



# Maritime Habitus and Learning Ethos Among Bajo Youth: Negotiating Scholling and Sea Life in Kawite-Wite

Rosmawati Taherong<sup>1\*</sup>, Maria Ulfa<sup>2</sup>, Erviana Antasari<sup>3</sup>, Mardiana<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Muhammadiyah Buton, Baubau, Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study aims to analyze how maritime habitus shapes the learning ethos of Bajo youth in Kawite-Wite Village, Muna Islands, Southeast Sulawesi, by addressing a research gap in coastal education studies that have largely emphasized access, participation, and dropout, while paying limited attention to maritime culture as both educational capital and structural challenge. **Methods:** This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach within a critical sociology of education paradigm using a phenomenological-sociological design. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and documentation involving 24 informants, consisting of 16 Bajo youth aged 13-18 years and 8 supporting informants, including teachers, a school principal, fishermen parents, a senior fisherman, a Bajo community figure, and a local education observer. Data were analyzed interactively through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. **Findings:** The findings reveal three central patterns. First, maritime habitus functions as cultural capital through hard work, resilience, solidarity, responsibility, independence, and collective discipline. Second, it produces educational tension through seasonal absenteeism, fatigue, family labor demands, and the risk of school dropout. Third, Bajo youth construct a hybrid future orientation by negotiating their roles as students and children of fishing families. **Research Implications:** The study implies that coastal education should be culturally responsive, flexible, and connected to maritime life. **Originality:** This study advances the concept of maritime habitus as an analytical lens for understanding learning ethos as a negotiation between the school field and the sea field.



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## INTRODUCTION

Adolescent education in coastal and island communities cannot be understood solely as a process of knowledge transfer in the classroom. It is a social practice that occurs at the intersection of family, community, ecological environment, economic activities, and cultural value systems that shape how adolescents interpret school, learning, work, and the future. In the context of maritime communities, the sea is not only a space for economic production but also a social, cultural, spiritual, and epistemological space that provides daily learning experiences. Therefore, studies on the learning ethos of coastal adolescents need to move beyond a deficit approach that only emphasizes limited access, facilities, or academic achievement, to a sociocultural approach that views education as a process of disposition formation through repeated life experiences.

The Bajo people are a maritime community with strong historical and cultural ties to the sea. In various studies, the Bajo people are often understood as sea nomads whose lives are shaped by maritime knowledge, mobility, fishing activities, navigation, diving, weather prediction, and a spiritual relationship with the sea. For the Bajo people, the sea is not only a source of livelihood but also a field for the formation of identity and local knowledge. Bajo children are introduced from an early age to sailing skills, weather prediction, marine space awareness, and an understanding of the ethics of living alongside nature (Jumaidin et al., 2024; Maulidyna et al., 2021).

The Bajo people's close relationship with the sea has created a system of dispositions that can be called a maritime habitus. From Bourdieu's perspective, habitus can be understood as a structure of dispositions formed through repeated social experiences and subsequently influencing how individuals think, act, evaluate, and adapt within a social context.

(Bourdieu, 1977; Costa & Murphy, 2015). In the context of education, habitus does not stand alone, but interacts with cultural capital, family, community, and the school environment. Thus, the maritime habitus of Bajo youth can be read as a system of values and habits born of marine life, such as resilience, courage, hard work, solidarity, independence, obedience to family, and the ability to adapt to the uncertainties of nature (Basri et al., 2017; Maulidyna et al., 2021).

In the lives of Bajo youth, the learning ethos does not always manifest itself in a form identical to modern school culture. It can manifest itself in the form of diligence in helping one's family, discipline in following the rhythm of work at sea, the ability to learn from experience, the ability to read natural signs, responsibility for the community, and resilience in the face of risk. These values actually overlap with important learning characteristics in formal education, such as independence, self-regulation, cooperation, resilience, and future orientation. Research on Bajo children in Southeast Sulawesi also shows that their social skills are manifested through the values of working together, learning together, protecting each other, helping each other, and devotion to family and community (Wajdi & Putra, 2021).

However, formal education for maritime communities often faces a tension between the logic of schooling and the logic of marine life. Schools demand regular time, consistent attendance, a standardized curriculum, and an orientation toward academic achievement; while the lives of the Bajo people often shift according to the seasons, tides, fishing activities, family needs, and community traditions. Recent studies on Bajo community education emphasize the need for a more holistic, adaptive, and place-based educational model, as the rigid school system is less able to respond to the seasonal mobility and worldview of the Bajo people (Nurhaliza et al., 2025).

The local context of Kawite-Wite Village in the Muna Islands, Southeast Sulawesi, provides an important empirical space for understanding this relationship. Kawite-Wite is a village closely linked to coastal activities, fisheries, and seaweed cultivation. A study of the socio-economic history of Kawite-Wite Village shows that seaweed cultivation has developed as a significant part of the village's economic activities since the 1990s and contributes to the local socio-economic life. Thus, Kawite-Wite Village can be understood as a social space where formal education directly intersects with the community's maritime economic life (Ishak et al., 2025).

In this context, Bajo youth in Kawite-Wite Village live in two learning environments simultaneously. First, the formal educational environment, which demands school attendance, engagement in learning, curriculum mastery, and academic achievement. Second, the cultural educational environment, which takes place through family, seafaring, coastal activities, community practices, and the transmission of maritime values. These two environments are not necessarily in conflict, but neither are they necessarily mutually reinforcing. On the one hand, maritime habitus can strengthen a learning ethos through the values of hard work, responsibility, courage, resilience, and solidarity. On the other hand, family economic demands, the rhythm of seafaring activities, limited educational resources, and community perceptions of the benefits of schooling can influence youth engagement in formal education (Costa & Murphy, 2015; Maulidyna et al., 2021; Nurhaliza et al., 2025).

