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My Work Affects My Studies! Lived Experiences of Elementary Pupils Engaged in Farm Work and the Teachers Who Handle Them

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Abstract: Utilising a phenomenological research design employing unstructured in-depth interviews, this study investigated the lived experiences of elementary school students engaged in farm work and the teachers overseeing them, focusing specifically on the impacts of farm work on their schooling. Six teachers and six pupils from grades four to six at a rural elementary school in an agricultural area in the Philippines agreed to participate in the interviews. Digitally recorded interviews

were thematically analysed to generate the themes and sub-themes. Unlike the majority of previous studies, this present study included both the perspectives of students and teachers. The study considered the actual experiences of the children and the teachers' conceptualisations of an ideal educational experience for students. The study aimed to fill the gap by forming a synthesis with these two different perspectives. The researchers generated three themes: poor academic performance, mechanisms for reinforcement of learning, and imbalance between school responsibilities and daily lives. The results highlighted that farm work negatively affected the academic lives of elementary school pupils, leading to poor grades and increased absenteeism. Meanwhile, teachers faced challenges in delivering and reinforcing learning materials due to the frequent absenteeism of the students. In conclusion, the demands of farm work hinder pupils' educational progress and their ability to benefit from classroom instruction fully. For future research, it would be helpful to extend the current findings by examining the parents' perceptions since this study focused only on the experiences of elementary pupils and elementary teachers' perspectives regarding the effects of farm work on academic life.

Keywords: farm work, academic performance, elementary children, teacher's intervention, absenteeism.

Introduction

In 2020, 160 million children were working worldwide, an increase of 8.4 million children in the previous four years. Beginning in 2020, 97 million boys and 63 million girls worked as child labor over the world, accounting for around one in ten of all children (International Labour Office & United Nations Children's Fund, 2021). The labour performed by children is most prevalent in the agricultural and industrial sectors, both of which are dominated by males (Abdul-Mumuni et al., 2019). Most of the children working on the farm were male, for they were much physically stronger than women and could endure much work on the farm. Driven by poverty, parental misfortune, social gaps, and educational inequities, child labor steals childhoods, stifles individual potential, and holds back economies and societies (Kaur & Byard, 2021). A child often forgets school and childhood to become a farm worker in order to provide their daily necessities. Significant impacts included being too tired to read and complete schoolwork, restricted enrollment, difficulty recalling lessons taught and dropping out, poor appraisal skills, and disruptions to school attendance (Abdu et al., 2020).

Research Problem

Children who work lose their childhood, dignity, and access to quality healthcare and education (Srivastava, 2019). The access to free healthcare and education was denied to these children as they had no choice but to work due to poverty. Adolescence is a period characterized by learning, play, and acquiring new knowledge, free from the responsibilities of adulthood (Sandra et al., 2020). Child labour is any person under 18 who engages in an activity for socio-economic advantage (Şekerciet al., 2021). Children aged 17 and below are meant to focus and attend school regularly and must not take the responsibility that is supposed to be the parents' duty. Child labour is a socio-economic problem that undermines society's moral fibers and social progress (Shah et al., 2016). Mathias and David (2014) added that the act of putting a child to work that is hazardous to their physical, mental, or emotional well-being is known as child labor. Many minors are taking part in things that are the parent's responsibility, which significantly impacts those children.

Children who are forced out of school and into the workforce due to economic conditions or shortcomings in the educational system are deprived of the opportunity to develop the skills and

competencies necessary to realise their potential, find stable and well-paying employment, and stop the cycle of poverty (Quattri & Watkins, 2019). Poverty is one of the major problems in the Philippines that cause children to work due to a lack of finance for education. They are forced to do the job for them to sustain their needs. According to Haider and Qureshi (2016), since investing in children's education is typically viewed as the finest possible starting point for increased returns, children are perceived as human capital in every family structure. Because of a lack of information and due to culture, parents always thought that the best way possible was to invest in the child's education so that, in return, their child would help them financially as they got older and out of poverty.

In addition, children who work several hours each week are among the most disadvantaged people in the world, both because of their labour and the difficult conditions that force them into it in the first place (Chudgar et al., 2022). In one of the elementary schools in a hinterland barangay in Bayawan City, Negros Oriental, Philippines, there is a concerning issue of pupils being absent from school because of farm work. Many of these pupils are obligated to work on farms to help their families meet basic needs. This underscores the harsh reality that child labour is a regrettable outcome of poverty, forcing children to forgo their education to contribute financially to their families.

