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The Impact of the Fishing Industry on Boys' Academic Performance: A Case Study of North 'A' District in Unguja, Zanzibar - Tanzania

The Impact of the Fishing Industry on Boys' Academic Performance: A Case Study of North 'A' District in Unguja, Zanzibar, Tanzania

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Abstract
This study investigates how participation in the fishing industry affects boys' academic performance in the North "A" District of Zanzibar. It identifies the types of fishing-related activities undertaken by schoolboys, examines the socio-economic factors driving their involvement, and evaluates the consequences for their education. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative and qualitative data. The sample included 150 schoolboys selected through purposive and simple random sampling, along with nine key informants who contributed qualitative insights. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data were examined through content analysis. Findings show that 73% of schoolboys are actively engaged in various fishing activities. Their participation is largely influenced by socio-economic factors, including household poverty, parental occupation, peer pressure, and prevailing community norms. The study further reveals that involvement in fishing negatively impacts academic performance. Key effects include increased absenteeism, reduced school attendance, fatigue, and poor concentration in class, which contribute to poor academic performance. The study concludes that boys' engagement in fishing significantly undermines their educational outcomes, primarily due to economic pressures and social influences. To address this issue, it recommends the development of targeted interventions aimed at reducing child involvement in fishing while promoting alternative livelihoods for families. Additional recommendations include enforcing child labour laws, offering financial and educational support, introducing flexible learning programmes, raising awareness about the importance of education, and strengthening collaboration among government agencies, schools, NGOs, and community leaders.

Introduction
The fishing industry plays a crucial role economically, socially, and at the household level. It contributes approximately USD 141 billion of dollars globally, with seafood being one of the most traded food commodities. The fishing industry also contribute significantly to employment worldwide, approximately 61.8 million people were employed in the primary sector of fisheries and

aquaculture in 2022 in fishing, processing, and related sectors such as transport and retail (FAO, 2022). It supports food security by supplying essential protein and nutrients to billions of people, particularly in coastal and developing regions. It holds cultural significance for many communities, where fishing is central to traditions and local economies (Bennett et al., 2018; Gul et al., 2024). Moreover, fishing provides livelihoods through small-scale fisheries and aquaculture, offering income and affordable, nutritious food, which is especially important in rural coastal areas (FAO, 2022). However, this economic activity often necessitates the involvement of all family members, including children. Boys, in particular, are frequently engaged in various aspects of the fishing industry, which can have significant implications for their educational performance and future prospects (FAO, 2022).

Boys working in the fishing sector reported frequent absenteeism, which negatively affected their continuity of learning and academic performance in Southeast Asia (Edmonds and Shrestha, 2017). Long working hours in fishing limit school attendance and student engagement, which leads to lower academic attainment (Weeratunga et al., 2019; Haller et al., 2021). Ngajilo et al. (2023) reported that boys working in Tanzanian fishing communities frequently missed school due to injuries and chronic fatigue caused by heavy workloads.

The participation of boys in the fishing industry in coastal areas reflects a deep-rooted economic activity that supports family livelihoods but adversely affects their educational progress. Although the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar has enacted the Employment Act no 11 of 2005 to prohibit child labour, protect children, and ensure access to education (Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, 2005), boys in fishing communities continue to participate in the fishing industry. The extent to which boys' engagement in fishing affects their academic performance in secondary schools in Zanzibar is not well known. This gap demonstrates the need for research to examine the impacts of the fishing industry on boys' academic performance in North A, District Zanzibar. Understanding these impacts is crucial for informing strategies and interventions that can improve educational attainment and enable boys in fishing communities to reach their full potential.

Literature Review

Across the world, boys in coastal communities are widely involved in artisanal and small-scale fishing, often participating from an early age and contributing to household incomes (Dominic & Paul, 2024). In regions such as Southeast Asia, including Brazil, Indonesia, and Thailand, boys as young as ten engage in fishing and fish-processing activities. While this involvement supports family livelihoods, it frequently interferes with their education (Baig, 2025; UNCEF, 2019). Similar patterns are observed in North America, particularly in Alaska, where boys assist their families during fishing seasons, potentially disrupting their schooling (NOAA, 2020). In the Brazilian Amazon, boys participate in both subsistence and commercial fishing, further illustrating the global nature of child involvement in fisheries (FAO, 2022).