Several studies on the Bajo community still emphasize aspects of cultural identity, ecological knowledge, marine conservation, local wisdom, poverty, marginalization, social adaptation, and contextual education models. However, studies specifically linking maritime habitus to the learning ethos of adolescents are still relatively limited, especially in the local context of Kawite-Wite Village in the Muna Islands. This gap is important to fill because the learning ethos of Bajo adolescents cannot be sufficiently explained through individual psychological variables but needs to be understood as the result of the internalization of maritime values, experiences, and social practices (Basri et al., 2017; Ishak et al., 2025; Maulidyna et al., 2021; Nurhaliza et al., 2025; Samudin et al., 2019).

The central problem of this study lies in the limited understanding of how maritime habitus operates ambivalently in shaping the learning ethos of Bajo youth within the tension between schooling and sea-based family life. Existing studies have shown that Bajo communities possess strong maritime knowledge, ecological wisdom, social solidarity, and cultural attachment to the sea, which are transmitted through family communication, community practices, and inherited local values (Jumaidin et al., 2024; Machmud et al., 2020; Maulidyna et al., 2021). However, these studies have not sufficiently explained how such maritime dispositions are translated into educational practices, learning motivation, school attendance, and future orientation. This gap is crucial because the learning ethos of Bajo youth cannot be adequately interpreted merely as an individual psychological attribute, such as motivation, discipline, or academic aspiration. Rather, it emerges from a complex negotiation between the school field, which requires regular attendance, curricular achievement, and academic discipline, and the sea field, which is shaped by seasonal fishing, household economic needs, family responsibility, and inherited maritime identity. Therefore, the problem addressed in this study is not simply whether maritime culture supports or hinders education, but how maritime habitus simultaneously functions as cultural capital that strengthens hard work, resilience, solidarity, responsibility, and independence, while also creating educational tension through seasonal absenteeism, fatigue, and the risk of dropout?

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Based on this description, this study aims to analyze the forms of maritime habitus in the lives of Bajo adolescents in Kawite-Wite Village, explain how this habitus shapes a learning ethos, and reveal the negotiation between the demands of formal education and maritime cultural life. Theoretically, this study enriches the study of educational sociology and educational anthropology through the concept of maritime habitus. Practically, the research findings are expected to form the basis for the development of coastal education that is more contextual, culturally responsive, and sensitive to the lives of maritime communities.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach within the paradigm of critical educational sociology with a phenomenological-sociological study type to deeply explore the conscious experiences of Bajo youth regarding the relationship between maritime habitus and learning ethos in their social context. This approach was chosen because it is able to provide a rich, contextual, and close understanding of the participants' experiences, especially when the research is directed at explaining the meaning, social practices, and dynamics of education in a particular community (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). The study was conducted in Kawite-Wite Village, Southeast Sulawesi, which was chosen purposively because it is a coastal area with a dominant Bajo community and has social characteristics relevant to the focus of the study, namely that most people work as traditional fishermen and seasonal fishers, fishing activities often involve children and adolescents, there are schools as formal education spaces, and there is a social phenomenon of education in the form of high absenteeism and dropouts during the fishing season.

The research subjects were selected using purposive sampling technique involving 24 informants, consisting of 16 primary informants of Bajo youth aged 13-18 years and 8 supporting informants including teachers, school principals, parents of fishermen, senior fishermen, community leaders or Bajo traditional leaders, and local education observers. The number of informants was considered adequate because it represented the main sources of social experience, namely youth, family, school, and community, and followed the principle of sufficient information in qualitative research (Malterud et al., 2016).

Data collection was carried out over approximately eight weeks through three stages: preliminary field mapping, main data collection, and data verification. Preliminary field mapping included informal observation, identification of key informants, and coordination with school and community representatives. The main data collection involved participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions, and documentation. Observations were conducted repeatedly in school, household, and coastal activity settings to observe learning activities, school attendance, involvement in fishing, family relations, and maritime cultural practices. In-depth interviews lasted approximately 45–75 minutes and explored school experiences, learning motivation, absenteeism, family work, maritime identity, and future orientation. FGDs were conducted to obtain collective meaning construction and to compare individual narratives with shared community interpretations. Three FGD sessions were organized: one with youth who were still attending school, one with youth who had dropped out or were no longer active in school, and one with adult supporting informants consisting of parents, teachers, and community representatives. Each FGD involved 5–8 participants and lasted approximately 60–90 minutes. Documentation included village profiles, school data, student attendance records where available, activity records, photographs of the educational and maritime environment, and other relevant local archives.

Data analysis was conducted interactively and cyclically following Miles et al., (2018), namely data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The analysis involved three coding stages. First, open coding was used to identify initial codes such as learning from the sea, helping parents, seasonal absenteeism, fatigue, family responsibility, school as hope, dropout experience, maritime identity, and future orientation. Second, axial coding was used to connect these codes into broader categories, such as maritime habitus as cultural capital, tension between school and sea, family economic pressure, fluctuating learning motivation, and hybrid future orientation. Third, thematic categorization was conducted to construct the main themes of the findings. Data saturation was considered achieved when the information obtained from interviews, observations, and FGDs began to repeat, no substantially new themes emerged, and the main categories were sufficiently supported by data from different informant groups. Data validity was maintained through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability with triangulation of sources and techniques, member checking, thick description, audit notes, and the use of informant quotes (Nowell et al., 2017). Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from youth, teachers, parents, school leaders, fishermen, community figures, and local education observers, while technique triangulation was carried out by comparing observation, interview, FGD, and documentation data. This study also paid attention to the ethics of social research through informed consent, parental or guardian approval for informants under 18 years old, the use of pseudonyms, confidentiality of personal data, and respect for the customary and cultural norms of the Bajo community.

