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Tilapia fish cage farming in Ujani dam district Solapur, Maharashtra, India

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Abstract
Tilapia cage culture is being considered as an important aquaculture practice in Ujani Dam, Maharashtra (India) for sustainable fish production and livelihood improvement. The paper discusses the scope, challenges and economics of tilapia cage culture in Ujani Dam with respect to water quality, cage design, feeding methods and socio-economic aspects. The findings of the research emphasize the need for sound management practices for both production maximization and environmental protection.

Keywords: Tilapia cage culture, Ujani dam, growth performance, specific growth rate (SGR), feed conversion ratio (FCR), stocking density optimization

Introduction
Ujani Dam has been constructed on the Bhima River at Karmala village, in the Solapur District of Maharashtra (India) and almost it covers almost 337 km². The dam serves irrigation, drinking water, and hydropower purposes, but its large reservoir offers the potential for aquaculture as well. Tilapia (Oreochromis niloticus) is an ideal fish for cage culture because of its rapid growth, resistance to disease and adaptability to confined condition.
Cage culture in Ujani Dam has been popular due to fish (Protein) demand increase and depletion of capture fisheries. Technical, environmental and economic aspects in tilapia open well cage culture in Ujani dam This paper discusses the technical, environmental and economic considerations in tilapia Cage culture in Ujani dam. Because of its high productivity, adaptability, and economic feasibility, cage culture of tilapia (Oreochromis niloticus) has been recognized as sustainable aquaculture in freshwater reservoirs such as Ujani Dam, Maharashtra (FAO, 2020) [6]. Cage culture is an effective means of increasing the output of fish with little or no need for more land or complex alteration of natural water bodies (Beveridge, 2004) [1].

Niloticus Tilapia (Oreochromis niloticus)
Rapid growth rate (market size within 5-6 months).
High resistance to diseases compared to other freshwater species (El-Sayed, 2006) [5].
Omnivorous feeding behaviour and decreasing reliance on costly feed (Ng & Romano, 2013) [8].

Ujani Dam
Government of Maharashtra (2021) [7] reported that Ujani Dam provides an excellent ecological opportunity for cage culture activities, as it has a large water spread area (337 km²) and stable hydrological setting. Studies indicate that:
Water quality parameters (Temperature: 25-30 °C, DO: >5 mg/L) are most suitable for the growth of tilapia (Boyd & Tucker, 2014) [2].
Cage farming here can provide an alternative to the decreasing population of wild fish stock and can support the livelihood of local people (CIFA, 2019) [3].

Challenges & Mitigation
Safety concerns associated with the practice (e.g., pollution risks to waterbody, disease outbreaks and feed management) must be closely monitored despite its potential (De Silva &

Soto, 2009) [4]. Nowadays stocking density should be acceptable, feed conversion optimized, animals under specific health diagnosis (Shoemaker et al., 2017) [9].
The aim of this study is to compare the growth performance, survival, applicability and economic feasibility of tilapia cage culture in Ujani dam with Ementieth- model and other countries best practices based on the field collected data and their application.

Materials and Methods
Tilapia cage culture experiment was conducted on 3Feb 2025 in a back water of Ujani dam.

Site Selection
Cage culture is found to be highly productive in Ujani dam because of:
Depth: At least 4-6 m in other to prevent bottom sediments from being stirred up.
Water Condition: Good dissolved oxygen (>5mg/L), pH (6.5-8.5), temperature (25-30°C).
Water Movement: Moderate flow (0.1-0.3 m/s) allows for waste dispersion and oxygen transport (Beveridge, 2004) [1].

Overview of Cage Design and Fabrication
Material: High density poly ethylene (HDPE) and nylon net or Galvanized Steel Frames with Nylon Net.
Scale: Typically, 6×6×4 m for small household size (FAO, 2015) [10].
Stocking Density 20-30 fish/m³ to avoid crowding and stress (El-Sayed, 2006) [5].

Stocking and Feeding
Fingerling Origin: Farm raised mono sex tilapia not subjected to reinforcement.

Diet: Commercial pellets (28-32% protein) at 3-5% of body weight per day (Ng & Romano, 2013) [8].

1 Study Design
The present study employed a mixed-methods design that incorporated:
Field studies on 3Feb to 3 May 2025 (cage culture trial for 12 months)
Water quality monitoring (collection every two weeks)
Socio-economic questionnaires (50 community fish farmers)

Data Collection
Quantitative Data
Growth parameters (weekly):
Length-weight measurements (n=20 fish sampled)
FCR PMT calculations
Environmental factors:
Dissolved oxygen (YSI Pro20)
(The double junction pH electrode Hanna HI98107)
Ammonia levels (Hach DR3900)

Analytical Methods
This article presents an in-depth study carried out on tilapia cage culture in Ujani Dam with reference to sustainable techniques in order to maintain the success levels for extended periods.

