EDCOM2
The Second Congressional Commission on Education

Priority Area #10
Home and School Environment

Strengthening the Home-School Environment of Left-Behind Children through Effective Parenting

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This Research Fellowship is made established through the Gokongwei Brothers School of Education and Learning Design (GBSEALD) and the Ateneo School of Government (ASOG), to conduct research projects on 28 priority areas in education reform, as identified by the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II).

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Statements and Declarations

Declaration of Funding

This research was conducted in collaboration with Ateneo de Manila University as part of the partnership with the Second Congressional Commission (EDCOM II).

The funding source played no role in the design of the study, data interpretation, or decision to publish the findings, as the author maintained complete autonomy in the research process, ensuring objectivity and impartiality in the presentation of results.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Declaration of Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

TurboScribe was used for the transcription and English translation of audio recordings, LM Notebook for organizing related literature, and Paperpal for language editing.

Declaration of Principles

The EDCOM II is collaborating with scholars across various institutions to provide valuable insights for the development of evidence-based policies that address the unique challenges and opportunities in the Philippine education landscape.

Our commitment to excellence, integrity, and ethical conduct in advancing research and disseminating knowledge is defined by the following principles:

The Commission is dedicated to upholding the highest standards of academic rigor in the evaluation, review, and dissemination of research publications. Our pledge is to ensure the integrity and quality of the knowledge we contribute to the scholarly community.

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Karol Mark R. Yee, PhD
EDCOM II EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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List of Acronyms or Abbreviations

4Ps	Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program
CAR	Children at Risk
CICL	Children in Conflict withw the Law
DMW	Department of Migrant Workers
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
EDCOM II	The Second Congressional Commission on Education
ERPAT	Empowerment and Reaffirmation of Paternal Abilities
IRR	Implementing Rules and Regulations
LGU	Local Government Unit
MOU	Memoranda of Understanding
NGO	Non-Government Organization
OFW	Overseas Filipino Worker
OWWA	Overseas Workers Welfare Administration
PES	Parent Effectiveness Service
POEA	Philippine Overseas Employment Administration
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
RA	Republic Act
SEA-PLM	Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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Executive Summary

Parental involvement is widely recognized as a key determinant of student success. Research has consistently shown that learners perform better academically, emotionally, and socially when their parents or caregivers are engaged in their education. However, economic demands, caregiving arrangements, and geographical distance constrain parental involvement in the well-being and learning of children from transnational families, which constitute one out of ten households in the Philippines. These challenges call for responsive and inclusive policies that address the complex realities of left-behind children, which correspond to three out of ten Filipino children.

Hence, this study investigates how the home-school environment can be strengthened to support Filipino learners, particularly those from transnational households. Informed by the framework of shared accountability among families, schools, and communities, this case study examines the Parent Effectiveness Service (PES) Program under the Republic Act (RA) 11908 in terms of its responsiveness to the diverse needs of left-behind children.

The key findings of the case study are as follows:

- Remittances from migrant parents improve material access to education, but cannot substitute for emotional presence and educational guidance.
- Stay-behind fathers often struggle to replicate maternal roles because of gender norms.
- Caregiving by extended kin or older siblings is common but can vary due to their own responsibilities, limited resources, and inconsistent emotional support.
- Many migrant parents and their substitutes had no prior knowledge of the PES Program, its objectives, or benefits.
- Barriers to participation included lack of time, logistical issues, and stigma associated with attending parenting programs.
- While the PES Program effectively reaches at-risk families through court-mandated participation, there is no similar enforcement for transnational families unless left-behind children are explicitly categorized as at-risk or in conflict with the law.
- While the PES Program can build parenting capacities, its limited and uneven implementation across local government units (LGUs) hinders its effectiveness.
- PES modules emphasize parental involvement, but program design and delivery require better contextualization for transnational families.
- PES modules overlook the critical roles of substitute caregivers in transnational family setups.
- The PES manual is largely outdated and requires specific guidance to facilitate sessions tailored to the transnational families.
- PES sessions lack digital or remote learning options that align with the practical realities of migrant parents and their substitutes.

Policy recommendations to facilitate parental involvement in the well-being and learning of children from transnational households are as follows:

- Mandate LGUs to adopt and localize the PES Program with modules tailored to migrant parents and their substitutes.
- Include modules that support fathers in caregiving.
- Institutionalize remote parenting strategies through government-supported digital parenting platforms.
- Normalize participation in the PES Program by framing it as part of responsible parenting rather than as a remedial intervention.
- Involve migrant parents and their substitutes in program feedback and session planning.
- Integrate the PES Program with other government programs to reduce opportunity costs.
- Encourage flexible, multilingual, and culturally sensitive communication between schools and families.
- Foster partnerships among LGUs, schools, non-government organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations, and the private sector to expand support systems for left-behind children and their caregivers.
- Systematically assess the PES Program across diverse household structures as part of program monitoring and evaluation.

By adopting these inclusive, flexible, and community-based strategies to strengthen the PES Program, migrant parents can be empowered to participate actively in their children's education, even from afar. This approach contributes to creating a more equitable and resilient home-school environment in transnational households.

