communication skills improved, mostly from a moderate to a fair level. Notably, students' awareness of the importance of engaging in CLP communication activities increased from a fair to a good level, with mean scores of 2,69 before and 3,31. The test results indicate a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of students' awareness and practice regarding skills in engaging in CLP communication activities before and after the empirical activity, with a significance level of $p = 0,000 < 0,05$ and a mean difference of 0,92 (Table 4):

Table 4. Students' skills in engaging in child labor prevention communication activities before and after the empirical activity (N=13)

No.	Skills in engaging in child labor prevention communication activities	Pre-intervention Results		Post-intervention Results	
		Mean	Level	Mean	Level
1	Awareness of the importance of engaging in child labor prevention communication activities	2,69	3	3,31	4
2	Identifying target audiences for child labor prevention communication	2,08	2	3,15	3
3	Defining the purpose and content of communication	1,85	2	2,92	3
4	Defining methods and forms of communication	2,15	2	3,08	3
5	Mean	2,19	2	3,12	3
6	Standard deviation	0,522		0,428	
7	P-value	0,001			

Regarding skills in seeking help for CLP, the research findings show that before the empirical activity, students' awareness and practice levels were moderate, with a mean score of 2,35; then increased to 3,13 (fair level) following the empirical activity. All aspects related to seeking help for CLP improved, with most increasing from a moderate to a fair level. Notably, students' skills in supporting friends when encountering difficulties improved from a fair to a good level, with mean scores of 2,46 before and 3,31 after the empirical activity. The test results indicate a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of students' skills in seeking help for CLP before and after the empirical activity, with a significance level of $p = 0,00 < 0,05$ and a mean difference of 0,79.

The research findings also reveal the changes in students' skills in motivating learning about CLP after engaging in the empirical activity (Table 5).

The results presented in Table 5 show that the students' awareness and practice levels regarding this skill rose from a moderate level, with a mean score of 2,21 to 3,29 (good level) following the empirical activity. Among these, students' understanding of the causes of loss of learning motivation and methods for building learning motivation improved significantly from a moderate level to a good level, with mean scores of 3,46 and 3,31, respectively. The test results indicate a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of students' awareness and practice regarding the skill of motivating learning before and after the empirical activity, with a significance level of $p = 0,000 < 0,05$ and a mean difference of 1,08.

Table 5. Students' skills in motivating learning about child labor prevention before and after the empirical activity (N=13)

No.	Skills in motivating learning about child labor prevention	Pre-intervention Results		Post-intervention Results	
		Mean	Level	Mean	Level
1	Understanding the causes of the loss of learning motivation	2,38	2	3,46	4
2	Understanding methods to build learning motivation	2,23	2	3,31	4
3	Practicing building learning motivation	2,08	2	3,15	3
4	Defining learning purposes, goals, and planning	2,15	2	3,23	3
5	Mean	2,21	2	3,29	4
6	Standard deviation	0,366		0,267	
7	P-value	0,000			

It can be seen that the students' skills in child labor prevention showed a remarkable change following the empirical activity from a moderate level, with a mean score of 2,25, to a fair level, with a mean score of 3,23. The test results indicate a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of students' awareness and practice across all four skill groups related to child labor prevention before and after the empirical activity, with a significance level of $p = 0,000 < 0,05$ and a mean difference of 0,97 (Table 6):

Table 6. Changes in students' skills in child labor prevention before and after the empirical activity (N=13)

No.	Changes in students' skills in child labor prevention	Pre-intervention Results		Post-intervention Results	
		Mean	Level	Mean	Level
1	Skills in identifying the risks of child labor	2,27	2	3,37	4
2	Skills in engaging in child labor prevention communication activities	2,19	2	3,12	3
3	Skills in seeking help for child labor prevention	2,35	2	3,13	3
4	Skills in motivating learning about child labor prevention	2,21	2	3,29	4
5	Mean	2,25	2	3,23	3
6	Standard deviation	0,319		0,213	
7	P-value	0,000			

(Source: Research survey results, 2024)

*** Changes in students' attitudes toward child labor prevention**

The survey also explored the students' interest levels and their evaluation of the significance of engaging in activities aimed at enhancing awareness and skills in CLPJ (Table 7):

Table 7. Changes in students' attitudes toward child labor prevention before and after the empirical activity (N=13)