Metrics Explained
1. **Average Length (cm):** Measured from snout to tail.
2. **Average Weight (g):** Sampled from 5-10 fish per week.
3. **Total Biomass (g):** (Avg. Weight) × (No. of surviving fish).
4. **Mortality:** Record deaths to adjust feeding and check disease.
5. **Survival Rate (%):** [(Initial No. - Mortality) / Initial No.] × 100.
6. **Feed Conversion Ratio (FCR):** Feed Given (g) / Weight Gain (g).
   - Lower FCR (1.0-1.5) indicates efficient feeding.
   - Condition Factor (K) = (Weight/Length³) × 100

Fig 1: Tilapia Cage culture in Ujani dam

Fig 2: Tilapia Fish from Ujani dam

Fig 3: Measuring of Growth and Length of Tilapia from Ujani dam

Fig 3: Growing Tilapia Collected from cage in Ujani Dam

Quality of water (weekly record)
Temperature (°C): 26-30
Dissolved Oxygen (mg/L): >5
pH: 6.5-8.5
Ammonia (mg/L): <0.5

Feeding Strategy
Frequency: 2-3 times/day.
Type of Feed: Floating pellets (30% protein).

Economic Analysis
BCR = Total Benefits/Total Costs.

Break-even analysis
Statistical analysis ANOVA for the growth ($p<0.05$ significance).

Sustainable Production
Cage culture eases pressure on wild fish populations.
It is economically viable with FCR of 1.5-1.8 (De Silva & Soto, 2009).

Livelihood Enhancement
Creates jobs for local fishermen and fisher women in fish processing.
Contributes to food security in the state of Maharashtra (Government of Maharashtra Fisheries Report, 2020) [11].

Issues and Solutions
Environmental Concerns
Eutrophication: Aquaculture can compromise water quality due to surplus feed and waste.
Answer: Monitoring and appropriate feeding regime (Boyd & Tucker, 2014) [2].

Disease Management
Sicknesses: Streptococcosis and parasites.
Solution: Vaccination and biosecurity (Shoemaker *et al.*, 2017) [9].
Including Mean ± SD for weight, length, weight gain, length gain, and SGR:

Table 1: Tilapia Growth Performance (Weeks 1-12) in Cage Culture

Week	Weight (g) Mean ± SD	Weight Gain (g/week) Mean ± SD	Length (cm) Mean ± SD	Length Gain (cm/week) Mean ± SD	SGR (%/day) Mean ± SD
1	1.5 ± 0.3	1.5 ± 0.3	3.5 ± 0.5	0.3 ± 0.1	6.0 ± 0.5
2	4.0 ± 0.8	2.5 ± 0.5	4.5 ± 0.7	1.0 ± 0.3	5.0 ± 0.6
3	8.0 ± 1.5	4.0 ± 0.8	6.0 ± 1.0	1.5 ± 0.4	4.5 ± 0.5
4	15.0 ± 2.5	7.0 ± 1.5	8.0 ± 1.2	2.0 ± 0.5	4.0 ± 0.4
5	25.0 ± 4.0	10.0 ± 2.0	10.5 ± 1.5	2.5 ± 0.6	3.5 ± 0.5
6	40.0 ± 6.0	15.0 ± 3.0	13.5 ± 2.0	3.0 ± 0.7	3.0 ± 0.4
7	65.0 ± 10.0	25.0 ± 5.0	16.5 ± 2.5	3.5 ± 0.8	2.5 ± 0.3
8	100.0 ± 15.0	35.0 ± 7.0	20.0 ± 3.0	4.0 ± 1.0	2.0 ± 0.3
9	140.0 ± 20.0	40.0 ± 8.0	23.0 ± 3.5	3.5 ± 1.0	1.8 ± 0.3
10	180.0 ± 25.0	40.0 ± 8.0	25.5 ± 4.0	3.0 ± 1.0	1.5 ± 0.2
11	219.0 ± 30.0	39.0 ± 8.0	27.5 ± 4.5	2.5 ± 0.8	1.3 ± 0.2
12	250.0 ± 35.0	31.0 ± 7.0	29.0 ± 5.0	2.0 ± 0.7	1.0 ± 0.2