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**RESULTS**

**Table 1.** Composition of Research Informants

| <b>Informant Category</b>                                 | <b>Amount</b> | <b>Informant Code</b> | <b>Focus of the Data Mined</b>   |
|---|---------------|-----------------------|--|
| Bajo teenagers still in school                            | 11            | RBS-1 to RBS-11       | School experience, learning motivation, attendance, time management between studying and going to sea      |
| Bajo teenagers drop out/are not actively attending school | 5             | RBP-1 to RBP-5        | Experience of dropping out of school, involvement in the sea, family economic pressure, future orientation |
| Coastal junior high/high school teachers                  | 2             | G-1, G-2              | Student attendance patterns, learning behavior, learning barriers, school responses                        |
| Headmaster  | 1             | KS-1                  | School conditions, attendance policies, absence and dropout data   |
| Fisherman parents   | 2             | OT-1, OT-2            | Family views on school, children's need to help at sea, educational support                                |
| Senior fisherman  | 1             | NS-1                  | Inheritance of maritime skills, the value of sea work, the role of children in sea activities              |
| Bajo traditional/community figures                        | 1             | TM-1                  | Bajo cultural values, community views on education, maritime identity                                      |
| Local education observer                                  | 1             | PP-1                  | Coastal education issues, dropout risks, opportunities for educational intervention                        |

**1. Social Overview of Bajo Youth Education in Kawite-Wite Village**

The findings show that the educational life of Bajo adolescents in Kawite-Wite Village takes place within a complex maritime social space. School exists as a formal educational institution, yet the learning experiences of adolescents are not entirely separated from the rhythm of fishermen’s family life, fishing seasons, and household economic demands. Most adolescents come from traditional fishing families whose livelihoods depend on fishing activities, making the involvement of children and adolescents in family work a socially accepted practice. In this context, the sea functions not only as an economic resource but also as a cultural educational space where adolescents learn about hard work, responsibility, resilience, courage, solidarity, and obedience to parents. One adolescent who is still actively attending school explained:

*“In the morning I go to school, but when my parents need help, I help at sea or prepare the fishing equipment. Here, we are used to doing that because our family life depends a lot on the sea.”* (RBS-3, Bajo adolescent still attending school)

This quotation shows that the roles of being a student and being a child of a fishing family do not operate separately, but intersect in everyday life. Bajo adolescents do not only face academic demands, but also moral obligations to help their families. Therefore, their educational context cannot be understood solely through school attendance, but must be viewed as the result of negotiation between the school space and the sea space. A similar view was expressed by a coastal teacher:

*“The children actually have the desire to go to school, but at certain times they have to help their parents. Especially during the fishing season, their attendance becomes irregular.”* (G-1, coastal junior high school teacher)

This quotation emphasizes that absenteeism and involvement in family work are not merely matters of individual discipline, but part of the socio-economic structure of maritime communities. This finding strengthens the research focus that the learning ethos of Bajo adolescents is formed within a distinctive social field, namely the field of formal education and the field of marine life, both of which impose demands, values, and meanings on adolescents.

**Table 2.** Matrix of Initial Findings on the Social Context of Bajo Youth Education

| <b>Findings Theme</b>                      | <b>Empirical Indications</b>  | <b>Data source</b>   | <b>Initial Meaning</b>   |
|--|---|--|--|
| The sea as a space for living and learning | Teenagers are accustomed to seeing and participating in sea activities since childhood. | Interviews with teenagers, parents, senior fishermen, observations | The sea shapes maritime skills, responsibilities and identities. |

| Findings Theme                         | Empirical Indications   | Data source   | Initial Meaning  |
|--|---|---|--|
| Schools as a space for social mobility | Teenagers and some parents view school as a path to a better future.                                    | Interviews with teenagers, parents, teachers        | Education is understood as an opportunity to escape the vulnerability of the maritime economy. |
| Seasonal absence                       | Student absenteeism increases during the fishing season or when families need help.                     | Interviews with teachers, principals, documentation | Absenteeism is a socio-economic symptom, not just a disciplinary violation.                    |
| Risk of dropping out of school         | Teenagers who are frequently absent fall behind in class, lose motivation, and feel closer to sea work. | Interviews with school dropouts, teachers, parents  | Dropping out of school occurs through a gradual process.                                       |

## 2. Forms of Maritime Habitus in the Lives of Bajo Youth

Maritime habitus in the lives of Bajo adolescents is formed through a process of social habituation from an early age within the family, community, and daily marine activities. This habitus grows through direct experience, observation of parents, involvement in marine work, and the internalization of fishing community values. Since childhood, Bajo adolescents have observed and participated in activities such as preparing boats, repairing nets, reading weather signs, determining the right time to go fishing, carrying the catch, and helping with family economic work. A senior fisherman explained the process of transmitting maritime skills as follows:

*“Bajo children learn about the sea not from books. They watch their parents, join them on the boat, and over time they understand the direction of the wind, the waves, and when the sea is good or unsafe. That is a life lesson for them.”* (NS-1, senior fisherman)

This quotation shows that maritime habitus is formed through participatory learning and embodied experience in marine life. Knowledge of the sea is transmitted practically, not always through formal instruction, but through direct involvement in family and community activities. In relation to the research focus, maritime habitus becomes a source of social dispositions that can shape adolescents’ perseverance, courage, attentiveness, and endurance. In addition to practical skills, maritime habitus also contains moral values related to family responsibility. One fisherman parent stated:

*“We do not force children to stop going to school, but when there is work at sea and the family needs help, children usually help. That is also how they learn responsibility.”* (OT-1, fisherman parent)

This statement shows that helping the family is understood as a moral obligation, not merely an economic burden. This is where maritime habitus becomes ambivalent: on the one hand, it forms responsibility, hard work, and solidarity; on the other hand, it can reduce study time and disrupt school regularity. Thus, the forms of maritime habitus among Bajo adolescents become an important foundation for understanding how their learning ethos is formed, maintained, or even weakened by the rhythm of maritime life.