The fishing industry in Africa plays a crucial role in economic development, particularly in coastal and inland communities. Boys are actively involved in fishing-related activities, including catching, processing, and selling fish (Torell et al., 2015; Oluwakayode-Oluyi et al., 2025). This participation is largely shaped by cultural norms that define fishing as a male-dominated activity. Around Lake Victoria and in coastal West Africa, boys begin engaging in fishing at a young age due to economic necessity and deeply rooted cultural practices (Answar, 2022; Udoh, 2023; Ayetey, 2025). However, such early involvement raises serious concerns about child labour and education performance, as many boys work long hours under harsh conditions.

Studies in Tanzania indicate that a significant proportion of boys involved in fishing perform poorly academically (Ngajilo et al., 2023). Boys living in coastal areas and around Lake Victoria commonly fish for both subsistence and income. Although economically beneficial, this involvement exposes them to hazardous working conditions and long hours, which adversely affect their educational outcomes and well-being (Mwaipopo, 2017). Their responsibilities include casting nets, hauling in catches, sorting and processing fish, and cleaning, drying, packaging, and selling them in local markets. These activities are time-consuming and often begin at an early age, limiting their ability to focus on schooling (Mwaipopo, 2017).

In Zanzibar, particularly in North Unguja, fishing is central to community life, shaping both livelihoods and social structures. Boys are traditionally introduced to fishing by their fathers or male relatives, facilitating the transfer of indigenous knowledge and fishing skills across generations. While this practice strengthens cultural identity and sustains local fisheries, it also contributes to the early involvement of children in labour-intensive work (Moshi and Kitula, 2025; Bennett *et al*., 2021; United Republic of Tanzania, 2022). Consequently, concerns arise regarding the long-term implications for children's education, health, and overall welfare.

Existing literature consistently shows a strong relationship between boys' participation in fishing and poor educational outcomes across Africa and Asia. Factors such as early labour involvement, socio-economic pressures, long working hours, and fatigue contribute significantly to low academic performance and school dropout rates. However, notable gaps remain. Most studies have focused on regions outside Zanzibar, limiting their relevance to island-based fishing communities with distinct cultural and environmental contexts.

Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by examining the specific activities undertaken by boys in North "A" District, Unguja, the socio-economic and cultural factors influencing their participation, and the resulting impact on their academic performance. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study provides a comprehensive, context-specific understanding to inform effective educational policies and interventions in coastal communities.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study used two theories: Human Capital Theory and Social Reproduction Theory. The Human Capital Theory was formally developed in 1964 by the economist Gary Becker, who argued that investments in education, training, and health are important for enhancing an individual's productivity and the economic growth of societies (Becker, 1964). The theory emerged from the recognition that human skills and knowledge are as important as physical capital in driving development. Over time, it has been widely used to explain how education and skill acquisition improve employment opportunities, earnings, and overall societal welfare.

The main assumption of the Human Capital Theory is that education and training are vital investments that enhance an individual's skills, knowledge, and productivity, leading to improved economic and social outcomes. The theory emphasises that when people invest time and resources in education, they increase their potential for higher earnings, better employment opportunities and overall societal progress. In North Unguja fishing communities, where fishing offers immediate financial benefits, education is perceived as less valuable. Boys often decline to continue schooling due to the high opportunity cost, as their labour directly contributes to family income.

The Social Reproduction Theory was developed by sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron in 1977. The theory explains how social inequalities, particularly in education, wealth and status, are reproduced across generations through family, schooling and cultural practices

(Bourdillon, 1977). It emphasises that social structures, norms and expectations are transmitted from parents to children, often reinforcing existing hierarchies and limiting opportunities for upward social mobility.

The main assumption of Social Reproduction Theory is that children's educational outcomes are heavily influenced by their family's social, cultural and economic background. Schools and communities often reproduce existing social hierarchies by privileging certain cultural norms and resources, thereby placing children from disadvantaged households at a systemic disadvantage that affects their learning and long-term opportunities. In the context of the fishing industry in North A, Unguja fishing traditions and socio-economic conditions reinforce boys' involvement in fishing rather than education, perpetuating cycles of limited opportunities.