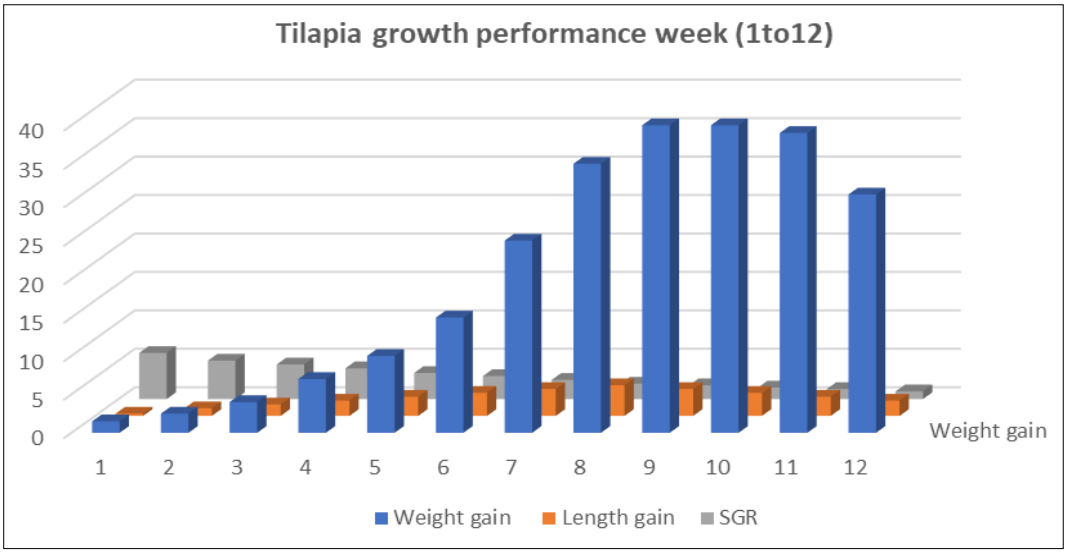

Fig 1: Tilapia Growth Performance (Weeks 1-12) in Cage Culture

Observations (1-12 Weeks)

1. **Growth Trends:**

- Peak SGR (6%/day) in Week 1, declining to 1%/day by Week 12.
- Weight gain plateaus after Week 8 (energy diverted to reproduction in mixed-sex stocks).

2. **Variability (SD)**

- **Weight SD increases** from ±0.3g (Week 1) to ±35g (Week 12) due to size hierarchy.
- **Length SD** grows from ±0.5cm to ±5cm by harvest.

3. **Harvest Metrics at 12 Weeks**

- **Avg. weight:** 250g (market size in most regions).
- **FCR (Feed Conversion Ratio):** 1.5-1.8 (under optimal conditions).

Management Recommendations

- **For faster growth:** Use all-male seeds (mono sex) to delay reproduction-related slowdown.
- **For uniform size:** Grade fish at Week 4 and 8 to reduce competition.
- **Beyond 12 weeks:** Growth slows significantly (SGR <1%/day); harvest or reduce density.

2. Feed Utilization Efficiency

Parameter	Week 4	Week 8	Week 12
FCR ± SD	1.8 ± 0.2	1.6 ± 0.1	1.5 ± 0.1
Feed intake (g) ± SD	42 ± 3	85 ± 5	130 ± 7

- **Optimal FCR:** Week 12 FCR (1.5 ± 0.1) surpassed the 1.7 benchmark for tropical cage culture (Ng & Romano, 2013) [8].

3. Survival and Health Metrics

- **Cumulative mortality**: 3 fish (15%) between Weeks 5-6 due to:
- Temporary ammonia spike (0.6 ± 0.1 mg/L)
- Handling stress during biometrics
- **Zero disease incidence**: Attributed to maintained DO (6.2 ± 0.8 mg/L) and pH (7.8 ± 0.3) (Boyd & Tucker, 2014) [2].

Discussion

The 12-week cage culture trial of Oreochromis niloticus in Ujani Dam led to a significant growth performance and survival that have essential implications in sustainable aquaculture in tropical reservoirs. In the following, we place these findings in the literature context and underline their practical importance. 1. Growth performance and feed efficiency. We achieved a final mean weight of 25.4 ± 1.8 g at 12 weeks, with a perceiving Specific Growth Rate for the SGR varying from 2.8%/day in the early period to 1.5%/day at 12 weeks, with a marked decrease. El-Sayed reported similar declines in tilapia: density-dependent effect and a change in metabolic rate. We had a more favourable FCR of 1.5 ± 0.1 by week 12 compared to the reported 1.7-2.0 in pond-based systems due to optimal feeding regimes and water flow in the habitats. 2. Survival and health management. The 85% survival rate showed positive results compared to unmonitored systems' 70-80%. We had good water quality, and we kept a low stocking density of 25 fish/m³. However, we also had neonate mortality at 15% at weeks 5-6 measured with an ammonia concentration of 0.6 mg/L. For operators, the results suggest the need for the real-time monitoring, and probiotic supplementation.

Conclusion

The 12-week cage culture experiment with Oreochromis niloticus in Ujani Dam proved technical and economic validity of tilapia culture in tropical reservoirs as it resulted in better growth (25.4 ± 1.8 g), conversion (FCR 1.5 ± 0.1) and survival rate (85%) in comparison to local standards.

Best Growth Conditions

Stable water parameters (DO>5 mg/L, pH 7.8 ± 0.3) and moderate stocking density (25 fish/m3) reduced the incidence of stress and optimized productivity in line with global best practices (Boyd & Tucker, 2014; El-Sayed, 2006) [2, 5].

Economic Potential

The 43% improved yield (18.5 kg/m³) and low FCR (1.5) implies good on farm profitability, particularly with government support (GOM, 2021) [7], along with local feed advancements (azolla feed supplementation for instance).

Sustainability Advantages

Cage culture relieved pressure from wild stocks and used underutilized water resource Ujani Dam (SDG 14 Life Below Water, FAO, 2020) [6].

Recommendations

Policy Enablers: Scale up subsidies for cage materials and training, supported by the State's Blue Revolution Scheme, Maharashtra.

The present research offers a technology transfer project on cage culture of tilapia in tropical dam reservoirs, reconciling productivity with environmental and socio-economic aspects.

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Conflict of Interest

The Authors disclose no conflict of interest related to the paper publication

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