Keywords: *Home-School Environment, Parental Involvement, Transnational Families, Left-Behind Children, Parent Effectiveness Service Program*

Introduction

Education is seen as a legacy in which Filipino parents leave their children (Aguilar, 2020; Arguillas & Williams, 2010; Asis & Ruiz-Marave, 2013; Jimenez, 2015). Parents believe that education provides the skill sets necessary for success and helps low-income families break their poverty cycles. This perspective underscores the role of education in achieving social mobility and family stability (Asis & Ruiz-Marave, 2013; Era, 2016).

Deep-seated beliefs in education's transformative power shape parental involvement in their children's learning. Parental involvement, referring to parents' contributions to their children's education, is essential in Filipino family life and aspirations (Cortes, 2015; Jabar, 2023). Home-based involvement includes communicating about school, monitoring progress, and assisting with homework, whereas school-based involvement consists of attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering, and participating in school events (Boonk et al., 2018). Expecting children to perform well in school is another form of parental involvement (Jabar, 2023).

Data from the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics or SEA-PLM (2021) revealed that parental education, parental occupation, and home possessions have a larger impact on the reading, writing, and mathematics literacy of grade 5 students in the Philippines. Filipino children, who have access to more educational resources because of their higher socioeconomic status, tend to perform better in school than those with limited resources.

Nevertheless, when parents play an active role in their children's education, they can help to bridge the gap in academic achievement. Studies have shown that parental involvement in promoting reading, communicating about school, and having high expectations strongly correlates with academic achievement (Boonk et al., 2018; Castro et al., 2015). Research has indicated that such involvement can mitigate the challenges of low socioeconomic background and limited parental education on academic success (Boonk et al., 2018).

Notably, parental migration, both domestic and overseas, is becoming increasingly common among Filipino children from low-income households. Parents view migration as a means of securing their children's future (Asis, 2006; Aguilar, 2020).

While migration brings economic benefits, it has social costs, as children remain with one parent or other caregivers (Reyes, 2007). These left-behind children, defined in this study as minors whose one or both parents migrate for work abroad, leaving them in the care of the remaining parent, extended kin, or substitute caregivers either temporary or prolonged and indefinite separation, are prone to abuse, exploitation, and negative behaviors (Cuaton & Teguihanon, 2019; Dominguez & Hall, 2022; Tolentino & Arcinas, 2018). Without parental guidance and support, left-behind children are more likely to experience inequality in education, health, and opportunities (Kunwar, 2022). They are also often excluded from government social welfare programs due to assumed financial stability from remittances (Pajaron et al., 2020; Dominguez & Hall, 2022).

The Philippine government has recognized the vulnerability of children growing up without their parents when it enacted Republic Act (RA) 11908, or the Parent Effectiveness Service (PES) Program Act,

in 2022. The law identifies vulnerable children as those at risk, in conflict with the law, exposed to violence, or belonging to families facing social disadvantage. While the statutory text does not explicitly name the children of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of RA 11908 clarify that left-behind children of OFWs are included in the scope of the program. This inclusion signifies that families affected by labor migration are formally recognized as potential beneficiaries of parenting support.

The PES Program aims to provide parents and parent substitutes for vulnerable children, such as those left behind by OFWs, with essential knowledge and skills to effectively fulfill their parental duties and responsibilities. This parenting program seeks to strengthen family units as part of promoting the holistic development of Filipino children requiring social protection.

However, how the PES Program caters to the diverse needs of left-behind children remains unclear, given its recent institutionalization. Data from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) revealed that only 18% of 1,634 cities and municipalities in the country have fully implemented the PES Program. About 10% of these local government units (LGUs) have only been oriented on RA 11908.

Hence, this study[1] aims to examine how well the PES Program can address the non-educational and educational needs of children left behind by OFWs. First, it explores the realities of transnational families in order to understand their needs. Second, it evaluates the reach (i.e., the extent to which the government program is accessible to and attended by transnational families), relevance (i.e., usefulness and applicability of the program to the specific needs, experiences, and challenges of transnational families), and alignment (i.e., consistency of the policies and program implementation with the realities, needs, and existing support systems for transnational families) of the PES Program. Finally, this study examines the role of the public and private sectors in implementing the PES Program as part of understanding its strengths and areas for improvement.

In line with the priority area of the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) in strengthening the home-school environment of basic education in the country, the findings from this study can be used to develop a coherent model of interventions and support mechanisms that can facilitate parental involvement in left-behind children's well-being and learning. The findings can also help in creating a model of engagement and shared accountability in supporting Filipino learners from transnational families to do well in school, increase their life chances, and overcome the poverty trap.

However, the scope of this case study is limited to understanding effective parenting within the context of the PES Program, which may overlook other factors that influence left-behind children's well-being and learning. Assessing how well the PES Program addresses the non-educational and educational needs of left-behind children may require longitudinal data, which may not be feasible given the program's infancy.

1 *Any views, statements, or analyses expressed in this paper are those of the author and should not be attributed to those of EDCOM II.*

The needs of left-behind children are likely to evolve over time due to changes in family dynamics and other external factors. A case study conducted at a single point in time may not capture these evolving needs.

Review of Related Literature

As economic opportunities outside the country drive millions of Filipinos abroad, labor migration has led to the rise of transnational families, wherein one or both parents work overseas while their children remain in the home country. Hence, this literature review examines the Filipino family, analyzing how migration affects caregiving and parental involvement and how children cope with growing up without parents. Subsequently, it proposes a model of effective parenting for left-behind children based on existing literature.