Material and Methods

Study Area

The study was conducted in North A District, Unguja, which is bordered to the north and east by the Indian Ocean. To the south, it shares a boundary with North B, while the Indian Ocean forms the western boundary. The district is characterised by sandy beaches, coral reefs, fishing villages, and small-scale farming areas. This area is known for its economic reliance on tourism and fishing. Fishing is a cornerstone of the local economy, providing livelihoods to a significant portion of the population in North Unguja. Traditional fishing practices dominate, with some involvement in commercial fishing. The area has limited agricultural potential compared to other parts of Zanzibar due to its sandy soils. The region has a well-provisioned social services framework; primary and secondary schools are relatively widespread, but secondary education for boys is affected by cultural factors and fishing activities. The study was chosen because a significant number of schoolboys were engaged in fishing.

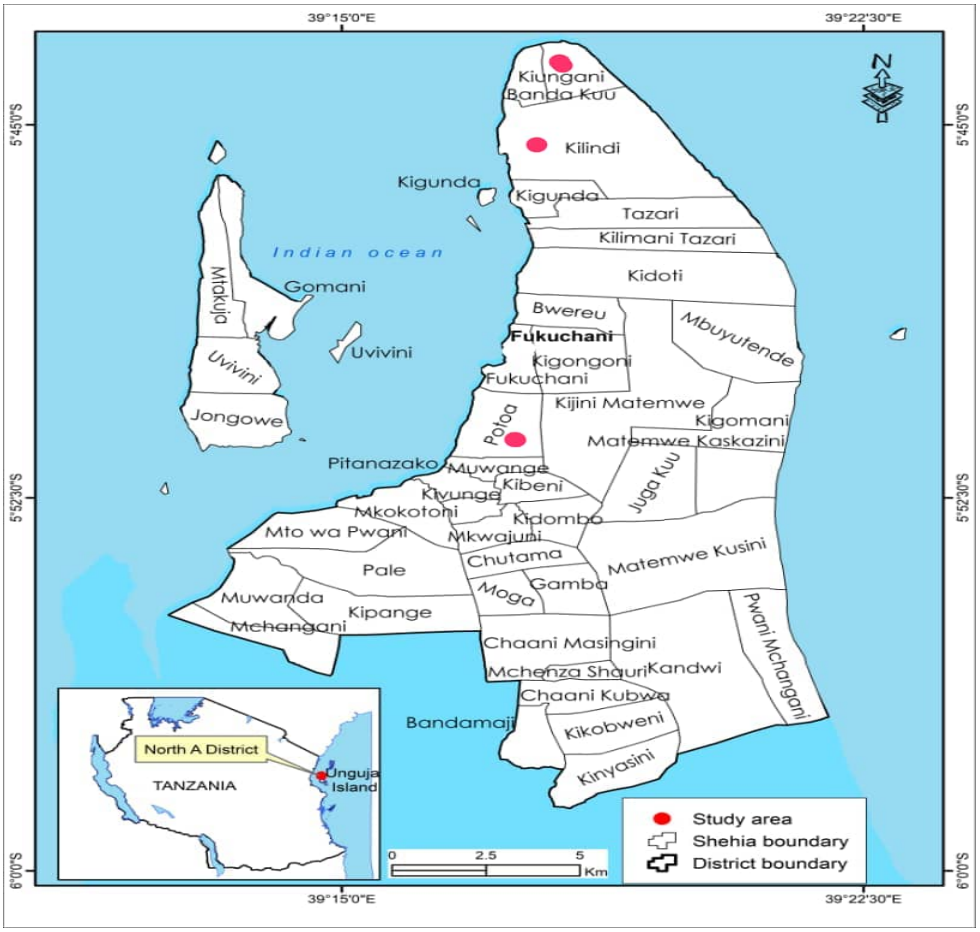

Figure 1: North A District – Unguja

Source: Survey data 2025

Sample and Sampling Procedures

This study employed a combination of purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques to obtain respondents. Purposive sampling was used at the initial stage to select three secondary schools located in coastal wards: Potoa, Kilindi, and Banda Kuu, where boys are highly involved in fishing activities. Key informants were purposively selected based on their knowledge, experience, and direct engagement in fishing and community leadership. Simple random sampling was applied to select individual student respondents from the chosen schools. This technique ensured that every boy in the selected schools had an equal chance of being included in the study, thereby minimising selection bias and enhancing representativeness.