Unlike the majority of previous studies, this present study included both the perspectives of students and teachers. It took into account the realities of the children and what the teachers' ideals of what a student's educational experience should be like. The study aimed to fill the gap by forming a synthesis with these two different perspectives.

The result of this present study is expected to help schools, communities, and governments understand the challenges faced by these pupils and develop strategies to support their academic and personal growth. By gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of farm worker pupils, educational stakeholders can create targeted interventions and initiatives that promote their overall well-being and enhance their educational outcomes.

Research Focus

There exist several studies on farm work; however, these studies primarily address aspects other than the lived experiences of pupils engaged in such activities. Lee et al. (2021) revealed that risky forms of child labour can harm both physical and mental health, which can have a negative impact on learning. Additionally, the findings of this study emphasised the factors that negatively impact such work can have on children's learning outcomes. Similarly, a significant barrier to achieving Education for All international commitments is thought to be child labour (Zabaleta, 2011). Specifically, the farm work involving children is a huge problem in the Philippines and other parts of the world. Some children are forced to work at a young age while attempting to obtain an education in order to make a living and escape poverty. Children who drop out of school struggle to balance working and studying simultaneously (Nelson & Quiton, 2018). Because of poor working conditions and their tender age, children who have experienced farm work may be forced to quit school because they were taught that it is better to work to survive than to have an education.

Child labour is currently a recognised problem on a global scale, research is underway to ascertain the underlying causes of this phenomenon (Chauhan & Ain, 2019). It is a problem that affects all nations worldwide (Shahraki et al., 2020). Eryilmaz et al. (2020) stated that children who work as child labourers often do not get the education they deserve. Because of poverty, some children at a tender age are forced to work, and as a result, most of them barely attend school.

Research Aim and Research Questions

This study explored the lived experiences of the pupils in a rural elementary school in Bayawan City, Philippines, who were engaged in the farm work and the teachers who handled them. The following research question guided the investigation: What are the lived experiences of pupils and teachers regarding the effects of farm work on academic life?

Literature Review

Children who work and attend school may be overworked and suffer health problems (Wolff & Maliki, 2008). This is because they may not be able to get enough rest, maintain a healthy diet, or have time for leisure activities. A child who works long hours may have lower grades due to insufficient time or energy to dedicate to their education. Additionally, children who work are sometimes unable to regularly attend class, which hinders their intellectual development. The farm working can result in physical and mental stress, exhaustion, and other health problems impairing a student's learning capacity and academic success. The factors that affected the supply of child labor were age, the number of years spent in formal education, and the mother's early experiences as a child labourer (Cruz & Encabo, 2009). Early experiences as a farm worker are one of the reasons why the parents choose their child to work in the fields. Parents let their children work on the farm at a very young age to train them as they get older. Children are frequently involved in activities that could be exhausting for farming and fishing communities (Abdullah et al., 2024). Since farming is vigorous work, children with tender body structures carry heavy loads at a young age, and they have no choice because they need to work for their family's needs.

Child labour affects future incomes beyond the loss of formal schooling and human capital, such as the absence of social and cognitive skills or an increase in health risks (Baland & Robinson, 2000). This can lead them to stop schooling or poor performance in school. According to Radfar et al. (2018), children engaged in the farm work are deprived of physical, mental, and emotional development. The most severe injuries suffered by young family farm workers could be avoided by eliminating the family farm exemption from the Hazardous Occupations Orders and increasing the age limit for conducting hazardous agricultural labor from 16 to 18 (Marlenga et al., 2007). It is much better to increase the age limit and to impose other restrictions to avoid having children of a tender age work on the farm. According to Frempong and Stadelmann (2021), child labour may also be motivated by the desire to enhance the expected income the entire family will receive from the child. The family's average income eventually increases daily with the income of the child who works, resulting in child labour.

Child labour affects children in more ways than only the short and long term; these consequences last for the duration of the child's entire life cycle (Holgado et al., 2014). In the study of Shah et al. (2016), child labor is a socio-economic problem that undermines society's moral fibers and social progress. This is especially true in third-world countries. Because of their poverty, most children would rather work on the farm for their daily needs than go to school for their education. Parents did most of the child labor: more than 70% was done in the family company, with the remaining portion being done on household tasks (Fumagalli & Martin, 2023).