The Filipino Family as a Social Institution

The family represents the basic unit of Philippine society (Battistella & Conaco, 1998). Viewing it as a source of security and identity, Filipinos prioritize their family above all else, such that the needs and well-being of the family take precedence over personal desires (Abalos, 2023; Jimenez, 2015). This strong family orientation is deeply ingrained in Filipino culture and collectivist values, influencing individuals' behaviors, decisions, and aspirations (Alampay, 2013; Asis et al., 2004).

While the nuclear family structure, consisting of parents and their children, is prevalent, the Filipino family maintains close ties and relationships with extended kin, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins (Asis et al., 2004; Battistella & Conaco, 1998). The extended family often lives together and provides support for childrearing and caregiving. This extended kinship promotes a sense of belonging and shared responsibility within the family (Alampay, 2013).

Traditionally, Filipino families have adhered to distinct gender roles. Fathers are expected to be primary breadwinners and providers, whereas mothers are responsible for nurturing and caring for their children and homes. These roles are often reflected in terms, such as haligi ng tahanan (pillar of the home) and ilaw ng tahanan (light of the home) for fathers and mothers, respectively (Alampay, 2013; Gutierrez, 2024). These gender roles are reinforced through childrearing practices (Aguilar, 2020; Cortes, 2015; Gutierrez, 2024). For instance, children are often assigned chores according to these roles, with daughters obliged to help with domestic tasks and sons expected to assist their fathers in looking after the family (Aguilar, 2020).

Children are central to the Filipino family (Abalos, 2023). They are often regarded as sources of joy and pride (Abalos, 2023; Aguilar, 2020). They are rarely considered a burden, even with the hardships associated with raising them (Abalos, 2023). Filipino parents make significant sacrifices to their children, as shown by how they prioritize their well-being and education (Aguilar, 2020). This child-centeredness fosters a strong emotional bond between parents and their children (Alampay, 2013).

Filipinos believe that a child's actions and achievements are reflected in the family (Alampay, 2013; Mamauag et al., 2021). This is why Filipino parents see themselves as responsible for their children's failures in school and tend to attribute a child's success to proper discipline (Alampay, 2013). This sense of responsibility motivates parents, particularly mothers, to become involved in their children's education, often going above and beyond to provide support, resources, and encouragement (Garcia & de Guzman, 2020).

Parental Involvement in Transnational Households

Urbanization and globalization have changed the structure, dynamics, and living arrangements of families (Abalos, 2023). The concept of a typical family has evolved as parental absence due to labor migration has become common (Alampay & Garcia, 2019). This trend is particularly pronounced in the Philippines, which currently holds the highest number of international migrant workers in Southeast Asia (Fu et al., 2023).

Labor Migration as a Phenomenon

The Philippines has sent workers overseas since the 1900s, with significant growth in international migration during the 1970s economic crisis (Asis, 2006; Pajaron et al., 2020). The 1974 Labor Code's Manpower Exchange Program institutionalized this strategy to address unemployment by reducing local job market pressure while meeting global labor demands (Asis, 2006; Bryant, 2005). Initially dominated by male construction workers and seafarers (Asis et al., 2016), migration patterns shifted in the 1980s as East and Southeast Asia's aging population increased the demand for female domestic workers (Asis et al., 2004; Cuaton & Teguihanon, 2019). While intended to be temporary, OFW remittances provide substantial economic benefits through foreign exchange and poverty reduction. This success transformed labor exports from a short-term solution to a fundamental economic strategy (Brillo, 2008).

In 2023, OFWs reached 2.16 million, with 98% having existing work contracts, while the rest were employed without work permits or visas. OFWs aged 45 years and older comprised the largest group at 24%. Females constituted 56% of OFWs, with a significant proportion in elementary occupations that involved performing routine tasks, such as cleaning, basic maintenance, and deliveries. The CALABARZON Region had the largest share of OFWs at 19%, followed by the Central Luzon Region at 15%, and the National Capital Region at 10%. Asia remains the main destination, primarily Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2024).

On average, international migrant workers earn four to five times more than they would in their home countries. For some, this substantial increase in income outweighs the expenses associated with relocation (Bryant, 2005). The remittances sent to families help alleviate financial constraints and credit limitations for households, enabling left-behind children to attend school, avoid entering the workforce, and maintain good health (Pajaron et al., 2020). In addition to improving their standard of living, some of the remittances are spent on enrolling left-behind children in private schools, which are typically viewed as offering superior instruction compared to public schools (Bryant, 2005).

However, data from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) reveal a significant gender disparity in income among international migrant workers,

with migrant mothers earning less than migrant fathers, even after accounting for factors, such as education, age, and location. On average, migrant mothers remit approximately 70% less than their male counterparts do. This gap can be attributed to the types of jobs typically available to women migrants, who are more likely to be employed in undervalued and underpaid sectors. Specifically, three out of four Filipino migrant mothers work as domestic workers in a sector characterized by low wages, limited job security, and often exploitative working conditions. This gender wage gap can affect left-behind children's access to education, healthcare, and other opportunities (Cortes, 2015).

