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## Academic Performance of Left-Behind Senior High School Students in the Philippines: Impacts of Parental Migration

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### ABSTRACT

The migration of Filipino workers overseas remains a major socio-economic phenomenon, offering financial stability yet creating emotional and academic challenges for left-behind children. This qualitative phenomenological study examined how parental absence affects the academic performance of senior high school students in Los Baños, Laguna, whose parents work abroad. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with purposively selected Grade 12 students meeting specific criteria. Thematic analysis revealed three key themes: thriving amidst loneliness, flourishing academic independence, and repaying sacrifices through excellence. While remittances eased financial burdens, students reported feelings of isolation, lack of parental guidance, and academic pressure driven by the desire to honor their parents' sacrifices. Strong communication and adaptive coping strategies emerged as vital in mitigating adverse effects. The study underscores the need for school-based support systems and policy interventions addressing the psychosocial well-being and academic needs of left-behind students.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Migration is a movement wherein people are looking for and working for resources that they need to live and survive in their everyday lives (Effiong & Aya, 2022; Benson & O'reilly, 2009; Purkayastha *et al.*, 2023). Adolescent joblessness reached the number of 19.7% in the Philippines, while the unemployment and underemployment were 21.6% (Tuason & Crutchfield, 2021; Castilla *et al.*, 2022). In this case, Filipinos are continuing to migrate as their top option after graduating in the Philippines because of lower opportunities for work and a lower minimum wage compared to when they work abroad (Guinihin *et al.*, 2025; Lapid & Cruz, 2022). Migration has been an ongoing topic for several decades now in the scope of social sciences, including the fields of sociology, geography, and demography.

Although it is known that migration is a global movement of people, it has also been an activity of the Filipinos for several decades. Filipinos are known to work abroad to search for new opportunities in work with larger salaries than in the Philippines. Filipinos live to migrate and have been existing for so long because of many factors (Peralta *et al.*, 2024; Ancho *et al.*, 2025; Samonte *et al.*, 2019). Migration is a normal thing for the Filipinos as they have many aspects to consider, such as financial and quality of life. The phenomenon of migration in terms of Overseas Filipino Workers is mostly because of the opportunities in employment, and their income outside of the country is higher than the usual salary in the form of remittances (see <https://hdl.handle.net/10419/302226>).

In pursuit of improved quality of life for their left-behind families in the Philippines, the Overseas Filipino Workers decided to work and migrate abroad. The Philippines has come to be recognized as one of the major worldwide sources of international movement of labor. Overseas Filipino Workers demonstrate balanced financial management to ensure both immediate needs and long-term well-being are sustained. The educational system in the Philippines before 2012 was different from now (Almerino *et al.*, 2020; Gadaza *et al.*, 2025). The school year 2012-2013 was when the K-12 curriculum started in the Philippines through Republic Act 10533 (Rogayan *et al.*, 2019). The grade 12 students who are graduating will encounter different factors in relation to their academic performance. In this study, there were a lot of factors that needed to be studied, such as social, emotional, and resource availability of the left-behind senior high school students. The K-12 curriculum gives another two years to the left-behind senior high school students to have more time to think about college and prepare for it while their parents are away. It was not just the parents who work abroad who are suffering because while they are away, the left-behind children are also affected too as their absence is related to the children's well-being and academic performance (Distor *et al.*, 2021).

The left-behind senior high school students may see their migration of their parents as a sign of abandonment, they may see this as a sacrifice or resentment towards their parents (Aguilar, 2020). Hence, to the left-behind senior high school students, the physical presents, such as money or balikbayan boxes from their parents, were the only forms of warmth or love they had. In this study, the focus of the problems was the influence of the parental overseas workers on the academic performance of the left-behind senior high school students. The senior high school students were piled up with requirements to finish school and pursue college. With this being said, their experiences were different from the students whose parents are working in the same country and living with their parents on the same roof. The left-behind senior high school students described their academic performance when their parents were abroad. The study aimed to know how the left-behind senior high school students were able to perform academically as a result of parental absence.