The study targeted a total population of 741 school boys across the three wards: Potoa (403), Kilindi (143), and Banda Kuu (195). The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error:

$n = N / (1 + N(e^2))$

Where:
n = sample size
N = total population
e = margin of error (0.05)

Thus:
$n = 741 / (1 + 741 \times 0.05^2)$
$n = 741 / 2.8525$
$n \approx 260$

Based on this calculation, the required sample size was 260 respondents. However, due to non-response and field constraints, only 150 students participated in the study. Despite this lower response rate, the sample still captured diverse experiences regarding the impact of fishing activities on students' academic performance.

In addition to students, the study included nine key informants: three teachers (one from each ward), three experienced fishermen with more than 15 years of involvement in fishing (one from each ward), and three local government leaders (one from each ward). These participants provided in-depth qualitative insights to complement the quantitative data collected from students.

To ensure proportional representation, the sample was allocated across the three wards in proportion to the student population in each area, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Proportionate Sample Distribution by Ward (Shehia)

Ward	Total number of Students (boys in selected schools (N)	Proportion	Sample Size (n)	Actual sample (responded)
Potoa	403	0.55	141	85
Kilindi	143	0.19	50	29
Banda Kuu	195	0.26	69	36
Total	741	1	260	150

Data Collection Methods

The study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to achieve a comprehensive and balanced understanding of the research problem. Quantitative methods provided measurable data for statistical analysis, while qualitative methods captured the depth and context of participants' experiences. Both primary and secondary data sources were utilised. Primary data were obtained from students, teachers, fishermen, and community leaders, whereas secondary data were drawn from school records, previous studies, and government reports.

A questionnaire survey was used to collect quantitative data from selected schoolboys. The questionnaire consisted of both open- and closed-ended questions focusing on the types of fishing activities boys engaged in, the socio-economic factors influencing their involvement, and the effects of fishing on their academic performance. The questionnaire was pretested to determine its validity and reliability.

Qualitative data were collected through interviews with nine key informants, including teachers, experienced fishermen with over 15 years of experience, and community leaders. This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of personal, socio-economic, and cultural perspectives on education and community beliefs.

Additionally, observational methods were employed to examine boys' daily activities at beaches and fish markets, providing real-time evidence and validating self-reported data. The documentary review further complemented the study by analysing school attendance records, academic performance, and educational statistics in Zanzibar.

The validity of the research instrument was established through content and face validity procedures, where educational officers reviewed the questionnaire to assess the clarity, relevance, and suitability of the items in relation to the study objectives. Their comments were incorporated to improve the instrument, and pilot testing was conducted with 15 respondents to ensure that the questions were understandable and appropriate for respondents. Reliability was assessed in a pilot study using Cronbach's alpha in SPSS to evaluate the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. The instrument obtained a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.79, indicating acceptable reliability and suitability for data collection.

Data Analysis

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques to effectively interpret the collected data. Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including mean, median, mode, and percentages, were computed to summarise the data and identify patterns related to boys' involvement in fishing activities and their academic performance. These statistical measures facilitated clear interpretation and presentation of the findings.

Qualitative data obtained from key informant interviews and observations were analysed using content analysis in NVivo. The responses obtained from interviews and observations were carefully transcribed, coded, and grouped into themes based on their meaning. The identified themes were then interpreted in relation to the study objectives. This approach helped to uncover underlying themes and patterns, particularly regarding social and cultural influences on boys' participation in fishing and perceptions of education.

In addition, secondary data were analysed using Microsoft Excel, which supported data organisation, comparison, and basic statistical analysis. The integration of these analytical methods ensured a comprehensive understanding of both numerical trends and contextual factors influencing the study outcomes.

Results and Discussion

Fishing Activities Carried Out by Schoolboys

The study found that 73% of boys participated in fishing activities, while 27% were not involved, as indicated in Table 2. Some of those schoolboys participate in multiple activities; during the high fishing season, they are involved in both direct fishing and selling. During the low season, the same boys take part in boat and trap preparation. This demonstrates that boys in fishing communities are involved in different fishing activities, depending on their capabilities and the season. The activities performed include direct fishing, boat and trap preparation, clearing and selling, and transporting fish, as illustrated in the multiple-response Table 3.