**Table 3.** Forms of Maritime Habitus in the Lives of Bajo Youth

| Forms of Maritime Habitus             | Empirical Indications  | Socio-Cultural Meaning  | Implications for Learning Ethos   |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| The sea as a learning space for life  | Teenagers learn to read the weather, currents, waves, fishing gear and ocean risks.          | The sea becomes an arena for cultural education that forms practical knowledge and life skills. | Developing accuracy, adaptability, and the ability to face difficulties |
| Hard work and family responsibilities | Teenagers help their parents go out to sea, prepare fishing gear, and transport the catch.   | Helping the family is understood as a moral obligation and a form of devotion.                  | Fosters responsibility, but may reduce learning time                    |
| Resilience in the face of risk        | Teenagers are used to facing bad weather, waves, uncertain catches, and physical exhaustion. | Marine life forms courage, patience and endurance   | Potential to strengthen learning resilience                             |

| Forms of Maritime Habitus        | Empirical Indications  | Socio-Cultural Meaning  | Implications for Learning Ethos  |
|----------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Solidarity and collective work   | Teenagers work together in families and fishing groups                                     | Safety and success at sea depend on mutual trust and mutual assistance.         | Supporting collaborative learning and social awareness                   |
| Maritime compliance and identity | Teenagers follow their parents' directions and are proud to be part of the Bajo community. | Identity as a child of the sea is passed down through families and communities. | Forming pride in identity and negotiation between the school and the sea |

### 3. The Learning Ethos of Bajo Youth in Formal Education

The learning ethos of Bajo adolescents is formed at the intersection between the demands of formal schooling and the realities of fishermen’s family life. Learning ethos is not only reflected in classroom attendance or academic achievement, but also in the way adolescents interpret school, divide their time between studying and helping their families, complete assignments, maintain motivation, and imagine their future through education. Adolescents who are still attending school generally recognize that education is important for expanding life opportunities, reducing dependence on marine work, and improving family dignity. One adolescent who is still actively attending school stated:

*“I still want to go to school because I want to have a better job. But sometimes after coming home from the sea, my body is tired, so I cannot study at home for long.”* (RBS-7, Bajo adolescent still attending school)

This quotation shows a strong awareness of the importance of education, but this awareness is confronted with physical and time limitations caused by involvement in maritime activities. The learning ethos of Bajo adolescents is not weak in terms of values, but it is often disrupted in practice due to the socio-economic burden of the family. On the other hand, adolescents who are no longer actively attending school show a shift in orientation toward formal education:

*“At first, I still wanted to go to school, but because I often went fishing and missed many lessons, over time I felt embarrassed to enter the classroom. Eventually, I spent more time at sea.”* (RBP-2, Bajo adolescent who dropped out/is no longer active in school)

This quotation shows that the weakening of the learning ethos does not occur suddenly, but through a gradual process: absenteeism, falling behind in lessons, embarrassment, loss of confidence, and finally distancing oneself from school. This finding strengthens the main theme that the learning ethos of Bajo adolescents is the result of social negotiation, not merely a matter of individual motivation. Formal education becomes meaningful when it is connected to adolescents’ lived realities, but it may lose its appeal when schools fail to accommodate their socio-maritime conditions.

**Table 4.** Learning Ethos of Bajo Youth in Formal Education

| Subtheme  | Empirical Indications  | Social-Educational Meaning   | Implications for Learning Ethos   |
|---|--|--|---|
| School as a hope for social mobility  | Teenagers want to stay in school to get more stable jobs and help their families.  | Education is understood as a way out of the vulnerability of the maritime economy. | Strengthening motivation, aspirations and future orientation              |
| School as a burden of time during the fishing season  | Teenagers are often absent or late when the family needs help going out to sea.  | School schedules clash with the economic rhythm of fishing families                | Weakens attendance, concentration, and continuity of learning             |
| Fluctuating learning motivation   | The enthusiasm for learning fluctuates depending on family support, school experiences, fatigue, and economic pressures. | Learning ethos is shaped by social relations, not just individual motivation.      | Requires ongoing school and family support                                |
| The difference between teenagers who are actively attending school and those who have dropped out of school | Active teens have stronger support and aspirations; dropouts experience repeated absences.                               | Dropping out of school is a gradual social process                                 | The importance of early detection of absenteeism and decreased motivation |

#### **4. The Relationship between Maritime Habitus and the Formation of Learning Ethos**

The relationship between maritime habitus and the learning ethos of Bajo adolescents is complex, dynamic, and ambivalent. Maritime habitus does not function as a single factor that automatically supports or hinders formal education. Rather, it appears as a system of dispositions that influences how adolescents interpret learning, school, family responsibility, work, and the future. A Bajo community leader explained:

*“Bajo children are strong because they are used to the sea. They know the hardships of life, they know how to help their parents, and that can actually become a resource for schooling if schools are able to understand their lives.”* (TM-1, Bajo community leader)

This quotation emphasizes that maritime habitus should not necessarily be viewed as an obstacle to education. The values of resilience, responsibility, and hard work formed through marine life can become cultural capital for the development of a learning ethos. In other words, the sea is not the opposite of school, but a source of social experience that can be converted into learning strength if schools are able to connect it with the learning process. However, a teacher also pointed out the problematic side of this relationship:

*“The children do have the value of hard work, but the school schedule often does not fit their lives. During the fishing season, it is difficult for them to attend consistently, while lessons continue.”* (G-2, coastal senior high school teacher)

This statement reveals the ambivalence of maritime habitus. Maritime values support endurance and responsibility, but the rhythm of the maritime economy often clashes with the rhythm of formal schooling. Therefore, the relationship between maritime habitus and learning ethos must be understood as a negotiation process. The main focus of this study becomes increasingly clear: the learning ethos of Bajo adolescents is not formed outside maritime culture, but precisely within the tension between marine culture, family demands, and the expectations of formal education.