In most cases, literature was focused on the experiences of the Overseas Filipino Workers parents about how migration is the solution to the problems in the financial aspect of their families their lives away from home, but there were recurring worries about the left-behind senior high school students by the migration movement of their parents, which was now increasing attention that turning into global issue (Navarez & Diaz, 2017).

Parenting is important. Many reports regarding the impact of parenting on social condition and education have been well-documented (Table 1). In general, parenting through migration was completely different from the parents who were working and residing with their families in the Philippines. In the context of the families with OFWs, the most affected were the children who are staying in the Philippines, waiting for their parents to come home. The left-behind senior high school students were forced to communicate with their parents through their technologies and gadgets while being physically away from them. With this, the left-behind senior high school students' development was also affected (Burgos *et al.*, 2020). They were at higher risk of losing the strong attachment they have with their parents when they are away. This study analysed the struggles and challenges of the senior high school students in terms of academic performance. There were studies discussing the left-behind children of the Overseas Filipino Workers parents, but they did not specify the left-behind senior high school students who were considering pursuing their studies at the college level.

This study focused on the students in terms of academic performance to describe their experience and to identify their influence. The families who were better off financially have a greater chance of being successful in academic performance (Asis & Ruiz-Marave, 2013). This study discussed the success in academic performance along with the factors affecting the senior high school students' academic performance relating to their everyday lives. An assessment of the Overseas Filipino Workers' parents' influence on the academic performance of left-behind senior high school students in Los Banos, Laguna, served as the main objective of this study.

**Table 1.** Previous studies on parenting.

No	Title	Reference
1	Influence of parental involvement and school environment on pupils' academic performance in the English language.	Saadu (2023a)
2	Permissive parenting style and maladaptive behavioral tendencies among junior high school students of Notre Dame of Tacurong College, Mindanao, Philippines.	Cabanatuan & Ahmad (2022)
3	Perceived social responsibility and vaccine hesitancy among parents of grade 12 student in Laboratory High School.	Deximo & Lucero (2021)
4	Parental academic support in online and modular learners amidst pandemic: A comparative study.	Palma <i>et al.</i> (2021)
5	Parents' and teachers' perception of indicators for the choice of marriage partner among hearing-impaired adults.	Adesokan <i>et al.</i> (2024)
6	Coping with adolescence: Parents' experiences in providing sexuality education to deaf adolescents.	Stackus & Asnancie (2024)
7	Single mother parenting in preschool children's social-emotional development.	Arlianty <i>et al.</i> (2025)
8	Designing a gaslighting illustration book as a media for parental education.	Kurniawan & Santoso (2026)
9	Impact of single parenting on academic performance of junior secondary school students in mathematics.	Lasisi <i>et al.</i> (2024)
10	Community service perspective on intervention strategies by parents-teachers associations: Challenges and prospect.	Oladimeji <i>et al.</i> (2023)

**Table 1 (continue).** Previous studies on parenting.

No	Title	Reference
11	Early childhood education matters: comparing educational outcomes of children with and without home instruction for parents of preschool youngsters (HIPPY).	Obafemi <i>et al.</i> (2023)
12	Parents and teachers' perceived effect of banditry activities on pupils enrollment in selected public primary schools.	Saadu & Lawal (2023)
13	Influence of parenting styles on moral skills acquisition of primary school pupils: Community service perspective.	Saadu (2023b)
14	Parents' viewpoint on the proposed Philippine mandatory reserve officers' training corps for senior high school students.	Malaguial <i>et al.</i> (2023)
15	Relationship between parental factors and uses of abusive words among primary school pupils: community service perspective.	Saadu (2024)
16	Female genital mutilation: Parental perception and religious point of view.	Saadu <i>et al.</i> (2023)

## 2. METHODS

This study was conducted in Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines, an area with a high proportion of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). According to the Philippine Statistics Authority in 2024, OFWs from CALABARZON account for 19% of the national total, yet limited research has been conducted on the left-behind children in this municipality (see <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/survey/labor-and-employment/survey-overseas-filipinos>).