Table 2: Schoolboys Participate in Fishing Activities (n=150)

	Frequency	Percentage
Participate in fishing	110	73
Not participation	40	27
Total	150	100

Source, Field Work 2025

Direct Fishing

The findings show that most students, particularly boys, are involved in direct fishing. Table 3 indicates that 73% of boys engaged in fishing, with direct fishing as the dominant livelihood activity. This reflects the sector's economic importance and households' reliance on boys for income and food security. Field observations (Figure 2), taken during a working day, further confirm boys actively engaged in fishing. These activities require significant time and physical effort that could otherwise be devoted to schooling. Overall, both statistical and visual evidence demonstrate that participation in fishing directly competes with students' academic responsibilities.

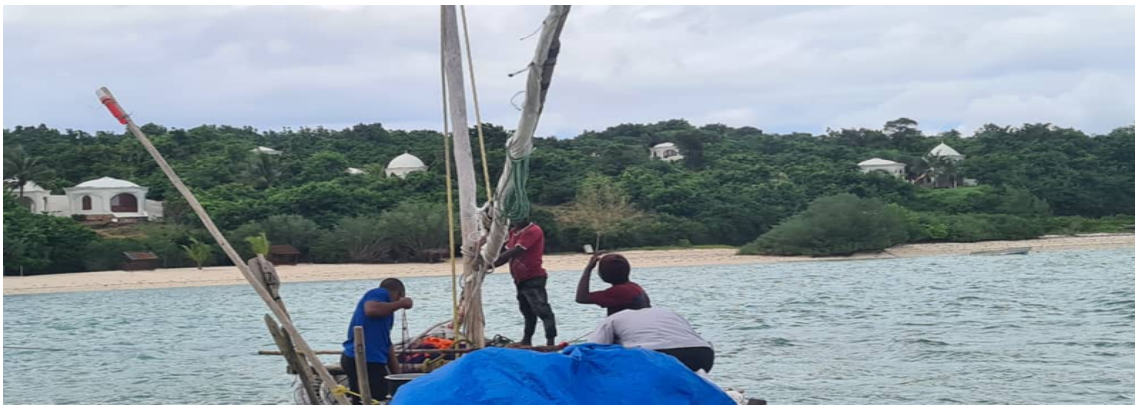

Figure 2: Boys' Involvement in Fishing Activities - Source: Field work 2025

This finding is further supported by a key informant, a class teacher from Banda Kuu, who explained:

> *"In our school, a significant number of boys, especially those in Form One to Form Three, participate in direct fishing. Some fish go out at night and arrive at school the next day, obviously tired. We notice lower attendance and punctuality, particularly during peak fishing seasons. Their involvement is not occasional; it is part of their routine".*

This finding aligns with evidence that children's involvement in fishing and similar income-generating activities undermines educational participation, particularly in resource-dependent households (Ngajilo, 2023; Bourdillon, 2017). While such work supports family survival, it often disrupts schooling and long-term outcomes. Children engaged in fishing typically endure long hours and physical exhaustion, reducing concentration and learning capacity (Basu, 2017; Anyolo, 2024). Moreover, fishing commonly occurs in early mornings or evenings, limiting time for study, rest, and preparation. Consequently, competing demands between fishing and schooling contribute to lower academic achievement among participating students.

Table 3: Fishing Activities carried out by Schoolboys (n=150)

Fishing Activities	Frequency	Percent
Direct Fishing	110	73
Boat and Trap Preparations	102	68
Cleaning and Selling of Fish	102	68
Carrying and Transporting Fish	104	69

Source: Field Work

Boat and Trap Preparations

Table 3 shows that 68% of schoolboys are involved in boat and trap preparation, indicating its importance in supporting household fishing activities in North A District. However, this labour-

intensive and time-consuming work interferes with class attendance, assignment completion, and study time. Its physical demands also cause fatigue, reducing concentration and learning effectiveness. These findings were further supported by a key informant (class teacher of Kilindi).