If child labour is outlawed without first improving the incomes of people experiencing poverty, the problem will only get worse, and more children will live in poverty (Patrinos & Psacharopoulos, 1997). Children are forced to work when their families are financially strained because of hardships like poverty, illness, or job loss (Sikandar et al., 2022). Children are considered to be engaged in child labor when they engage in behaviors that negatively impact their development, health, or education (Ifelunni et al., 2019).

Child labourers are highly vulnerable to abuse, which is typically committed by family members, employers, and co-workers (Ahad et al., 2023). As a child, they are often subject to abuse and injustice by their employers, as explained by Psacharopoulos (1997); when compared to the control group of children who are not employed, a child's educational attainment is reduced by around two years as a result of working. While labour is necessary to convert assets into income, grants for productive assets have become a critical tool in initiatives aimed at lifting the extremely poor out of poverty (Edmonds & Theoharides, 2020). Most children engaged in farm work are more likely to lag or, worse, struggle academically because they are forced to skip school to earn a living. Because of their tender age, most children who are already in farm work tend to be in jeopardy, especially in their health, because of the struggles that they face in doing farm work. Children engage in a greater variety of agricultural and rural activities as part of their rural upbringing and learning a livelihood, which can have positive and negative effects (Busquet et al., 2021). As they work on the farm, their family can earn for their daily necessities, but their education and well-being will be compromised.

Five years later, the likelihood of children working for pay is higher, and their daily earnings are higher for those who had worked as children (Beegle et al., 2009). In order to minimise the severity of child labour, international and domestic policies have been put in place (Hamenoo et al., 2018). Several non-government organizations have set measures to lessen the severity of extreme farm work that includes children and setting opportunities for them to have a proper education.

Household assets significantly influence the number of children working and increasing school attendance, but they are ineffective in reducing the number of hours that children work (Kharisma, 2017). Due to the demands of their labour, children involved in child labour are unable to attend school regularly, as they must work throughout the day. Poverty predominantly drives these children to prioritise fieldwork over regular school attendance as a means of earning a livelihood. It is imperative for the government to take proactive steps to reduce the incidence of child labor in farming by implementing effective strategies. In the study of Edralin (2002), violation of children's rights is most noticeable when it takes the form of child labor, which is when kids engage in a range of jobs on a somewhat regular basis to support themselves or other people. Most children work on the farm mainly to help their families with their daily needs. Further, the employment of minors as labourers in developing economies poses a significant risk to society, and pertinent stakeholders are working together to solve some of the underlying causes and problems (Khatab et al., 2019).

The research aimed to address the research gap by comprehensively integrating the perspectives of both students and teachers. When it comes to dealing with children working for subsistence and daily necessities, we have to keep in mind their struggles and why they are subjected to the situation they are currently in. But the concerns of the teachers are also valid and raise some good points. Although the children's current situation is precarious it is still important for the children to experience the benefits of education. The combination of the two perspectives shall provide a unique insight into this plight. In this present study, the lived experiences of schoolchildren who were engaged in farm work and how it affected their academic life, including the lived experiences of teachers who had farm workers in their classes was explored.

Materials and Methods

Design

The Phenomenological design was employed in the research, which sought to get at the meaning of lived experience through the careful and thematic analysis of lived experience itself. Data sources were driven using interviews with the elementary pupils and their teachers.

Setting

The study was conducted at an elementary school in one of the hinterland barangays (Barangay Tayawan) in Bayawan City, Negros Oriental, Philippines. Barangay Tayawan is a rural area in the northern part of the city, 27 km from the city proper. The study was conducted in a rural agricultural area characterised by sugarcane and coconut farming, with a school population consisting of 829 pupils and 28 public school teachers. This barangay, located in a highland region, was chosen to investigate the experiences of pupils engaged in farm work and its impact on their academic life.

Participants

The study participants comprised 12 purposively selected individuals – six elementary pupils from fourth to sixth grade (who had one year of experience as farm workers) and the six elementary teachers who handled them (who had at least two years of teaching experience). They consented to take part in the in-depth interviews. Participants, specifically the pupils, should be: (a) 9 – 12 years old, (b) enrolled in Grades 4 to 6, (c) at least one year experience as a farm worker, (d) working in the farm in exchange of money, (e) a farm worker at the time the study is conducted, and (f) willing to share his/her experiences as a farm worker. The exclusion criteria included the following conditions: (a) below Grade 4 and above Grade 6, (b) less than one year experience as a farm worker, (c) working on the farm but a son or daughter of the farm owner, (d) not a farm worker at the time of the study, and (e) no interest in sharing his/her experiences as a farm worker.

