



# SEA TO SCHOOL: BALANCING LEARNING WAVES OF LIFE OF STUDENTS WORKING AS A FISHERMEN

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## ABSTRACT

The study titled "Sea to School: Balancing Learning Waves of Life of Students Working as Fishermen" explores the unique challenges and experiences of students who juggle their academic responsibilities with their role as fishermen. These students are often found in coastal communities where fishing is not just a livelihood but a way of life. The study adopts a qualitative approach to delve deeply into the lived experiences of students working as fishermen. Qualitative methods allow for an in-depth exploration of the subjective meanings, perspectives, and contexts surrounding the phenomenon, providing rich, nuanced insights that quantitative approaches may not capture. The sample size of 10 participants is designed to achieve data saturation, a principle where data collection continues until no new themes or information emerge. Although 10 participants are expected to be sufficient for saturation, the researcher remains flexible and open to recruiting additional participants if necessary to ensure comprehensive data is gathered. Collectively, these implications highlight the need for a multi-level, collaborative approach to education that is both context-sensitive and student-centered. By responding to the actual conditions of learners in coastal and fishing communities, educational institutions and their partners can better promote equity, reduce dropout rates, and empower students to thrive academically while honoring their cultural and economic roles. Comparative studies between different regions or countries facing similar challenges could offer valuable insights into best practices for integrating work and learning. Future studies should also focus on understanding the role of family and community support networks in shaping the educational outcomes of working students, particularly in contexts where economic pressures are high. Engaging with both students and educators to co-create solutions will enhance the relevance and impact of future educational interventions.

**KEYWORDS-** Sea to School, Balancing Learning, Waves of Life, Students, Working as a Fishermen

## INTRODUCTION

In the tranquil waters of coastal communities, where the flow and movement of the sea dictate the rhythm of life, exists a unique narrative seldom heard amidst the bustling corridors of education. It is a story of resilience, perseverance, and the pursuit of education despite the challenges of life at sea. For countless students in coastal regions around the world, the sea is not just a backdrop but an integral part of their daily existence.

As dawn breaks and the horizon is painted with hues of orange and pink, these students embark on a journey that transcends the boundaries of traditional education. Their classroom is the vast expanse of the ocean, their textbooks the lessons learned through years of toil and hardship on the fishing vessel. Through their story, we explore the intersection of education and livelihood, shedding light on the challenges faced by students who straddle these two worlds and the resilience that propels them forward.

Additionally, this study will emphasize the inherent obstacles and institutional difficulties encountered by students residing in coastal towns, although it lacks substantial discourse on prospective policy and intervention approaches to tackle these matters. A potential research study might analyze current policies and interventions that are designed to assist students from fishing households. Additionally, it could explore effective strategies for enhancing educational opportunities, fairness, and achievement within these communities.

In Ghana, school-going children often engage in fishing activities alongside their studies. This involvement not only helps them internalize community norms from a young age but also plays a crucial role in supporting their families economically. Beyond financial contributions, these children gain valuable skills related to fishing, such as boat handling, fishing techniques, and understanding marine ecosystems. Moreover, this early exposure to work gives children a sense of purpose and identity within their community. They learn responsibility, teamwork, and the importance of hard work firsthand, which contributes to their self-esteem and personal development. Despite their current roles as fisher folks, many of these children also harbor dreams of pursuing more fulfilling careers that require education. They see education as a pathway to achieving their aspirations, whether it's becoming teachers, healthcare professionals, engineers, or pursuing other professions that inspire them. This dual perspective—balancing practical skills gained through work with long-term educational aspirations—shapes their outlook on life and future possibilities (Shaibu, 2022).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The study Das & Das (2021) found that most students from fisherman families in Fraserganj Coastal Village, India attend school regularly, but some report occasional absenteeism due to fishing-related responsibilities or health issues. The distribution of students across different grade levels varied, with a significant number attending primary school and fewer progressing to higher



grades. Limited educational support services and barriers, such as financial constraints and insufficient infrastructure, also impacted students' academic progress. Parental involvement varied, suggesting the need for targeted interventions.