> *"Some boys spend long hours helping their families prepare boats and traps before going out to sea. By the time they come to school, they are already tired and less attentive in class. This has a direct effect on their academic performance."*

Similarly, another key informant (local government officer) said:

> *"It is common to see boys, especially those in secondary school, working with fishermen in preparing traps or fixing boats. They consider this part of their daily duty, but it makes them miss important study time and sometimes even lessons".*

These findings align with evidence that children's involvement in fishing-related tasks reduces time available for schoolwork and increases the risk of dropping out (UNICEF, 2018). Studies also show that labour-intensive activities, such as boat preparation, cause fatigue and low classroom participation, weakening academic performance (Anyolo, 2024; Udoh et al., 20). Likewise, child labour disrupts attendance and undermines learning outcomes (International Labour Organisation, 2017).

Fish Cleaning and Selling

Findings show that 68% of boys involved in fishing also engage in cleaning and selling fish, as shown in Table 3. These time-sensitive market activities often extend into school hours, causing lateness or absenteeism. Involvement in trading and handling money further distracts students from their studies. Combined with long working hours, these responsibilities contribute to poor academic performance. This was supported by a key informant (class teacher from Kilindi).

> *"We have boys who spend their mornings at the market helping to clean and sell fish. By the time they come to school, if they come to school, they are already exhausted and behind in their work. This regular involvement has a clear effect on their results".*

Similarly, a community leader noted the wider social expectation;

> *"In fishing families, boys are often expected to take part in selling fish. Even during school days, some are sent to the market. Parents see it as training for future business, but it pulls the children away from school and weakens their academic progress".*

These findings are consistent with those of Answar (2022), who found that children's involvement in fisheries-related trade exposes them to long working hours and responsibilities beyond their age, reducing their capacity to concentrate in school. UNICEF (2019) reported that child participation in small-scale trading activities, such as selling fish in coastal communities, often leads to fatigue and lost study time, which directly undermines academic outcomes.

Carrying and Transporting Fish

The findings in Table 3 show that 69% of boys involved in fishing carry and transport fish. This physically demanding work involves heavy loads and long distances, leading to fatigue that limits classroom participation. It also reduces time for after-school study and preparation, negatively affecting academic performance compared to non-participating peers. This finding was supported by a key informant (an experienced fisherman from Potoa).

> *"Boys are often used to carry fish from boats to the market or home. It looks like simple work, but it takes a lot of their time and energy. When they go to school after that, they cannot concentrate well, and many end up performing poorly"*

These findings are consistent with those of Aedeke (2019), who observed that the combined effects of physical fatigue and commercial responsibilities, such as fish selling, significantly reduce students' alertness, classroom participation, and concentration. As a result, boys involved in fishing activities often experience negative academic outcomes. Similar evidence from mainland Tanzania, Malawi, South Africa, and Ghana indicates that pupils engaged in fish transportation during peak fishing seasons frequently miss classes, arrive late, and have limited time for studying, leading to lower academic performance and higher dropout rates (Moshi and Kitula, 2025; Porter *et al*., 2011).

Boys' involvement in fishing-related activities, including fishing, boat preparation, cleaning, selling, and transporting fish, can be explained through Social Reproduction Theory and Human Capital Theory. Social Reproductive Theory suggests that such participation reflects societal expectations, where boys are socialised to prioritise family economic needs over education. This often results in absenteeism, fatigue, and reduced academic engagement. In contrast, Human Capital Theory views education as an investment in future productivity. However, time spent on fishing limits opportunities for learning, thereby undermining boys' educational attainment and long-term development.

Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Boys' Involvement in the Fishing Industry

Poverty

Household poverty is a key factor driving boys' involvement in fishing. Table 4 shows that 94% of respondents cited financial problems as the main reason, while only 6% disagreed. In coastal communities, fishing is an accessible and immediate source of income, making it a default option. It helps meet daily subsistence needs and cover indirect schooling costs such as uniforms, exercise books, and transport.