While remittances are crucial for improving the standard of living, they often do not translate into long-term investments that could break the cycle of poverty (Cuaton & Teguihanon, 2019; de la Garza, 2010; Reyes, 2007). Additionally, the process of migrating to work overseas often involves substantial upfront costs, including recruitment fees, travel expenses, and documentation (Cuaton & Teguihanon, 2019; Lan & Wei, 2016). Many low-income families need to borrow money to finance these expenses, leading to debt burdens that offset the benefits of remittances. This financial strain can perpetuate their precarious economic situation and prevent them from escaping poverty (Cuaton & Teguihanon, 2019).

Approximately 45% of OFWs are parents, or nearly half of the country's migrant workers have left behind children in the Philippines (Edillon, 2008). This underscores the scale of transnational households and situates parental migration as not only a social phenomenon but also an educational concern particularly with the majority of OFWs are females concentrated in elementary occupations and low-wage jobs. Findings from SEA-PLM (2021) demonstrate a strong correlation between parental occupation, socioeconomic status, and a child's literacy and numeracy outcomes. The large share of migrant parents in low-income sectors highlights how labor migration intersects with the learning crisis: while remittances may improve household resources, the educational outcomes of left-behind children remain constrained by both socioeconomic conditions and parental absence.

The Rise in Transnational Families

OFWs often encounter challenges in obtaining legal status that permits family relocation. They typically migrate alone or, less frequently, with their spouse (Fu et al., 2023). Many OFWs, who are allowed to bring their children, cannot do so because of a lack of childcare options, insufficient wages to cover high living costs in host countries, and inaccessibility of social benefits for their families (Zhu et al., 2023). These realities result in their children remaining in the Philippines (Cortes, 2015; Fu et al., 2023).

Transnational families constitute one out of ten households in the Philippines (Aguilar, 2020; Cortes, 2015; Solis, 2020). These families have become prevalent in the country, given that OFWs represent 10% of the labor force (Cortes, 2015).

Care Arrangements. When one or both parents are absent due to labor migration, household composition and family responsibilities need to be reimagined, with care arrangements negotiated among migrant parents, stay-behind caregivers, and left-behind children (Aguilar, 2020; Fu et al., 2023). These transnational arrangements challenge established norms regarding

gender-based division of labor, spousal dynamics, and parent-child interactions (Aguilar, 2020).

When a father leaves for overseas work, the primary caregiving of left-behind children rests on their mother (Cortes, 2015). This care arrangement is not largely disruptive, as it aligns with traditional gender roles, where mothers are expected to stay at home to care for their children and fathers are obliged to provide for their families (Lam & Yeoh, 2019). With mothers continuing to fulfill their caregiving roles, the conventional structure of a Filipino family remains intact, which allows for a greater degree of continuity in children's lives (Cortes, 2015). Notably, other relatives play a less significant role in caregiving when mothers stay behind. Mostly, paid domestic help assists with childcare and household tasks when fathers are not around (Asis, 2006).

When a mother decides to migrate abroad to earn money for the family, most left-behind children remain under the care of their fathers, who assume responsibility for meeting their material, emotional, and social needs (Cuaton & Teguihanon, 2019). This care arrangement may lead to a shift in traditional gender roles within the family and influence parenting approaches (Cuaton & Teguihanon, 2019; Gutierrez, 2024).

However, there is a common assumption that men are inherently incapable of providing adequate care to their families (Aguilar, 2020). When a mother is absent, the father is not expected to step into her nurturing role (Abenir, 2019; Aguilar, 2020). He believes that a mother's care remains different (Asis et al., 2016). Although stay-behind fathers may attempt to fulfill both parental roles, cultural and patriarchal norms often hinder them from fully engaging in "mothering" (Cuaton & Teguihanon, 2019, p. 1852). These stay-behind fathers would also feel overwhelmed to assume the tasks of caring for their households, particularly among those employed (Aguilar, 2020; Gutierrez, 2024).

Families would, therefore, require assistance from female relatives, such as aunts and grandmothers, to meet the needs of left-behind children (Cortes, 2015; Cuaton & Teguihanon, 2019). Extended family members are chosen as caregivers based on a hierarchy of care wherein migrant mothers ask for assistance from their own mothers before their sisters and mothers-in-law (Lan & Wei, 2016). In their absence, families would hire domestic help or leave younger children in the care of older siblings (Arguillas & Williams, 2010; Cuaton & Teguihanon, 2019).

When both parents migrate to work abroad, care arrangements for their children are substantially disrupted and become uncertain (Lam & Yeoh, 2019; Tolentino & Arcinas, 2018). Extended family members usually step up to become parent substitutes (Asis, 2006). If relatives are unavailable due to old age and illness, they live far away, or they are overburdened with their own parental duties, other care arrangements are made (Peng & Wong, 2016). Either domestic help is employed, adolescent children are asked to fulfill parental responsibilities to their younger siblings, or, if old enough, children are left on their own (Aguilar, 2020; Arguillas & Williams, 2010; dela Garza, 2010; Peng & Wong, 2016).

Transnational Parenting. Around three out of ten Filipino children are growing up without at least one parent due to international labor migration, a trend that is increasingly reshaping family dynamics (Zhu et al., 2023). The rise of parents migrating

overseas, particularly mothers, has drawn attention to the potential care shortage and crisis for children left behind (Fu et al., 2023).