No.	Changes in students' attitudes toward child labor prevention	Pre-intervention Results		Post-intervention Results	
		Mean	Level	Mean	Level
1	I am interested in activities supporting awareness-raising for child labour prevention.	2,54	3	3,31	4
2	I find activities supporting awareness-raising for child labour prevention meaningful and useful.	2,62	3	3,38	4
3	I am interested in activities supporting child labour prevention skill enhancement for prevention.	2,85	3	3,46	4
4	I find activities supporting child labour prevention skill enhancement very meaningful and useful.	2,92	3	3,54	4
5	Mean	2,73	3	3,42	4
6	Standard deviation	0,297		0,258	
7	P-value	0,000			

(Source: Research survey results, 2024)

The results presented in Table 7 show that students' attitudes toward engaging in the activities significantly improved from 2,73 (fair level) to 3,42 (good level) at the end of the empirical activity. The test results indicate a statistically significant difference in students' engagement attitudes, with a significance level of $p = 0,000 < 0,05$ and a mean difference of 0,69.

2.3. Discussion

With the contents presented, this article confirms the significant changes in students' awareness, attitudes, and skills in CLP after engaging in the empirical activities based on the group social work method. However, to replicate and effectively implement this model in schools for child labor prevention, it is necessary to implement several measures:

First: Schools need to set up suitable space for group activities, ensuring appropriate conditions of location, area, room settings, and space to help organize activities to ensure optimal effectiveness. Specifically, the room should be conveniently located for organizing activities and easily accessible to students. The area must be spacious and well-ventilated, with windows, greenery, bookshelves, file cabinets, tables, chairs, and other learning equipment. The environment must be safe, friendly, and quiet...

Second: The staff and teachers implementing social work activities in schools play a crucial role in educating and preventing CL among students. Therefore, schools need to develop strategies to enhance training activities, professional development, and capacity-building for staff in social work, group social work, and CLP. This activity will contribute to improving the effectiveness of CLP efforts in schools.

Third: Besides focusing on prevention models, schools also need to pay more attention to support and intervention models to promptly assist students facing CL - related difficulties or those who have become child laborers. Some difficulties students may encounter related to child labor include academic challenges, health problems, psychological impacts, limited communication

skills, and behavioral issues. In response to these difficulties, students need timely and effective support models, especially from the perspective of school social work and group social work.

Fourth: schools need to establish a plan for implementing CLP activities as part of the school's annual development plan; innovate forms and methods of prevention, focusing more on building club activities, prevention and intervention groups to engage students more actively and proactively; and strengthen collaboration with families, local authorities, child protection agencies, organizations, and businesses in the area...to promote the effectiveness of these activities.

3. Conclusion

The paper focuses on exploring and highlighting key aspects concerning changes in students' awareness, attitudes, and skills in child labor prevention after engaging in CLP empirical activities based on the group social work method. This study shares the same foci with Truong Thi Tam (2022) [16]. However, the empirical activities in Truong's study were implemented within the community and have not been directly targeted at groups of at-risk students in school, especially the group of secondary school students in mountainous regions with particularly difficult socio-economic conditions - groups at high risk of becoming child labourers while still in school. The research results show that, after the empirical activity, the students exhibited significant changes in awareness across four dimensions: (1) Awareness of the concepts of children, children's rights, and CL; (2) Awareness of the causes and consequences of CL; (3) Awareness of indicators for identifying CL and (4) Awareness of participants' responsibilities in CLP. Also, the students demonstrated changes in prevention skills across four dimensions: (1) Skills in identifying risks of CL (2) Skills in engaging in CLP communication activities; (3) Skills in seeking help; and (4) Skills in motivating learning about CLP. The students' attitudes toward engagement also changed significantly as they engaged in group activities, enhancing their knowledge and strengthening their prevention skills. The test results indicate statistically significant differences in all aspects related to knowledge, prevention skills, and students' engagement attitudes before and after the empirical activity. Although these results demonstrate the effectiveness and feasibility of applying the group social work model to support students in enhancing their awareness and skills in CLP, they are still limited to the group of students who engaged in the empirical research and have not been cross-validated with a control group. This represents a limitation of the study but also provides a foundation for further empirical research with more rigorous validation. Besides, the limited duration of the empirical research may have resulted in the incomplete coverage of the content intended to equip students with awareness and prevention skills. On the other hand, although the sample size of 13 students is suitable for prevention and risk reduction support in group social work, it remains relatively small, which limits the generalizability of the research. However, it also serves as a suggestion for future empirical research to ensure broader generalizability and greater sustainability. In addition to these findings, the article also proposes several solutions to further enhance the effectiveness of group social work activities in supporting students in CLP.

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