Table 4: Household Poverty

Household poverty	Frequency	Percent
Financial problem at home	98	94
Financial is not a problem	6	6
Total	104	100

Source; Field Work 2025

This finding is reinforced by a key informant (class teacher from Kilindi) who said;

> *"Almost every boy involved in fishing comes from a poor household. This is because parents cannot afford school costs like uniforms, pens, or lunch. Poverty pushes these boys to the sea, and by the time they return, they are too tired to focus in class".*

Another key informant, (local government leader) who said:

> *"Poverty is the main reason boys enter the fishing industry so early. Families depend on their labour to supplement income. Unfortunately, this reduces the boys' commitment to school, and many end up repeating classes or dropping out".*

Children from poor families are excessively involved in labour-intensive activities such as fishing, leading to poor educational outcomes (Basu, 2017). Therefore, the high involvement of boys from low-

income households demonstrates that poverty not only limits educational opportunities but also validates child participation in fishing as a necessary means of supporting their families.

Parents' Occupation

Parental occupation significantly influences boys' involvement in fishing (Table 5). About 61% reported that their parents engaged in fishing, while 39% reported that their parents were in non-fishing activities. This shows how family livelihoods shape boys' choices in coastal communities. In fishing households, boys are introduced to fishing early, learning skills from their parents. Fishing becomes both an economic necessity and a cultural practice passed across generations, encouraging boys to view it as a viable livelihood. These findings were supported by key informant interviews.

An experienced fisherman remarked that:

> *"In families where parents are fishermen, it is almost automatic that their sons will join them at sea. From a very young age, boys are taught how to mend nets, paddle boats, or set traps. Parents believe it is part of preparing their children for the future, so school becomes secondary. Fishing is seen not only as work but also as a tradition passed from one generation to the next".*

Another key informant (a community leader) said:

> *"Households where parents rely on unstable or seasonal sources of income, such as petty trade and casual labour, push boys into fishing as a way to diversify and supplement family earnings".*

Parental livelihoods in rural and coastal communities shape children's labour involvement, particularly in income-generating activities such as fishing (Ngajilo, 2023; Abdullah et al., 2022; World Bank 2020).

Table 5: Parents occupation

Parents occupation	Frequency	Percent
Fishing	92	61
Non-fishing	58	39
Total	150	100

Source: Field Work 2025

Peer Influence

Peer influence emerged as another significant factor affecting boys' participation in fishing activities. Table 6 shows that the majority of respondents (69%) indicated that peer groups influence boys' participation in fishing activities. The high proportion of boys whose peers fish suggests that fishing practices are reinforced through peer networks within schools and communities. When classmates are involved, fishing tends to be normalised as a common and acceptable activity, often creating social pressure for others to join. This peer-driven influence can increase the likelihood that boys will dedicate time to fishing rather than schoolwork, particularly when fishing is portrayed as a quick way to earn income or gain social recognition among friends.

Table 6: Peer Influence contributes to fishing industry

Peer Influence	Frequency	Percent
Classmate involved in fishing	104	69
Not involved in fishing	46	31
Total	150	100

Source: Field Work 2025

This finding aligns with the statement of a key informant, the community leader (Sheha), who said that;

> *"In our community, boys influence one another to join fishing, as it is seen as normal among peers. It is not always parents who push them; friends play a big role. Many are attracted by small earnings from fish sales, and seeing peers become financially independent encourages others to follow, often leading them to neglect school and spend more time at sea".*

On the other hand, another key informant (teacher) insists that the influence of peer friends contributes to schoolboys' involvement in the fishing industry, as noted:

> *"Many boys join fishing because their friends are earning money and dressing well; they feel left out if they do not participate. Boys often persuade each other to go fishing so that everyone can benefit financially and feel equal in the community. Also, boys frequently start fishing with friends, learning the trade together and reinforcing the activity as socially desirable"*

These findings are similar to those of Bourdillon (2018) that in rural African communities, children's work choices are often shaped by peer networks, with school attendance becoming secondary. These findings align with social reproduction theory, which argues that social structures and cultural practices are reproduced across generations through institutions and peer relations. In this case, peer networks act as a mechanism through which fishing is accepted and sustained, reinforcing the continuity of child labour in fishing despite formal schooling. By contrast, from a human capital theory perspective, peer influence undermines the perceived long-term value of education by promoting immediate financial gains from fishing, thereby discouraging investments in schooling.