To compensate for their physical absence, migrant parents actively seek ways to remain involved in their children's lives, often through financial support. Sending remittances is one of the most common methods migrant parents use to care for their children from afar, as these funds cover essential needs, such as education, healthcare, and daily expenses (Aguilar, 2020). For many migrant parents, sending remittances is more than just a financial transaction; it is a form of caregiving that reflects their deep concern for their children's well-being (Cuaton & Teguihanon, 2019). These remittances carry symbolic value, often referred to as emotional remittances, which represent not only money but also migrant parents' embedded feelings of love, concern, guilt, and sacrifice (Tolentino & Arcinas, 2018). In addition to providing financial support, parents often send physical gifts or cultural items that carry significant emotional weight to reinforce their connections with their left-behind children. While personal visits are less frequent due to financial considerations, these remittances and gifts serve as tangible expressions of migrant parents' ongoing commitment and care despite geographical distance (Solis, 2020).

Migrant parents often rely on technology to maintain communication and emotional connections with their left-behind children (Lan & Wei, 2016; Reyes, 2007). They use various communication technologies, such as mobile phone calls, text messages, video calls, and social media platforms, to be involved with their children and bridge the geographical distance between them (Aguilar, 2020; Fu et al., 2023; Lan & Wei, 2016; Solis, 2020; Tolentino & Arcinas, 2018). These technologies have become increasingly accessible and affordable, allowing for more frequent and richer interactions (Asis, 2006; Fu et al., 2023; Madiano & Miller, 2011). The pervasiveness of technology makes transnational parenting possible by allowing migrant parents to engage in parenting practices despite the physical separation caused by migration (Aguilar, 2020; Jimenez, 2015; Lan & Wei, 2016).

Migrant parents prioritize regular contact with their children, calling at least once a week to discuss school, monitor daily activities, offer guidance, and, if needed, engage in disciplinary actions from afar (Abenir, 2019; Lan & Wei, 2016). This frequent communication strengthens their presence in their children's lives and enables them to participate in their upbringing (Fu et al., 2023; Lan & Wei, 2016; Solis, 2020). In contrast to migrant fathers, migrant mothers tend to engage in more frequent and lengthy conversations with their left-behind children and substitute caregivers (Lan & Wei, 2016). This form of transnational mothering covers a wide range of topics, including the well-being of each family member, their children's daily requirements and social connections, matters related to schooling, and other dynamic aspects of family life (Aguilar, 2020; Jimenez, 2015; Lan & Wei, 2016).

Effects on Left-Behind Children. The impact of parental absence due to labor migration varies significantly depending on the child's age and developmental stage. Younger children and adolescents react differently and their needs during these crucial periods influence how they cope with the challenges of having parents working abroad.

Early Childhood. The early years, particularly the first five, are critical for a child's cognitive, emotional, and social

development. During this developmental stage, children form essential attachments with their caregivers that are fundamental to their emotional security and overall well-being. Since younger children, especially infants, are highly dependent on consistent caregiving for their physical and emotional needs, the absence of a primary caregiver, such as a mother, due to labor migration, can disrupt these attachment processes. This disruption often leads to feelings of insecurity and anxiety in younger children, and may cause long-term difficulties in emotional regulation and issues related to mental health (Asis, 2006; Capol et al., 2024; Cuaton & Teguihanon, 2019; de la Garza, 2010; Reyes, 2007).

Younger children lack the cognitive ability to understand the reasons for their parents' migration, which can lead to abandonment and neglect. Without the capacity to rationalize why their parents are away, they may experience emotional distress as they internalize parental absence in the form of rejection or loss (Aguilar, 2020; Capol et al., 2024; Cortes, 2015; Reyes, 2007; Solis, 2020). In particular, the absence of a mother can create a significant void in their lives, impacting their sense of security and well-being (Battistella & Conaco, 1998; de la Garza, 2010).

Research suggests that the absence of a parent, especially during a child's formative years, can negatively affect cognitive development. This impact can be attributed to the crucial role parents play in providing cognitive stimulation, emotional support, and a stable learning environment. Without parental involvement, children left behind may struggle to develop language skills, problem-solving abilities, and other cognitive functions essential for academic success (de la Garza, 2010; Pajaron et al., 2020).

Middle Childhood. As left-behind children grow older and enter school, they become more aware of their family situation and the social implications of having migrant parents. They may experience a mix of emotions, including pride in their parents' sacrifices, resentment over their absence, and longing for return. This emotional complexity can create internal conflict, as they navigate between appreciating economic gains and coping with the emotional toll of parental absence (Aguilar, 2020; Battistella & Conaco, 1998; Cortes, 2015; Reyes, 2007).

Children aged six to twelve years may also face social difficulties, such as isolation or bullying, due to the absence of migrant parents. The stigma of being a child left behind, especially if the family situation is widely known, can make social integration challenging. Adjusting to new care arrangements, often with extended families or relatives, adds another layer of complexity, as the children left behind must contend with new authority figures and different household dynamics. As a result, many struggle to cope emotionally (Aguilar, 2020; Battistella & Conaco, 1998; Cortes, 2015). Although they may understand the necessity of their parents' absence, they still experience feelings of sadness, loneliness, and resentment, which can affect their social interactions and emotional well-being (Aguilar, 2020; Arguillas & Williams, 2010; Battistella & Conaco, 1998; Cortes, 2015; Reyes, 2007; Pajaron et al., 2020).