On the other hand, another study revealed that children from Timor-Leste's fishing communities face challenges in attending school due to their involvement in fishing activities. Despite the importance of education, children's perceptions of schooling vary. Their involvement in fishing activities often takes precedence over schooling, leading to irregular attendance, dropout rates, and limited academic achievement. Family dynamics and socio-cultural context also influence children's engagement with schooling and fishing activities. The study emphasizes the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to address these unique challenges and promote their educational well-being (Jentoft, 2020).

Also, Pru et. al (2021) student-led techniques in veterinary education are crucial for shaping future professionals who are competent and ethically aware. These methods include case-based learning, role-playing and simulations, reflective writing and journals, small group discussions and debates, and ethics rounds and case conferences. These methods foster critical thinking, empathy towards animal patients and human caregivers, and help students understand diverse viewpoints and negotiate conflicting interests. By actively participating in ethical discussions and decision-making processes, students develop ownership over their ethical development, contextual learning, professional identity formation, and cultural sensitivity and diversity. These techniques not only cultivate ethical competence but also nurture a reflective mindset essential for ethical practice. By sharing their stories and engaging in ethical dialogues, students develop the skills and moral reasoning needed to navigate the complex ethical landscape of veterinary medicine with integrity and compassion.

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Additionally, Rio et. al. (2024) explores the experiences of seven senior high school students in Escalante City, Philippines who work as fishermen, focusing on poverty and family debts. It identifies six themes: leading reasons for the toil, realities of the job, mediators of challenges, reap of labor, hopes and aspirations for the future, and lessons learned from the experience. Poverty and the need to alleviate family debts were the primary driving forces. The students also identified friends, parents, and teachers as crucial sources of support. The study provides a nuanced understanding of the students' experiences and the lessons they learn.

The study "Fishing Practices of Small-Scale Fisheries in the Selected Coastal Barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental" provides valuable insights into the socio-economic dynamics of coastal communities. By identifying various fishing techniques ranging from traditional hook-and-line to modern methods like gillnetting and small-scale trawling, it underscores the diversity within small-scale fisheries. Furthermore, the study underscores the economic significance of these fisheries while highlighting challenges such as overfishing, habitat degradation, and regulatory constraints. Ultimately, it advocates for sustainable management practices and policy support to ensure the long-term viability of these coastal resources (Bersaldo, 2022).

## **Research Questions**

In this study, a student takes on the dual role of scholar and fisherman, navigating the turbulent waters of educational pursuit while balancing the demands of livelihood on the open ocean. Specifically, to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of the Students Working as a Fisherman?
2. How do the students cope up with their challenges in working as a Fisherman?
3. What insights can be drawn from the experiences of Students Working as a Fisherman?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The study adopts a qualitative approach to delve deeply into the lived experiences of students working as fishermen. Qualitative methods allow for an in-depth exploration of the subjective meanings, perspectives, and contexts surrounding the phenomenon, providing rich, nuanced insights that quantitative approaches may not capture.

Phenomenology focuses on understanding the essence of lived experiences from the perspective of the participants. In the context of students working as fishermen, this approach allows researchers to delve deeply into the subjective experiences, perspectives, and meanings attributed to their dual roles as students and fishermen. By exploring the nuances of these experiences, researchers can gain insights into the challenges, motivations, aspirations, and coping mechanisms of students navigating the complexities of balancing work and education.

Phenomenological experience is a concept that focuses on individuals' subjective perceptions and interpretations of their lived experiences. It is central to understanding the multiple social positions individuals occupy, such as gender, race, and class, which are intertwined with power relations. These positions influence how individuals experience the world and are treated by others. Core concepts include subjectivity, intersectionality, treatment by others, social dynamics, and discrimination. Coping responses are often inevitable as individuals navigate their social environments. Researchers and



practitioners must consider these factors in their research and practice to address issues like inequality and discrimination. A holistic approach is needed to address these complexities and promote empowerment. Cole (2009) emphasizes the importance of recognizing the multifaceted nature of individuals' experiences and the power relations that shape them.