A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed to explore the lived experiences of senior high school students whose parents are working abroad. Detailed information regarding this method is explained elsewhere (Susilawati *et al.*, 2025). The approach was guided by Husserl's concept of phenomenology, using bracketing to minimize researcher bias and ensure authentic representation of participants' narratives.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

- (i) Senior high school student in Los Baños, Laguna.
- (ii) At least 18 years old and in Grade 12.
- (iii) Has one or both parents working abroad for a minimum of five years.
- (iv) Parents provide financial support for education.

A minimum of ten participants were interviewed, with additional participants added until data saturation was achieved. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews (face-to-face or online) lasting 1-2 hours. An interview guide with five core open-ended questions was used, allowing for probing and follow-up questions. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and conducted in Filipino, then translated into English for analysis. Primary data came from participant interviews, while secondary data were sourced from books, articles, and relevant studies.

Before data collection, participants received an explanation of the study's objectives and signed an informed consent form. Pilot testing was conducted to refine the interview questions. Transcripts were returned to participants for member checking to ensure accuracy.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The process involved:

- (i) Familiarization with data.
- (ii) Generation of initial codes.
- (iii) Searching for patterns.

- (iv) Reviewing and defining themes. Themes were supported with direct participant quotes. Bracketing was maintained throughout the analysis to limit personal bias.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of how participants managed their academic performance to be good despite the physical absence of their parents revealed that their motivation to excel in school stemmed from both personal reasons and the constant pressure they experienced. To provide a comprehensive context for their academic performance, it was essential to examine the decision-making processes that influenced their academic choices. Accordingly, this study prioritized the exploration of participants' academic performance as a consequence of parental absence. In this regard, three main themes have been identified to analyze the participants' academic performance, each of which is elaborated in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Academic performance of the left-behind senior high school students as a result of parental absence.

Theme	Description
1: Thriving Amidst Loneliness	The participants demonstrate the ability to perform well in school and achieve high grades despite experiencing academic pressure and the loneliness of living apart from their parents.
2: Flourishing Academic Independence	Being physically away from their parents forced the participants to be independent in academics.
3: Repaying Sacrifices through Excellence	Participants seek to reciprocate and acknowledge the sacrifices of their overseas Filipino worker (OFW) parents, recognizing the demands of their profession.

#### 3.1. Theme 1: Thriving Amidst Loneliness

Lack of parental guidance can be caused by the pressure on students to do well in school. Aside from that, it could also lead to a loss of self-confidence because their parents are away from them to support them physically. Nevertheless, because they feel pressured to perform well to satisfy their parents, some people may experience academic stress and anxiety (Mania et al., 2024). The presence of showing up and being physically available was something that the left-behind senior high school students were longing for. They were being deprived of having parents who were physically available to them anytime. The lack of confidence they were feeling was because they were also doubting themselves, due to the fact that their parents were pressuring them to always do something good and to always give their best at all times.

To emphasize being an academic achiever despite experiencing the lack of parental guidance physically and emotionally, Participant 4 stated that: *"I'm an achiever [academic achiever in school]. I didn't tell him [father], I just asked my cousin to attend [school recognition] with me."*

Being a consistent achiever in school ever since the left-behind senior high school students were in their elementary school was something that they were proud of. But since their parents were not physically present, they asked their extended families or friends to attend the school recognitions or graduations. The participants strongly emphasized that they felt lonely because their parents were not physically present for them to support their

achievements supported by Participant 3. She stated that: *"He was not on my mind during the recognition season. But after that, I got sudden realizations and also think about my dad being at my recognition when I see someone on social media. Since my dad hasn't been present [during recognition], my mom always goes with me [going up on stage] when I receive recognition or an award. I therefore hope that my father will accompany me [to receive awards] to college for the first time."*

Furthermore, being physically present and available to the children is also important because they still feel the absence of their parents. Despite this, the left-behind senior high school students were still doing their best, especially in terms of academic performance. Other than that, the dark side of being achievers was being pressured by their parents, who were giving them a hard time to focus on school and studies because they had expectations to meet.