Studies have shown mixed findings regarding the effect of parental absence on the academic performance of children at this developmental stage. Although children are still developing their cognitive and emotional regulation skills at this age, parental absence can have varied effects depending on several factors.

On one hand, remittances sent by migrant parents allow families to invest more in their children's education, providing access to better schools, learning materials, and extracurricular activities (Arguillas & Williams, 2010; Battistella & Conaco, 1998; Kunwar, 2022; Pajaron et al., 2020). This economic benefit can outweigh the negative impacts of parental absence and lead to better academic outcomes for left-behind children (Arguillas & Williams, 2010; Kunwar, 2022). Moreover, understanding the sacrifices their parents make by migrating to work abroad can instill a strong sense of responsibility and motivation in these children to perform well in school (Kunwar, 2022). Faced with the emotional and practical challenges of being separated from one or both parents, some left-behind children cope with these difficulties with greater independence and resilience (Asis, 2006; Navarez & Diaz, 2017).

However, some left-behind children tend to perform poorer academically than their peers with both parents present in the household. In particular, children left behind by migrant mothers seem to have the lowest average school grades and class ranks (Battistella & Conaco, 1998). Boys, especially those who experience prolonged separation from their migrant parents, are more likely to experience negative school outcomes than girls are (Aguilar, 2020; Battistella & Conaco, 1998; Cortes, 2015; Kunwar, 2020). Factors, such as disruption in care arrangements, lack of parental involvement in schoolwork, and added household responsibilities in the absence of a parent, can explain these outcomes (Isaksson Castro, 2015; de la Garza, 2010; Lam & Yeoh, 2019; Pajaron et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, studies have found no significant differences in academic outcomes between children of migrant parents and those with both parents present (Asis, 2006; Fu et al., 2023), suggesting that parental absence may not solely determine academic success. Key factors include the quality of caregiving, communication with migrant parents, children's personality and coping mechanisms, and the social context (Asis et al., 2013; Castro, 2015; Fu et al., 2023; Lam & Yeoh, 2019; Navarez & Diaz, 2017; Pajaron et al., 2020; Tolentino & Arcinas, 2018).

Adolescence. During the adolescent stage of left-behind children, parental absence due to labor migration can intensify feelings of anger, resentment, and loss and can lead to increased risk-taking behaviors, such as substance abuse, delinquency, and early sexual activity (Antia et al., 2020; Dominguez & Hall, 2022; Solis, 2020). This vulnerability may stem from a combination of factors, including a lack of parental supervision, emotional distress, and the desire to cope with feelings of loneliness and isolation (Antia et al., 2020; de la Garza, 2010). Left-behind children may also struggle to reconcile their sense of self with their family's transnational setup. They may find it difficult to connect with their migrant parents, which may lead to feelings of detachment and difficulty seeking guidance and support (Aguilar, 2020). While some may find support and resilience through their peers or extended family, others may experience problems forming and maintaining healthy social relationships (Dominguez & Hall, 2022).

Migrant parents commonly send remittances to support their children's education, allowing them to attend better schools, afford educational resources, and reduce their need to work to contribute to their household income (Arguillas & Williams, 2010; Cortes, 2015; Fu et al., 2023; Kunwar, 2022; Pajaron et al., 2020). Consequently,

left-behind children at the adolescent stage tend to stay at school longer and achieve higher levels of education (Arguillas & Wiliams, 2010; Pajaron et al., 2020).

However, adolescent children of migrant mothers are more likely to lag in school than children with both parents present or even children with migrant fathers (Cortes, 2015). This observation can be attributed to the crucial role mothers often play in providing emotional support, academic guidance, and supervision (Cortes, 2015; de la Garza, 2010).

Research has shown that the absence of a parent, regardless of gender, can lead to increased responsibilities for adolescents left behind, particularly girls, who often must take on more household and caregiving duties (Aguilar, 2020; Cortes, 2015). These increased responsibilities can limit students' time spent studying, leading to poorer academic performance or even school dropout (Cortes, 2015; de la Garza, 2010).

Several factors can mitigate the effects of parental absence on adolescents. Supportive caregivers can reduce the negative impact of absent parents (Asis, 2006; Reyes, 2007; Pajaron et al., 2020; Tolentino & Arcinas, 2018). Regular communication with absent parents helps adolescents manage their emotional stress and improve their well-being and academic outcomes (Asis, 2006; Fu et al., 2023; Jimenez, 2015). Strong relationships with teachers, peers, and their communities can provide support and enhance academic performance (Tolentino & Arcinas, 2018).

Effective Parenting for Left-Behind Children

In summary, families negotiate roles, relationships, and parenting practices in a transnational context to meet the non-educational and educational needs of children left behind. Effective parenting in this context involves adapting to the unique challenges of geographic separation and relying on social and community resources to address the developmental needs of left-behind children. Figure 1 shows the interconnectedness of the emotional, structural, and social aspects of effective parenting, which can contribute to the well-being and learning of left-behind children.