### **Research Participants**

The selection of 10 participants for the study "Tides of Education: Stories of Students Working as Fishermen" will be conducted in Sta. Maria, Davao Occidental. This locale was chosen for its strong coastal community where fishing serves as a primary livelihood, making it an ideal setting to explore the unique experiences of students balancing work and education. The sample will consist of five (5) participants for in-depth interviews (IDI) and five (5) for focus group discussions (FGD). All data gathered through these methods will be recorded and transcribed to ensure a thorough summary of participants' responses.

The sample size of 10 participants is designed to achieve data saturation, a principle where data collection continues until no new themes or information emerge. Although 10 participants are expected to be sufficient for saturation, the researcher remains flexible and open to recruiting additional participants if necessary to ensure comprehensive data is gathered. To ensure the selection of participants with the most relevant and diverse experiences, purposive sampling will be employed. This technique targets individuals who have direct experience in both fishing and education, ensuring the sample adequately represents the broad range of perspectives relevant to the study.

Participants will be selected based on specific inclusion criteria: (a) they must be currently enrolled in a high school or equivalent educational institution in Sta. Maria, Davao Occidental, and actively involved in fishing as part of their livelihood. Additionally, (b) participants should be at least 15 years old above and assent forms will be established, also, (c) they have at least three years of experience working as fishermen while pursuing their education. This inclusion ensures the participants have the necessary firsthand knowledge to contribute valuable insights to the research. By focusing on this specific group of individuals in Sta. Maria, the study is designed to capture a deep understanding of how students manage the dual demands of fishing and schooling within the unique context of this coastal community.

### **Research Instrument**

To gather comprehensive and meaningful data relevant to the deeper understanding of their experiences in balancing learning as students working as fishermen, this study employed a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide as the primary research instrument. This qualitative tool was designed to capture the lived experiences, perceptions, practices, and challenges faced by students working as fishermen.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected interview data will be analyzed using phenomenological analysis techniques, which involve a systematic exploration of the lived experiences described by participants. Researchers engage in a process of bracketing, setting aside preconceptions and biases, to focus solely on the participants' accounts. Through a process of thematic coding and interpretation, researchers identify common patterns, themes, and essences that emerge from the data, capturing the shared lived experiences of stakeholders.

Creswell (2013) outlines six crucial stages in qualitative data analysis that are necessary for assessing and interpreting published research findings in the realm of education. This approach typically involves a systematic process of analyzing qualitative data, often following steps such as coding, categorizing, and thematic analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents the broader implications of the findings and explores potential pathways for future research and policy development. Grounded in the lived experiences of student fishermen, the study underscores the unique challenges and resilience exhibited by individuals who navigate both academic and occupational responsibilities.

The insights gained highlight critical areas where educational institutions, community stakeholders, and policymakers can intervene to support learners in coastal and fishing communities. Furthermore, this chapter outlines future directions that aim to deepen understanding, refine existing interventions, and promote more inclusive, flexible, and responsive educational frameworks tailored to the realities of working students in marginalized contexts.

### **Implications**

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of students who simultaneously engage in fishing work and pursue formal education. These insights have several implications for educators, policymakers, community stakeholders, and support organizations aiming to foster inclusive, responsive, and empowering educational environments for working students in coastal communities.

First, the theme "Balancing Education and Fishing Work: The Dual Responsibilities of Students" underscores the importance of integrating time management education and work-life balance support into school programs. The dual burden of labor and learning reveals the pressing need for flexible class schedules, alternative delivery modes such as blended or modular learning, and school-based initiatives that cultivate student motivation and long-term aspirations. Institutions must recognize the uniqueness of these learners and adapt accordingly by offering individualized academic plans and emotional guidance to sustain their perseverance.