#### **5. Fishing Season, Absenteeism, and School Dropout Vulnerability**

The fishing season is an important factor influencing the educational continuity of Bajo adolescents. During the fishing season, or when sea conditions are favorable, some adolescents become involved in helping their parents, either by directly going to sea or by assisting with supporting tasks. This situation causes school attendance patterns to become unstable, especially during periods when the family’s need for labor increases. The school principal explained:

*“When the fishing season is good, several students usually begin to be absent frequently. Not just for one or two days, but repeatedly, so they fall behind in their lessons.”* (KS-1, school principal)

This quotation shows that seasonal absenteeism is an observable pattern in the educational life of Bajo adolescents. Absence from school does not only have administrative consequences, but also disrupts learning continuity. When students fall behind in lessons, they need additional support so that they do not become increasingly distant from formal education. A Bajo adolescent who had dropped out or was no longer active in school shared a similar experience:

*“I often missed school because I followed my parents. After being absent for a long time, the lessons became difficult to follow. I felt that I was no longer the same as my other friends.”* (RBP-4, Bajo adolescent who dropped out/is no longer active in school)

This quotation shows that repeated absenteeism can develop into psychological disconnection from school. Adolescents do not only fall behind academically, but also feel that they have lost their social position in the classroom. In relation to the main theme, the fishing season becomes an important point for explaining how maritime habitus and family economic needs can weaken the formal learning ethos when not balanced with adaptive school strategies.

#### **6. The Role of Family, School, and Community in Shaping Learning Ethos**

The learning ethos of Bajo adolescents is not formed individually, but through the relationship between fishing families, schools, and maritime communities. The family becomes the first space for shaping values of work, obedience, responsibility, and life orientation. The school becomes a formal space that introduces academic knowledge, learning discipline, and aspirations for social mobility. Meanwhile, the maritime community becomes a cultural space that preserves Bajo identity, social solidarity, and legitimacy toward the values of marine life. One fisherman parent stated:

*“We want our children to study as high as possible, so their lives can be better than ours. But sometimes circumstances require them to help. Without their help, work at sea is also difficult.”* (OT-2, fisherman parent)

This quotation shows the ambivalence within fishing families. Parents have educational aspirations for their children, but at the same time they are bound by household economic needs. Families are not parties that reject schooling; rather, they are positioned in a difficult situation between supporting education and maintaining family survival. From the school side, a teacher emphasized the importance of a more contextual approach:

*“If they are only punished for being absent, the children may become even more distant from school. They need to be invited to talk, the reasons must be understood, and then they should be helped to catch up with lessons.”* (G-1, coastal junior high school teacher)

This quotation emphasizes that schools have a mediating role between maritime culture and formal education. An approach that only emphasizes administrative discipline risks widening the distance between adolescents and school. Conversely, an approach that understands the context of fishing families can strengthen the learning ethos. This finding reinforces the research focus that strengthening the learning ethos of Bajo adolescents requires collaboration among families, schools, and communities, not merely intervention at the individual student level.

**7. Future Orientation of Bajo Youth**

The future orientation of Bajo adolescents is formed through the intersection of school experiences, fishermen’s family life, maritime identity, economic conditions, and imagination about social mobility. Their future orientation is not singular, but moves along a diverse spectrum. Some adolescents view education as a path to obtaining more stable employment and improving their family’s social status, while others continue to see the sea as their main living space because they have been accustomed to fishing activities since childhood. One adolescent who is still actively attending school stated:

*“I want to keep going to school until I finish. If I can get a good job, I can help my parents. But I also do not want to forget that I am Bajo and that our life is close to the sea.”* (RBS-10, Bajo adolescent still attending school)

This quotation shows the emergence of a layered future orientation. Education is understood as a pathway for social mobility, while maritime identity is maintained as part of the self. Adolescents do not always see school and the sea as two choices that cancel each other out. A local education observer also emphasized the importance of education that does not disconnect adolescents from their cultural identity:

*“Bajo children need education that opens up their future, but that education should not make them feel that they have to leave behind their sea culture.”* (PP-1, local education observer)

This quotation strengthens the finding that education for Bajo adolescents needs to be developed contextually. Their future orientation should not be directed toward distancing them from the sea, but toward building a dual identity: as a maritime young generation with strong cultural roots and, at the same time, access to broader educational and occupational opportunities. Thus, the main theme of this study becomes increasingly clear: maritime habitus is not merely a social background, but a source of identity, cultural capital, and a field of negotiation in the formation of the learning ethos of Bajo adolescents.

**Table 5. Synthesis of Key Research Findings**

| <b>Dimensions of Findings</b>   | <b>Form of Findings</b>   | <b>Main Meaning</b>  | <b>Implications</b>  |
|---------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Maritime habitus as capital     | Hard work, resilience, responsibility, solidarity, and independence | Marine culture contains cultural capital that supports learning character. | Schools need to recognize maritime experience as a source of learning                |
| Maritime habitus as a challenge | Sea season, fatigue, absenteeism, and family economic involvement   | The rhythm of school collides with the rhythm of the maritime economy      | An adaptive and contextual educational approach is needed                            |
| Negotiating school and the sea  | Teenagers play dual roles as students and fishermen's children      | Learning ethos is formed through a process of social bargaining.           | Strengthening the learning ethos needs to involve families, schools and communities. |

| Dimensions of Findings | Form of Findings   | Main Meaning                              | Implications   |
|------------------------|--|---|--|
| Future orientation     | Education as social mobility, the sea as identity, and mixed orientation | The future of Bajo youth is multi-layered | Education must open up opportunities without severing maritime identity. |

## DISCUSSION

### Maritime Habitus as Cultural Capital for Education

The findings of this study show that the learning ethos of Bajo youth in Kawite-Wite is formed within a complex maritime social field. Schooling is not experienced as an isolated formal activity, but as part of a broader negotiation between educational demands, family obligations, fishing seasons, and the cultural logic of sea-based life. This finding strengthens the argument that the educational experience of Bajo youth cannot be understood merely through indicators of attendance, academic achievement, or individual motivation. Rather, it must be interpreted through the interaction between maritime habitus and the institutional logic of formal schooling.