Central to effective parenting is maintaining emotional attachment with left-behind children, despite their physical absence. Migrant parents can establish an emotional presence with their children by imparting emotional remittances, which symbolize their care and concern for them. They can also remain actively involved in their children's daily lives and can be attuned to their diverse needs through regular communication using digital technologies. Reassuring left-behind children about their emotional support is important for creating a secure environment for them to feel connected, well-guided, loved, and valued.

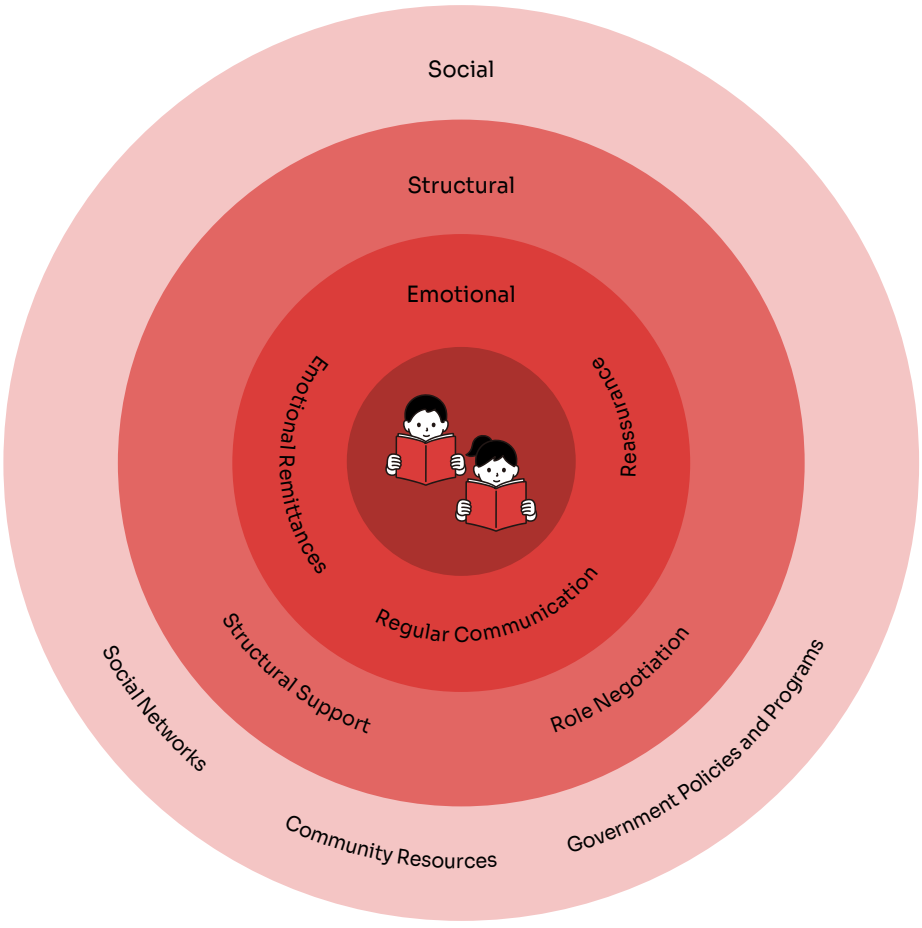
Another important aspect of effective parenting for left-behind children is providing structural support to ensure that these children receive consistent care and guidance amidst parental absence due to migration. Parenting by proxy involves entrusting caregiving responsibilities to other family members or close relatives, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, or older siblings, who take on the role of parent substitutes for left-behind children. The

absence of their parents is less likely felt by these children if they are supported, valued, and cared for by familiar figures, who uphold their parents' expectations and values. By maintaining open communication, aligning values, and fostering collaborative caregiving through role negotiation, transnational families can create a stable and effective parenting structure that can benefit both children and extended family networks. Having a structured caregiving system within the family ensures that, despite parental absence, there is a supportive environment that meets daily needs and nurtures the emotional, social, and educational development of children left behind.

The key to effective parenting of left-behind children is capitalizing on social networks beyond the immediate family and making the most of the available resources in the community. Social networks consist of relationships with neighbors, teachers, local organizations, and the community, who can offer resources, guidance, and opportunities that migrant parents may not be able to provide directly to their children. Migrant parents can strengthen their involvement in their children's lives by engaging in relevant government policies and programs that promote child welfare, development, and social protection. Their active participation in these institutional support systems ensures that their children are not only well provided for, but are also positioned to thrive within supportive environments that compensate for their absence.

FIGURE 1

Emotional, Structural, and Social Aspects of Effective Parenting for Left-Behind Children



Methods

This study used a case study design to understand how well the PES Program caters to the diverse needs of children left behind by OFWs. A case study design is suitable for this study, as it is useful for an in-depth exploration of a case within its real-world context, such as the PES Program of the Philippine government. The aim of a case study is to thoroughly analyze a case to gain a better understanding of a larger issue and provide insights that can inform policies and practices (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

To understand how parental involvement in education is portrayed in the PES Program, this study examined the content of the current PES modules from the DSWD. The contextual meaning of parent effectiveness was explored from these documents using conventional content analysis, which allowed for insights to emerge from the gathered data rather than relying on preconceived categories. Conventional content analysis involves repeatedly reading documents, noting first impressions and initial thoughts, assigning codes to the written notes, sorting the codes into meaningful categories, classifying the categories based on their relatedness, and reporting the contextual meaning as findings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Given the recent institutionalization of the PES Program and that only a few LGUs have fully implemented it, data on the participation of migrant parents and their substitutes are not yet available from the DSWD (A. Vinluan, personal communication, November 15, 2024). Furthermore, guidelines from the DSWD (2024) uphold the data privacy of their beneficiaries and dissuade the involvement of vulnerable children in research, unless unavoidable and necessary. Therefore, DSWD beneficiaries were excluded from this study.