Second, the theme "Harmonizing Proactive Strategies and Support Systems" emphasizes the value of proactive coping mechanisms and structured support systems. Students who successfully navigate both roles develop habits such as schedule planning, relaxation techniques, and collaborative problem-solving with teachers and peers. These findings suggest the need for capacity-building initiatives for educators to support students in stress management and adaptive learning. Moreover, it is vital to engage families and communities to establish a holistic support system, where open communication and shared responsibility become part of the student's growth process.

Lastly, the theme "Driven by a Strong Aspiration" demonstrates the transformative power of personal ambition, perseverance, and life lessons learned through struggle. Students internalize the value of education not just as a requirement but as an investment for a better future. Educational stakeholders must build on this intrinsic motivation by designing mentorship and leadership programs that affirm students' efforts and dreams. Importantly, family and community support surfaced as a powerful enabler, reinforcing the call for community-based learning models and livelihood-education integration that aligns with local culture and socio-economic realities.

Collectively, these implications highlight the need for a multi-level, collaborative approach to education that is both context-sensitive and student-centered. By responding to the actual conditions of learners in coastal and fishing communities, educational institutions and their partners can better promote equity, reduce dropout rates, and empower students to thrive academically while honoring their cultural and economic roles.

### **Future Directions**

Department of Education (DepEd)

DepEd should strengthen policies that support alternative delivery modes such as modular, blended, or evening classes for working students, particularly in coastal and fishing communities.

Incorporate context-based education that aligns with students' socio-economic backgrounds by blending academic learning with vocational skills and financial literacy. They also need to invest in mental health and guidance programs that target the unique challenges of working students. Provide training for guidance counselors in coastal and rural schools.

Also, there should be regular conduct of studies to map the educational needs of fishing communities to ensure that interventions are relevant and effective.

School Principals

They should create school timetables that allow adjustments for students engaged in labor. Principals can also initiate homework load reviews and alternative assessments for working students.

Also there is a need to strengthen collaboration with local government units, NGOs, and community leaders to create a safety net for at-risk learners. And facilitate professional development that helps teachers understand the realities of fisherfolk families and how to support students facing dual responsibilities.

Teachers

Teachers play a vital role in supporting students who balance school and work, particularly those engaged in fishing livelihoods. Demonstrating empathy and responsiveness in instruction, educators should practice flexibility and compassion by adapting teaching strategies to be more inclusive and accommodating of students' unique circumstances.

As mentors, teachers are encouraged to foster motivation by celebrating even small achievements and reinforcing the importance of perseverance and the long-term value of education. Additionally, employing culturally responsive pedagogy such as integrating real-life examples from students' fishing experiences can make lessons more relatable and meaningful. This approach not only enhances engagement but also empowers students by validating their backgrounds and everyday realities within the learning environment.

Fisherman-Students

Fisherman-students are encouraged to continue cultivating discipline and a strong sense of purpose by managing their time wisely and recognizing education as a valuable long-term investment. Maintaining open communication with teachers, peers, and family members is equally important—seeking support and sharing experiences can help ease the challenges of balancing work and school.

Through actively participating in school-led support activities and not hesitating to ask for help, students can build a more resilient academic journey. Moreover, fisherman-students have the potential to empower their peers by sharing their stories, serving as role models, and inspiring others through their perseverance, thus contributing to a more positive and motivating learning environment.

Future researchers

For future researchers, it is recommended to expand the scope of studies to explore the long-term impacts of balancing work and education on the personal and professional development of students in coastal and fishing communities. Researchers should examine the effectiveness of flexible educational programs, vocational training, and mental health support systems, and their direct influence on academic success and well-being.



Additionally, comparative studies between different regions or countries facing similar challenges could offer valuable insights into best practices for integrating work and learning. Future studies should also focus on understanding the role of family and community support networks in shaping the educational outcomes of working students, particularly in contexts where economic pressures are high. Engaging with both students and educators to co-create solutions will enhance the relevance and impact of future educational interventions.

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