On the other hand, teachers should (a) have at least two years of teaching experience at the elementary school where this study was conducted, (b) have a classroom advisory, and (c) have pupils in their class who are farm workers. The exclusion included the following conditions: (a) have less than two years of teaching experience at the elementary school where this study was conducted, (b) do not have a classroom advisory, and (c) do not have pupils who are farm workers.

Participant 1 is 39 years old, male, handling mathematics in fifth and sixth grades, and has been teaching for 15 years.

Participant 2 is 47 years old, female, handling three sections in fifth grade English and *Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao* (Values Education), and has been teaching for 17 years.

Participant 3 is 53 years old, female, handling three sections in sixth grade English and *Araling Panlipunan* (Social Studies), and has been teaching for 15 years.

Participant 4 is 35 years old, female, handling Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health (MAPEH), English, and Filipino in fourth grade, and has been teaching for ten years.

Participant 5 is 46 years old, female, a teacher handling fifth grade and Filipino and *Araling Panlipunan* (Social Studies) subjects, and has been teaching for 16 years.

Participant 6 is 43, female, handling fifth grade, has a master's degree holder, and has been teaching for five years.

Participant 7 is 12 years old, male, and a sixth-grade pupil. He is the youngest of three siblings. He lives with his grandparents. He and his grandfather work on the farm in exchange for money.

Participant 8 is a ten-year-old male and a fourth-grade pupil. He is the middle of the three siblings. He works on the farm together with his mother and siblings in exchange for money. His father works as a *habal-habal* (motorcycle) driver.

Participant 9 is 12 years old, male, and a sixth-grade pupil. He is the youngest of the six siblings. He is currently staying with his older brother while he is studying. He is working on the sugarcane plantation with his parents and his siblings. He plows, plants, and harvests sugarcanes.

Participant 10 is ten years old, male, and a sixth-grade pupil. He is the eldest of the four siblings. He lives with his mother and siblings. He is working on the sugarcane plantation with his mother and his siblings. He plows, plants, applies fertilisers, and harvests sugarcanes.

Participant 11 is ten years old, female, and a fifth-grade pupil. She is the second child of the six siblings and the only child working at the farm. Her mother and father are farmworkers, too.

Participant 12 is 11 years old, female, and a fifth-grade pupil. She is the youngest of six siblings and is a child working at the farm. Her mother and father are farmworkers, too.

Data Collection

After obtaining approval from the College of Teacher Education at Negros Oriental State University, Bayawan – Santa Catalina Campus, the researchers sought approval from the Schools Division Superintendent of the Department of Education, Bayawan City Division, and endorsement from the school principal where the study was conducted. Subsequently, the researchers sought parental or guardian consent for children engaged in farm work who met the inclusion criteria for the study. Since elementary teachers with pupils working on the farm were also part of this study, their consent was likewise sought. When all was set, the in-depth interviews were conducted in the houses (of pupils) and schools (of teachers). Interviews took place between April 12 and April 16, 2023. The interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to one hour. Digitally recorded interviews were then transcribed and thematically analysed to generate the themes and sub-themes.

Analysis

After data collection, responses to the given questions from the interview were analysed. A reflexive thematic analysis was used in the study in order to explore and understand the experiences of elementary farm working pupils. In addition, data were reviewed each time to see if there was an adjustment to make. Specifically, the analysis preceded using six steps by Clarke and Braun (2013). The process included the following steps: (a) familiarisation of data, (b) generation of codes, (c) combining codes into themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) determining significance of themes, and (f) reporting of findings.

Ethical Considerations

The conduct of this study was duly approved by the College of Teacher Education at Negros Oriental State University, Bayawan – Santa Catalina Campus and endorsed by the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent of Department of Education, Bayawan City Division. Further, to attest to their voluntary participation, participants were ensured in the anonymity, read and signed the informed consent form. The participants' identities were protected by anonymous individual responses that would identify them and by presenting the results in general. Additionally, the researchers respected the decisions of participants who chose to withdraw from the study, particularly during the data collection phase, even after initially providing informed consent. All responses were securely stored in

a database accessible only to the researchers. To protect confidentiality, any identifying information was thoroughly anonymised. No conflicts of interest were identified in this study.