An anecdote from Participant 1 explained that the main factor why the left-behind senior high school students' grades were high was because of parental migration. Participant 1 stated that: *"Ever since she [mother] went abroad [to work], I've wanted to have a straight line of 9 [grades in card]. But before that, I didn't care [what the grades were]."*

In connection with the pressure that the Overseas Filipino Workers' parents were giving to the left-behind senior high school students, they were also seeking validation that they did good in school. The consistent achievements were something that they could easily do because of the pressure, but what pleases them is when they hear compliments from their Overseas Filipino Workers parents, who are trying to please them. Academic anxiety is one of the primary causes of illness and injury among senior high school students (Zhang et al., 2020). The participants were left worrying about their academic performance because they cared too much about their parents' approval and validation, even if they felt lonely throughout the academic year, having no parents by their side to take care of and guide them.

### 3.2. Theme 2: Flourishing Academic Independence

Despite having extended families do their roles and responsibilities in raising and taking care of the left-behind senior high school students, they still did not have someone to ask about their school activities, such as attending card giving. Distance learners must find a challenging balance between trying to stay in contact with their teachers for support and developing their academic independence without the help of their parents and any extended family member so them not to be a burden (Jovero, 2021). The left-behind senior high school students were forced to be independent and hesitate to ask for guidance from their extended families because they thought their families were not obligated to do these tasks for them. For the left-behind senior high school students, it should be their parents to fulfill their responsibilities in attending school-related events, especially when it comes to academic-related activities.

An anecdote from Participant 10 revealed that even during card giving, there was no one to get her card in school. Even for the sake of grades, they were left to be strong and independent so they could get their report cards in school. She stated that: *"No one [in the family] went [to school for card giving] even if it was needed for grades, no one went [to school for me]."*

In school, events and such activities like family day and foundation day were required for the guardians to come so the left-behind senior high school students can participate in the events and also for them to get good grades and plus points in certain subjects connected to the school event. Family support was also an example to help the students boost their confidence because they have a support system within the school premises. The left-behind



children of the Overseas Filipino Workers parents expressed that they wanted their parents to be there physically with them (see [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381422900\\_Home\\_alone\\_exploring\\_the\\_emotional\\_challenges\\_on\\_children\\_of\\_overseas\\_Filipino\\_workers](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381422900_Home_alone_exploring_the_emotional_challenges_on_children_of_overseas_Filipino_workers)). However, in the situation of the participants, this was one of those moments they would feel like they had no one by their side to guide them and support them, even for the sake of their academic achievements and school-related things.

Another statement from Participant 9 expressed the situation of difficulties in planning for the future, specifically for college decisions, such as where to study and live. She stated that: *"It is hard to choose a school [for college] because I need to weigh the pros and cons and consult [the plans] with my parents. I like studying at UP Los Banos better since it's close [and the nearest school to home], because Malayan is too far away [from home]. In this way, they will not worry about me [and for safety]."*

The participants found it hard to plan without their parents by their side to help them decide on college and communicate only via online and gadgets, even if there were no time or location restrictions since the internet's convenience facilitates communication (Deianeira, 2023). However, consulting and deciding exhausted the left-behind senior high school students, so they would either decide on their own or consult with their parents. When it comes to planning for the future, such as choosing college schools and courses, since the parents were living away from their children, their top priority was to protect and keep their children away from harm as well. The left-behind senior high school students, when choosing colleges and places to live, were always consulting with their parents first via Messenger as a means of communication. The participants' responses were based on their parents' decisions that their priority is, as much as possible, their safety. However, some left-behind senior high school students preferred to decide on their own because they wanted to live away from their extended families.