Using Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, field, and cultural capital, maritime practices among Bajo youth can be understood as a system of durable dispositions formed through repeated participation in family and community life (Bourdieu, 1977; Costa & Murphy, 2015). The ability to read weather, prepare fishing tools, assist parents, endure physical fatigue, and maintain solidarity with family members is not simply a practical skill. It represents embodied cultural capital produced through maritime habitus. In this sense, the sea functions as a cultural classroom where Bajo youth learn discipline, resilience, responsibility, courage, and collective obligation.

This finding is consistent with Machmud et al., (2020), who found that Bajo children’s social skills in Southeast Sulawesi are shaped by cooperation, mutual help, protection, and devotion to family and community. However, the present study extends this earlier work by showing that these social values do not only shape interpersonal relations but also become a cultural basis for the formation of learning ethos in formal education. Thus, maritime habitus is not outside education; it is part of the socio-cultural foundation through which Bajo youth understand learning, responsibility, and future aspirations.

At the same time, the findings show that maritime habitus does not automatically support schooling. The same values that cultivate responsibility and family solidarity may also draw youth into fishing-related family work, especially during productive fishing seasons. In Bourdieu’s terms, this reflects a misalignment between the maritime field and the school field. Dispositions that are valuable in the maritime field are not always recognized or converted into educational capital within the school field. This argument resonates with Jin, (2025), who explains that cultural capital influences academic outcomes through the mediating role of habitus and field. In the Bajo context, the educational value of maritime habitus depends on whether schools can transform maritime experience into pedagogical resources rather than treating it as a disturbance to formal schooling.

### Moving Beyond the Deficit Perspective in Coastal Education

The results challenge deficit-oriented views that interpret the educational problems of coastal youth primarily through limited access, low motivation, weak discipline, or lack of family awareness. The evidence in this study shows that absenteeism, fatigue, and unstable learning participation are embedded in the socio-economic rhythm of fishing families, seasonal labor demands, and moral obligations to help parents. Therefore, school absenteeism among Bajo youth should not be treated merely as an administrative violation. It is better understood as a structural symptom of the mismatch between formal schooling and maritime family life.

This finding is supported by Aletheiani, (2022), who argues that schooling practices, curriculum, and educational opportunities for children in fisherman’s neighborhoods in the Indonesian archipelago need to be examined critically because formal schooling does not always correspond to the socio-economic realities of coastal communities. Similarly, Maemunah et al., (2021) show that the marginalization of Bajo children in education is closely related to the limited ability of formal educational systems to accommodate local wisdom, environmental realities, and the socio-cultural context of Bajo communities.

The finding also aligns with Nurhaliza et al., (2025), who argue that conventional stationary schooling models often fail to respond to the mobility, values, and worldview of Bajo communities. Their proposed on–off School Model becomes relevant because it recognizes that Bajo education requires flexibility, cultural sensitivity, and community-based learning. However, the present study provides a deeper sociological explanation of why such adaptation is necessary: Bajo youth live within two overlapping fields, namely the school field and the sea field. The school field is

organized by fixed schedules, regular attendance, curriculum continuity, classroom discipline, and academic achievement; by contrast, the sea field is organized by fishing seasons, tides, weather, family economic needs, collective labor, and inherited maritime identity.

Thus, the problem is not simply that Bajo youth lack learning ethos, but that their learning ethos is formed in a social world that formal schooling has not fully understood. When the school field fails to recognize the maritime field, educational problems tend to be interpreted as individual weakness, whereas they are actually rooted in structural and cultural misalignment

### **Learning Ethos as a Negotiated Socio-Cultural Formation**

The learning ethos of Bajo youth in this study appears as a negotiated socio-cultural formation rather than a stable individual trait. Youth who remain in school generally recognize the importance of education for obtaining better work, improving family welfare, and expanding future opportunities. However, this educational aspiration is continuously negotiated with physical fatigue, family work, repeated absenteeism, academic lag, and the emotional burden of feeling left behind in class. This finding shows that learning motivation cannot be separated from the social and material conditions surrounding youth.

This argument is consistent with [Ikhsan et al., \(2020\)](#), who found that formal child education among Bajo communities needs to be understood from the perspective of fishing families, where children's involvement in work is often interpreted as part of socialization, responsibility, and household survival. The present study confirms this argument but adds that such involvement does not eliminate educational aspiration. Bajo youth often want both: to continue schooling and to remain responsible to family and maritime life.

This finding also enriches the ecological and relational perspective of education. [El Zaatari & Maalouf, \(2022\)](#) argue that students' sense of belonging to school develops through the interaction of family, school, and broader social environments. The present study confirms this perspective in the Bajo context by showing that belonging to school is also shaped by belonging to family, community, and the sea. Therefore, strengthening learning ethos cannot rely only on classroom motivation, counseling, or individual discipline. It requires relational strategies that connect schools, fishing families, and maritime communities so that youth do not experience schooling as a space detached from their everyday life.

### **Fishing Season, Temporal Exclusion, and School Disconnection**

One of the important contributions of this study is its explanation of school dropout vulnerability as a gradual social process. The results show that dropout does not occur suddenly. It develops through repeated absenteeism, missed lessons, academic difficulty, embarrassment, declining self-confidence, and weakening attachment to the classroom. This pattern is evident in the experience of youth who initially still wanted to continue schooling but gradually withdrew after repeatedly missing lessons due to involvement in fishing activities.

This finding is consistent with [Sudirman et al., \(2023\)](#), who found that the high dropout rate among Bajo children in South Sulawesi is shaped by cultural-environmental conditions, low family income, curriculum, classroom facilities, teacher methods, and children's life habits. It also resonates with [Sudirman & Haling, \(2024\)](#), who show that Bajo children often struggle to survive in school because the school environment, learning strategies, and subject demands are not sufficiently aligned with their lived realities. The present study extends these findings by explaining the everyday mechanism through which dropout vulnerability develops: youth help parents during fishing seasons, miss classes repeatedly, fall behind academically, feel ashamed to return, and eventually become psychologically distant from school.