Results

The farm work involving children is typical in the Philippines. Children who are engaged in this kind of work suffer poor academic performance. On the other hand, teachers tend to reinforce the learning of the pupils who could not attend school due to the farm work. Through a reflexive thematic analysis of in-depth interview transcripts, the researchers generated three themes to highlight the pupils' and teachers' experiences: poor academic performance, mechanisms for reinforcement of learning, and imbalance between school responsibilities and their daily living.

Theme 1: Poor Academic Performance

The first theme generated by the researchers captures the impact of being a farm worker and reflects the challenges they face in balancing their agricultural responsibilities with their academic commitments. The farm work frequently takes a lot of time and effort, as reflected in the following sub-themes: difficulties in school task completion and habitual absenteeism. Since most of their time was spent working on the farm, they could not cope with the school lessons and, as a result, received deficient grades.

Difficulties in school task completion. Pupils engaged in the farm work faced challenges completing their school tasks within the expected time frame. One of the teachers said, *"We cannot really tell that he can comply 100% with the requirements because he is absent and cannot comply with other school requirements"* (Participant 2, personal communication, 12 April 2023). Pupils miss school because they must work on a farm to earn money. The teacher understands that it is challenging for the student because they must choose between attending school regularly and working to support themselves. This not only makes it hard for the student to keep up with their schoolwork but also makes it difficult for them to complete other things the school asks for. A pupil shared: *"Sometimes I can pass projects, sometimes I cannot"* (Participant 7, personal communication, 16 April 2023).

The pupils face challenges in completing school assignments as they juggle both work and educational responsibilities. They dedicate significant effort to supporting their families through work, leaving little time for schoolwork. Despite these challenges, they often manage to submit their projects successfully. However, occasionally, it becomes difficult for him to fulfill deadlines because of his ongoing battle to balance work and school. A pupil recounted that: *"I am tired; when I got home, I rested"* (Participant 8, personal communication, 16 April 2023). This pupil has been working on the farm, supporting his parents, and fulfilling his family's needs. This pupil decided to take a break at home despite having homework and study materials, showing how he prioritized their family's needs over his schoolwork. Another pupil shared: *"Tiring, and it's really hot. Sometimes, we get wet"* (Participant 7, personal communication, 16 April 2023).

Habitual absenteeism. Pupils who are engaged in farm work struggle to maintain consistent or perfect attendance at school because they are poor and have no choice but to work. A pupil said: *"My mother does not have money; that is why I work on the farm"* (Participant 8, personal communication, 16 April 2023). He works on the farm because his parents are struggling financially. The family's medical issues are compounded by the fact that his mother suffers from high blood pressure and heart disease. His father is a tricycle or *habal-habal* driver in the meantime. In order to help his parents and provide for the family during these difficult circumstances, the pupil works on farms to provide money for the family.

The pupils engage in farm work to contribute financially to their families. Their families are going through some difficult situations. It is all about putting food on the table and meeting family needs. Their absence from school is a reflection of the genuine financial hardships their families are experiencing. For them, working on farms means making both ends meet. A pupil shared: *"I work on the farm to buy rice, viand, and household supplies."* (Participant 7, personal communication, 16 April 2023).

Due to financial constraints, these students are forced to prioritise the farm work over regular attendance at school. This puts them in a difficult position. Their learning continuity is disrupted by frequent absences, which lead to missed lessons, incomplete assignments, and limited interactions with teachers. The teacher said: *"They [pupils] will be absent; they are already in a hurry [to work] because the sugar central is almost off milling. There is nothing we can do with that because we are not the ones who feed them. It is also because of their parents; no matter how we try to explain [not to let their children miss classes], the parents themselves are poor, so they have no choice but to let their children work"* (Participant 1, personal communication, 12 April 2023). Therefore, poverty can force children to contribute to the family's income or subsistence through farm work. In such situations, the financial pressures may leave them with no choice but to prioritize their responsibilities on the farm over regular school attendance. In certain circumstances, some pupils prioritise work over attending school due to financial constraints.

Due to their engagement in farm work, pupils are compelled to be absent from school because they perceive earning money for their daily needs as more beneficial than attending classes. They frequently skip school several times per week, leading to a decline in their interest to continue their education, which concerns teachers. Some pupils now prioritise working on the farm over their studies, viewing education as optional.