### 3.3. Theme 3: Repaying Sacrifices through Excellence

The left-behind senior high school students, as stated in the previous theme, were experiencing loneliness and academic pressure because they did not want to disappoint their parents and, as much as possible, give them achievements. Rather than taking credit for their personal school and academic achievements, one of the difficulties faced by senior high school students who are left behind is completing their education and getting good grades to finally pay their parents back for all of their hard work (Lobos et al., 2019). They were proving themselves through achievements because their Overseas Filipino Workers parents were expecting them to be good with their education, since this was the reason why their parents went abroad to earn money.

An anecdote from Participant 8 articulated her situation of doing her best in school to prove her achievements and how good she is in school. She stated that: *"I believe that since my father worked hard and is still working hard abroad to sustain my needs [and educational materials and resources], all I can give him is my high grades [at school], which I worked hard for."*

Participants were aware of the situation that their parents migrated for their good as well specifically for the education of their children. The participants optimistically interpreted their experiences so that having no parents around them physically would not hinder their studies, rather than viewing their circumstances negatively (Distor & Campos, 2021). Instead, the left-behind senior high school students were motivated to give good grades and achievements to

their parents because their mindset is that their Overseas Filipino Workers parents were sacrificing a lot, so they need to reciprocate their efforts. The participants' responses were to give their achievements to their parents and not to fulfill their needs and dreams. The participants were motivated to learn more because they are aware that their parents have departed to work abroad in order to provide them with additional materials and educational tools (Kunwar, 2022). They were pleasing their parents and leveling with what they were receiving.

While some of the participants were proving themselves by presenting their achievements to their Overseas Filipino Workers parents, some were treating their parents as their motivation and inspiration to go to school every day. Participant 9 expressed her thoughts by stating that: *"There are times when I feel lazy to go to school, but I think of my father as my inspiration and motivation [to go to school and study]."*

Going to school without motivation due to the lack of parental guidance was a normal experience for the left-behind senior high school students. Due to the academic pressure and parental sacrifices, the left-behind senior high school students were motivated by their parents their motivation to attend school. To them, they were continuing their studies and school because they wanted their parents to think that their sacrifices were paying off. The participants drew motivation and led their negativity to put more effort into their studies from their parents' work overseas (Distor & Campos, 2021). Making their parents their inspiration and motivation was how they dealt with laziness and tiring days, especially during their bad days and hectic schedules in school.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

As time goes by, the number of Overseas Filipino Workers' parents keeps increasing due to the mismatch between the cost of living and salaries in the Philippines. Many parents were still sacrificing their lives being spent abroad to make sure that their children were living comfortably and studying in a good school to finish their studies. Higher salaries were still the reason why many Filipinos were motivated to work abroad, because the Philippines offers very low salaries that do not match the cost of living. With this, the growing number of left-behind senior high school students may continue in the future. The cycle of experiencing no physical parents around, academic pressure, and seeking coping mechanisms to feel better may perpetuate into the next generation of left-behind senior high school students.

Revealing the reason behind why the participants chose to be good at school and have good academic performance became dramatically emotional because they do not see their achievements as their own. They treat their school achievements as their payment to their Overseas Filipino Workers parents, who spent their lives working abroad for their children to experience comfortable lives. Their success in school was often framed as a tribute to the hard work and dedication of their parents abroad. Lastly, the study showed differences in the experiences of the left-behind senior high school students as they expressed the need for school-based interventions such as accessible and stigma-free mental health services. Furthermore, policy intervention and law could be improved for the welfare of the left-behind children. The work is prescribed to be a director for counselling programs that are focused on left-behind children, particularly those who were continuing their education.

#### 5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.



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