The fishing season plays a significant role in shaping school attendance patterns. During periods of abundant catch, youth are more likely to assist their parents either by joining fishing activities, preparing equipment, transporting catches, or supporting household tasks. This confirms [Nurhaliza et al., \(2025\)](#) argument that the fixed schedules of conventional schools often clash with the flexible seasonal rhythms of sea-based life. In Kawite-Wite, the school calendar assumes stable attendance, while the maritime economy operates through seasonal opportunity. For fishing families, missing the fishing season can mean losing income; for schools, missing class means falling behind. Bajo youth are positioned between these two demands.

This condition can be understood as a form of temporal exclusion. Students are not excluded simply because schools are geographically distant or economically inaccessible, but because the organization of school time does not correspond to the organization of maritime life. The concept of temporal exclusion allows the discussion to move beyond the language of "student discipline" toward a structural critique of schooling. Bajo students are expected to follow school time, but the school rarely adapts to sea time. Therefore, temporary absence can become long-term

educational disengagement when schools do not provide academic recovery, modular learning, contextual assignments, flexible attendance policies, and community-based learning recognition.

### **Family Ambivalence and School-Community Mediation**

The role of the family in this study appears ambivalent but not anti-educational. Parents want their children to continue schooling and achieve a better life, yet they also depend on children's contribution to household survival. This finding is crucial because it counters the simplistic assumption that fishing families do not care about formal education. Instead, Bajo families are caught between educational aspiration and economic necessity.

[Ikhsan et al., \(2020\)](#) show that formal education among Bajo children must be understood from the perspective of fishing communities, where children's participation in family work is often tied to responsibility, survival, and cultural socialization. [Maemunah et al., \(2021\)](#) similarly argue that the educational marginalization of Bajo children is related to the limited accommodation of local wisdom and environmental realities in formal schooling. The present study extends these findings by showing that parental support for schooling is not absent, but constrained. Parents may value education, but when fishing work requires additional labor, children's participation becomes morally and economically justified.

Therefore, the family should not be positioned as the opposite of school. Family, school, and community must be understood as three interdependent social fields that shape learning ethos. When these fields support one another, maritime values can strengthen schooling. When they operate separately, students are forced to choose between school obligations and family obligations. Schools, therefore, occupy a strategic mediating position. [Aletheiani, \(2022\)](#) emphasizes that schooling practices in fishing neighborhoods must be critically examined in relation to the educational opportunities available to coastal children. In line with this, the present study suggests that if schools respond to absenteeism only through punishment, they risk increasing students' distance from education. However, if schools respond through dialogue, remedial support, communication with parents, and flexible learning strategies, they can become bridges between maritime culture and formal education.

### **Repositioning the Sea as a Pedagogical Resource**

The findings also suggest that the sea should be repositioned as a pedagogical resource. Bajo youth learn accuracy, patience, endurance, cooperation, environmental sensitivity, risk awareness, and decision-making through participation in maritime activities. These forms of knowledge and disposition are relevant to formal education, especially in character education, environmental literacy, science learning, local-based entrepreneurship, and project-based learning.

This argument is aligned with [Hindrasti \(2018\)](#), who emphasizes the importance of reorienting science learning through ocean literacy. It is also supported by [Nur et al., \(2023\)](#), who argue that maritime history and culture can be integrated into social studies learning to strengthen cultural awareness, environmental responsibility, and sustainable development. In the Bajo context, maritime knowledge is not abstract; it is lived, embodied, and socially transmitted. Students bring knowledge of weather, tides, fishing practices, family economy, cooperation, and risk management, yet these forms of knowledge rarely enter classroom pedagogy.

Furthermore, [Maulidyna et al., \(2021\)](#) show that Bajo communities possess local beliefs, ecological knowledge, and wisdom related to marine conservation. The present study extends this discussion by arguing that maritime wisdom is not only ecological but also educational. It contains moral, social, and practical knowledge that can be integrated into schooling. Therefore, the central educational question is not how to separate Bajo youth from the sea in order to make them successful students, but how schools can connect maritime experience with academic learning in a culturally responsive way. The sea should not be positioned as a distraction from school, but as a legitimate source of curriculum and pedagogy.

### **Hybrid Future Orientation and the Negotiation of Bajo Identity**

The emergence of hybrid future orientation is another significant finding of this study. Bajo youth do not always view schooling and maritime identity as mutually exclusive. Some youth aspire to complete education, obtain more stable work, and help their families, while also maintaining pride in being Bajo and remaining connected to the sea. This finding challenges the binary assumption that educational success requires cultural detachment from maritime life.

This finding corresponds with [Rosyadi et al., \(2022\)](#), who shows that young fishermen in Bajo Pulau, Bima, continue to negotiate survival strategies, literacy, and identity in the digital era. Young Bajo are not passive victims of poverty or tradition; they actively interpret their life choices and survival strategies. The present study extends this perspective by showing that Bajo youth in Kawite-Wite also negotiate between educational mobility and maritime

belonging. They do not simply reject schooling or abandon maritime life; instead, they attempt to combine both as part of a hybrid future orientation.

Compared with previous studies that emphasize Bajo ecological wisdom, cultural identity, social skills, dropout, and marginalization, this study shows that maritime identity also shapes future orientation. Bajo youth do not simply inherit culture passively; they actively negotiate how to remain rooted in their maritime identity while seeking broader educational and occupational opportunities. Thus, education for Bajo youth should not be designed as a pathway away from maritime culture, but as a means of enabling youth to construct a productive dual identity: culturally rooted, educationally resilient, and open to wider futures.

### **Theoretical, Practical, and Policy Contributions**

Theoretically, this study contributes to educational sociology by advancing the concept of maritime habitus as an analytical lens for understanding learning ethos in coastal communities. This concept expands the use of Bourdieu's habitus theory by locating it within maritime ecological, economic, familial, and cultural relations. The study demonstrates that learning ethos is not merely produced by individual motivation or school culture, but by the interaction between maritime dispositions, family responsibilities, school expectations, seasonal rhythms, and future aspirations.