Theme 2: Mechanisms for Reinforcement of Learning

The second theme reveals the mechanisms for reinforcement of learning for the elementary pupils with the aim of enhancing the learning process of the pupils. Supporting students who are involved in farm work is a challenge for teachers. They go the extra mile to give their farm-working pupils the interventions needed to succeed academically. A teacher said: *"Once there are successive absences, I immediately follow up, and then I immediately go to their parents and provide them interventions"* (Participant 2, personal communication, 16 April 2023).

Some pupils who are involved in farm work show a lack of interest in the modules or other academic interventions that their teachers give, despite the teachers' committed attempts to provide interventions and support. However, teachers work hard to make sure that no student who works on the farm is left behind academically. A teacher said: *"Number one challenge is how to make them attend classes regularly. If he [the pupil] is still absent, of course he will get behind on his studies. Then I will send him modules, but they will just hide it. As a teacher, you only concentrate on how you will make him learn, how to read because even himself, he refused to learn so we teacher even if we struggle to go to them"* (Participant 3, personal communication, 13 April 2023).

A teacher also said: *"The main thing is to let them know that if they just continue to go to school, we will give them interventions. Just do not stop [from school], for time will be wasted. With only a few months left, the school year is closing"* (Participant 1, personal communication, 16 April 2023). Teachers are dedicatedly striving to support their students, and despite the pupil's unwillingness to cope with the discussion, the teachers gave their very best to reinforce the pupils learning. They employed various interventions and strategies to enhance the students' learning experience. By offering these interventions, the teachers are actively engaging with the students' unique circumstances and striving to bridge the gap between their farm work and their educational needs.

Theme 3: Imbalance Between School Responsibilities and Daily Living

The third theme is the imbalance between school responsibilities and their farm work. The findings strongly indicate that engaging in farm work while attending school significantly impacts academic performance. Balancing work and studies affects the well-being of the child. Being a pupil engaged in farm work entails facing numerous daily challenges. Farm work often involves physical labor, which can lead to exhaustion and fatigue by the end of the day. The physical strain resulted in muscle soreness and fatigue, making it even more challenging to concentrate on study and homework. A pupil said: *"I feel tired [at the farm]"* (Participant 9, personal communication, 14 April 2023).

Consequently, pupils fall behind in their schoolwork or feel more stressed and pressured. Due to this imbalance, they experienced a problematic cycle in which their farm labour tiredness prevented them from progressing academically. Their incomplete schoolwork adds to their stress and sense of overwhelm. A teacher said: *"Sometimes they do not have projects and assignments"* (Participant 2, personal communication, 16 April 2023).

Many pupils choose farm work primarily for the purpose of helping their parents and contributing to the family's income. They want to help their families manage their finances and meet their day-to-day needs by taking on work on the farm and absent from school. A pupil shared: *"I work on the farm in order to help my mother..."* (Participant 11, personal communication, 16 April 2023).

Pupils who work on the farm have a more challenging time staying up academically than their peers. This limits their ability to engage in academic tasks like studying, finishing assignments, or participating in extracurricular activities. Because of the time restrictions imposed by their farm duties, their academic development can suffer. A teacher said: *"So far, they [pupils who work on the farm] are left behind"* (Participant 1, personal communication, 12 April 2023).

Balancing between education and work is exceptionally challenging for pupils who work on farms, frequently resulting in frequent absences from class. These pupils struggle to prioritize their studies because of farm work and the time and effort it takes. As a result, they frequently miss classes.

Discussion

The types of work in which children engage on farms are predominantly influenced by economic pressures, societal norms, and environmental disruptions (Martey et al., 2023). Children are considered to be engaged in child labor when they engage in behaviors that negatively impact their development, health, or education (Ifelunni et al., 2019). Sikandar et al. (2022) added that children are made to work when their families are under financial strain because of hardships like poverty, illness, or job loss. The age and nature of the work that the children do are the two main distinctions between child labour and child work (Djone & Suryani, 2019).

The findings highlighted that pupils tend to work on the farms on a daily basis to earn for their family. Thus, they were frequently absent in school. Meanwhile, teachers find it difficult to reinforce the child's learning. This idea was further supported by the finding that most of the pupils tended to choose to work on the farms for their daily living than go to school and learn. It has been affecting their academic performance.

Furthermore, teachers used whatever methods and strategies to scaffold the learning of the pupils. According to Pickett et al. (2022), keeping children and young people safe is something that producers, communities, and agriculture-based organisations—including safety and health organisations—do embrace in Canada. As they are the future of the nation, it is so much better to keep the children safe

from any harm that they might get that is why the government agencies that specialises health must have concrete actions for their welfare.