Using Social Reproduction Theory and Human Capital Theory, the findings show how poverty and cultural norms in North A District sustain inequality across generations. Fishing-based livelihoods and large households socialise boys into early labour, reinforcing limited educational attainment. Although education offers long-term economic benefits, immediate financial pressures push families to prioritise short-term income from fishing. This creates a rational yet constraining trade-off in which boys forgo schooling in favour of survival. Consequently, reduced investment in education weakens human capital development and restricts future socio-economic mobility, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage.

The Effects of the Fishing Industry on Boys' Academic Performance

Reduced School Attendance

The results presented in Table 7 reveal a strong association between school attendance and academic performance among boys in fishing communities. Among students with regular attendance, a significant majority, 26%, achieved high performance, while 8 per cent fell into the low performance category. In contrast, among students with irregular attendance due to absenteeism, only 7% attained a high performance grade of C or above, whereas a striking 61% recorded low performance below grade C.

Table 7: School Attendance of Boys who Participate in the Fishing Industry (n=150)

School Attendance	High performance	Percent	Low performance	Percent
Regular Attendance	39	26	7	5
Absenteeism	13	8	91	61
Total	**52**	**34**	**98**	**66**

Source: Field Work 2025

This finding clearly demonstrates that absenteeism, often due to boys' participation in fishing, is a critical factor undermining their academic success. Consistent class attendance enhances learning opportunities, exposure to teacher guidance, and participation in classroom activities, all of which contribute to better performance. Conversely, absenteeism disrupts the continuity of learning, widens knowledge gaps, and reduces students' ability to compete academically with their regularly attending peers.

These findings were complemented by key informant interviews (A head teacher) who said;

> *"Many boys who go fishing arrive at school late or do not show up at all. During peak fishing seasons, we notice that more than half the students miss lessons. This irregular attendance makes it difficult for them to follow the syllabus, complete assignments, or participate fully in class activities"*

Another key informant (a community leader) from Potoa remarked:

> *"Boys are often sent to the sea early in the morning and return late in the evening. This routine keeps them away from school for long hours. Families see the immediate benefits from fishing, but it comes at the cost of consistent school attendance and learning"*

These findings align with those of Boutin and Jouvin (2022), who found that absenteeism, especially when linked to child labour, widens knowledge gaps and reduces a student's ability to compete academically. This shows a need for interventions that balance participation in livelihoods with sustained educational engagement.

Fatigue and Reduced Concentration

The results presented in Table 8 demonstrate that fatigue and reduced concentration, largely associated with boys' involvement in fishing, significantly affect academic performance. Among students who reported experiencing fatigue or reduced concentration, only 7% achieved high performance, while the overwhelming majority, 59%, performed poorly. In contrast, students who did not face such challenges fared much better, with 28% achieving high performance and only 6% recording low performance.

Table 8: Fatigue and Reduced Concentration (n=150)

Fatigue and Reduced Concentration	High Performance	Percent	Low Performance	Percent
Experiencing Fatigue/Reduced Concentration	11	7	89	59
Not Experiencing Fatigue/Reduced Concentration	41	28	9	6
Total	**52**	**35**	**98**	**65**

Source: Field Work 2025

These findings clearly indicate that the physical exhaustion associated with fishing negatively affects students' ability to remain focused and engaged in the classroom. These findings are supported by a key informant (a class teacher, Banda Kuu) who stated;

> *"We notice boys sleeping in class or losing focus easily. After fishing at night, they come to school tired. Even when present, their minds are not in the class"*

Children involved in fishing and other labour-intensive tasks often suffer from fatigue, which limits their concentration and learning ability and, hence, contributes to a decline in academic performance (Bourdillon, 2018; Udoh, 2013). Fatigue and reduced concentration caused by boys' involvement in physically demanding fishing activities significantly hinder their academic engagement and performance.

Conclusion

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that the fishing industry has a significant negative impact on boys' educational performance in North A District, Unguja. While fishing remains a vital livelihood activity for many households, it demands boys' time and energy at the expense of their schooling. Boys who participate in fishing-related activities, whether directly or indirectly, consistently perform worse in school compared to their peers who are not involved. Therefore, there is a need for interventions that balance livelihood responsibilities with educational demands. This study recommends that the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Blue Economy and Fisheries, ensure strict enforcement of existing child labour regulations. Also, monitoring systems should be established in fishing communities to prevent excessive involvement of school-aged boys in fishing during school days.

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