This contribution differentiates the present study from earlier works that primarily discuss Bajo education in terms of marginalization, dropout, schooling access, or local wisdom (Ikhsan et al., 2020; Maemunah et al., 2021; Sudirman et al., 2023; Sudirman & Haling, 2024). While those studies are important in identifying educational barriers, the present study offers a relational and sociological interpretation: maritime habitus is not inherently opposed to education. It becomes a barrier only when the structure of schooling fails to recognize the temporal, cultural, and economic realities of maritime life.

Practically, the findings suggest that schools in coastal Bajo communities need culturally responsive and adaptive strategies. These strategies may include mapping fishing seasons in relation to the school calendar, providing remedial support for students experiencing seasonal absenteeism, strengthening communication with parents, integrating maritime knowledge into classroom learning, and developing early-warning mechanisms for students at risk of dropout. Such strategies are consistent with the call for adaptive schooling models for Bajo communities (Nurhaliza et al., 2025), critical curriculum reflection in fishing communities (Aletheiani, 2022), and the integration of ocean literacy and maritime culture into learning (Hindrasti, 2018; Nur et al., 2023).

At the policy level, the findings indicate the need for coastal education models that are flexible, place-based, and culturally grounded. Educational policy for maritime communities should not rely solely on standardized assumptions about attendance, learning continuity, and family support. It should consider local economic calendars, family labor patterns, ecological knowledge, and community-based cultural values. In this way, education for Bajo youth can move beyond a deficit approach and become a transformative space that connects school, sea, family, identity, and future.

Overall, this study argues that the learning ethos of Bajo youth in Kawite-Wite is shaped by the ongoing negotiation between schooling and sea life. Maritime habitus produces values that are educationally productive, such as resilience, responsibility, discipline, solidarity, and courage. Yet, when schools remain rigid and disconnected from the rhythms of maritime life, these values may not be converted into academic success. This study therefore challenges deficit narratives about Bajo youth and proposes a more critical interpretation: the problem is not that Bajo youth lack learning ethos, but that their learning ethos is formed in a social world that formal schooling has not fully understood.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the learning ethos of Bajo youth in Kaesa Kawite-Wite Village is shaped through a continuous negotiation between formal schooling and maritime life. Maritime habitus, formed through repeated participation in family-based fishing activities and everyday interaction with the sea, produces important dispositions such as hard work, resilience, responsibility, courage, solidarity, independence, and obedience to parents. These values may function as cultural capital that strengthens learning ethos. However, they also have an ambivalent character because family obligations, fishing seasons, physical fatigue, and household economic demands may reduce study time, disrupt school attendance, and increase vulnerability to school dropout.

The main contribution of this study lies in the development of maritime habitus as an analytical lens for understanding learning ethos in coastal communities. This concept extends educational sociology by showing that learning ethos is not merely an individual psychological attribute, but a socio-cultural formation shaped by the interaction between the school field and the sea field. Practically, the study challenges deficit-based interpretations of

Bajo youth by showing that maritime culture is not simply an obstacle to education, but can become an educational resource when schools are able to recognize and integrate it into meaningful learning practices.

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in one Bajo community, so the findings cannot be generalized to all Bajo communities in Indonesia. Second, the qualitative design provides deep contextual understanding but does not measure the statistical relationship between maritime habitus, learning ethos, absenteeism, and dropout. Third, this study has not yet examined broader policy actors or tested a specific educational intervention model for addressing seasonal absenteeism and learning discontinuity.

Based on these limitations, future research should conduct comparative studies across different Bajo communities and use mixed-method or longitudinal designs to examine how maritime habitus influences school attendance, academic resilience, learning motivation, and dropout risk over time. Intervention-based studies are also needed to test culturally responsive schooling models, including maritime-based curriculum, modular learning during fishing seasons, community-based learning recognition, and school-family mentoring systems.

For educational practice and policy, this study recommends that schools and local education authorities develop coastal education models that are flexible, place-based, and culturally grounded. Formal schooling for Bajo youth should not be designed to distance students from the sea, but to connect school, family, maritime culture, and future aspirations. By recognizing maritime habitus as both cultural capital and educational challenge, education can become more responsive to the lived realities of Bajo youth while strengthening their learning ethos without erasing their cultural identity.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

RT developed the research design, supervised the data analysis, and wrote the main manuscript. MU, EA, and M contributed to data collection, field data processing, validation of findings, and final editing of the manuscript.

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**\*Rosmawati Taherong (Corresponding Author)**

Department of Guidance and Counseling, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,  
Universitas Muhammadiyah Buton  
Jl. Pahlawan Km 5 Baubau , Southeast Sulawesi , 55183 , Indonesia  
Email: [berkas.umb0925038401@gmail.com](mailto:berkas.umb0925038401@gmail.com)

**Maria Ulfa**

Department of Guidance and Counseling, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,  
Universitas Muhammadiyah Buton  
Jl. Pahlawan Km 5 Baubau, Southeast Sulawesi, 55183, Indonesia  
Email: [maria.ulfa@umbuton.ac.id](mailto:maria.ulfa@umbuton.ac.id)

**Erviana Antasari**

Department of Guidance and Counseling, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,  
Universitas Muhammadiyah Buton  
Jl. Pahlawan Km 5 Baubau, Southeast Sulawesi, 55183, Indonesia  
Email: [erviana.antasari@umbuton.ac.id](mailto:erviana.antasari@umbuton.ac.id)

**Mardiana**

Department of Guidance and Counseling, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,  
Universitas Muhammadiyah Buton  
Jl. Pahlawan Km 5 Baubau, Southeast Sulawesi, 55183, Indonesia  
Email: [mardiana@umboton.ac.id](mailto:mardiana@umboton.ac.id)

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