The most compelling explanation for the present findings is that those children who perform farm work have poor academic performance. Three categories categorise child labour: the work accomplished outside the home, family work, and excessive housework. The most outstanding empirical attention has been given to children's jobs outside the house. This typically comprises paid or unpaid jobs in industry, services, or agriculture (Putnick & Bornstein, 2015). Children face difficulties both in school and family as they focus on work. Such labour affects future incomes beyond the loss of formal schooling and human capital, such as the absence of social and cognitive skills or an increase in health risks (Baland & Robinson, 2000). Working on farms involves exposure to hazardous conditions, such as heavy equipment, extreme weather conditions, and chemicals. Exposure to such risks at a young age can compromise both physical and mental health, impeding academic performance and crucial opportunities to develop essential skills necessary for their future careers and personal lives. The findings highlight that children engaged in farm work are consistently absent from school, significantly impacting their academic performance and educational progress. In Miller's (2010) study, it was found that less than 50% of the population of child laborers completed primary education. Most parents let their children work to help the family rather than invest in education.

The findings of this study underscored the existing gap that we seek to address. Both elementary school students and teachers face challenges in balancing farm work with their educational responsibilities. This finding will serve as a reference for Department of Education (DepEd), teachers, and parents to better understand the implications of involving elementary students in farm work. It allows them to recognise the specific challenges faced by students, such as time management, physical exertion, and impacts on academic performance.

Limitations

There were at least three limitations concerning the results of this study. The first limitation was that the paper focused on the participants working on the farm in exchange for money, not those working on their own farms. A second potential limitation was that the research did not include those participants who had the experience but were in 1st to 3rd grade. A third limitation was that the research did not include those participants who stopped schooling due to farm work and had no contact.

Conclusions

This study primarily aimed to explore the lived experiences of elementary pupils engaged in the farm work and the teachers who handled them. These teachers and pupils were enrolled and assigned to grades four to six in a rural elementary school in Bayawan City. Pupils encountered two challenges: difficulties in school task completion and habitual absenteeism. Due to poverty, students often engage in farm work from a young age to support their families, resulting in frequent absences and difficulty keeping up with previous lessons. On the other hand, teachers were also facing challenges, but despite those difficulties, they were able to reinforce the pupils' learning via home visitations and sending learning materials.

This study aimed to fill the gaps in the literature on the lived experiences of elementary pupils who were engaged in farm work and the teachers who handled them. The involvement of children in such work can have significant impacts on their physical, psychological, and academic well-being. A well-structured plan, supported by government initiatives, educators, and the community, could alleviate the burdens on these children and prevent negative effects on their academic performance.

Furthermore, by having livelihood programs for less-income families may also help them reduce the children who were forced to work for their daily needs while attending school. Teachers may consider having frequent home visitations and follow ups on the progress of the pupils' academic standing.

Recommendations

This study supported the idea that children engaged in farm work encountered several difficulties, such as poor academic performance and an imbalance in their responsibilities in school and at home. However, their most significant contribution may pose intriguing questions for future studies. Practical recommendations to increase the discussion on farm work involving schoolchildren were developed. In terms of future research, it would be helpful to extend the current findings by examining the parents' perceptions since this study only limits the experiences of elementary pupils and elementary teachers' perspectives regarding the effects of farm work on academic life. In addition to those already mentioned, the researchers, suggests several avenues of research that may be helpful.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future researchers could expand their studies to encompass a wider variety of environments related to child labour, such as elementary students engaged in farm work or whose families rely on subsistence farming. Additionally, they could investigate students who began working during their early elementary school years or those who repeated grades due to work-related factors. Second, future researchers may develop strategies and interventions that would support and lessen the burden carried by these children who are engaged in farm work. Further research examining the farm work may shed light on exploring the experiences of parents who are farmers and examine how it affects their health on a daily basis. Thirdly, there is a need for exploration into temporary stopgap measures that could be promptly implemented to support teachers in alleviating their students' educational burdens, especially while more fundamental and systematic issues are being addressed. Finally, the educational methods used during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as remote learning, distance learning or modular learning, may be analysed retrospectively whether or not they have exacerbated farm work involving schoolchildren, especially when their parents lost jobs during the duration of the pandemic.

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