Migrant mothers employed as domestic workers in Hong Kong for at least six months were recruited to participate in this study with the assistance of an NGO advocating the welfare of OFWs and their families. This study focused on migrant mothers, as care arrangements for left-behind children are more disruptive when mothers migrate to work abroad compared to fathers (Lam & Yeoh, 2019). Hong Kong was chosen because it is a common destination for migrant mothers from the Philippines with a large and stable OFW community. Filipino female domestic workers in Hong Kong face unique labor and financial challenges, including limited salaries and wage disparities, compared to male OFWs (Cortes, 2015). Despite their sacrifices, only 32% of their earnings are typically allocated for remittances, which is often insufficient to lift their families out of poverty or significantly improve their children's educational outcomes (Perez et al., 2018). This financial strain increases the likelihood that their left-behind children in the Philippines will be enrolled in public schools, a key factor in understanding the impact of labor migration on family dynamics and educational opportunities. Setting employment as a domestic worker for at least six months would allow for gathering varied insights into remittance behaviors, family adjustments, and transnational caregiving dynamics, which are central to this study's objectives.

This study recruited migrant mothers in Hong Kong for semi-structured interviews until data saturation was achieved. In total, eight migrant mothers were interviewed through phone to understand their realities

and gauge their interests, identify the factors influencing their willingness to participate, and understand their needs and expectations for a parenting program, such as PES. When studying individuals with very similar backgrounds or experiences, a relatively small number of interviews, typically around six to seven, is often sufficient to identify the main themes and patterns within the qualitative data. While a small sample size may limit how broadly the findings can be applied to other contexts, this size allows for a more in-depth understanding of their lived experiences and perspectives (Guest et al., 2006).

The migrant mothers included in this study were asked to nominate their substitutes and one of their left-behind children for interviews. To get their perspectives about attending a parenting program and their needs for looking after left-behind children, semi-structured interviews with the parent substitutes were conducted through phone calls. With their assent, the children left behind by migrant mothers participating in this study also underwent semi-structured phone interviews to understand their perceptions of effective parenting and evaluate how the PES Program can cater to their non-educational and educational needs. Feedback from these parent substitutes and left-behind children could provide insights into whether the PES Program can be effective in equipping caregivers with parenting knowledge and skills to support educational progress and other needs of their wards.

Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and translated into English using TurboScribe. Each verbatim transcript was then subjected to conventional content analysis to gain insights into the reach, relevance, and alignment of the PES Program with the needs and realities of transnational families. The findings reflected not only awareness of the parenting program but also its perceived significance and applicability in promoting the well-being and learning of left-behind children.

Furthermore, five LGUs were purposively selected in this study to represent varying contexts of engaging with the private sector for the implementation of the PES Program. The first LGU, a highly urbanized city in the Cordillera Administrative Region, partners with a foundation that represents the corporate social responsibility arm of a chain of convenience stores in the country. The second LGU, a highly urbanized city in the National Capital Region, works with another foundation, an NGO that caters to marginalized families living on the streets. These two foundations are the only private social welfare and development agencies with registration and licenses from the DSWD to operate PES. Both LGUs collaborate with the private sector, such as educational institutions and faith-based organizations, in carrying out the PES Program. The third LGU, a third-class component city in the Ilocos Region, collaborates with government entities, including the local school board, city health office, and city legal office, in addition to educational institutions and faith-based organizations from the private sector, in the implementation of the PES Program. The fourth LGU, a first-class component city in the CALABARZON Region, and the fifth LGU, a first-class municipality in the CALABARZON Region, lack partnerships with the public and private sectors in running the PES Program. These LGUs mostly belong to regions with a significant number of transnational families.

Semi-structured interviews with social workers from the social welfare and development offices of the five LGUs and

representatives from the two private social welfare and development agencies were conducted through videoconferencing to examine the strengths of the PES Program in fostering effective parenting of left-behind children, identify any areas for improvement, and understand the role of the public and private sectors in implementing the PES Program. The recordings of the interviews were transcribed and translated into English, when necessary, using TurboScribe. Verbatim transcripts of these key informant interviews underwent conventional content analysis to develop a model of engagement and shared accountability to support the well-being and learning of left-behind children.

To ensure research integrity, approval from the research ethics committee of Ateneo de Manila University (AdMUREC_24_083) was obtained prior to data collection involving human participants. Informed consent and assent forms contained details on the purpose of the research, voluntary nature of participation, data confidentiality, anonymity, and right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Findings

Parental involvement in children's education is widely recognized as a key factor in improving academic success and overall well-being. This study explores the complex realities faced by transnational families and examines the reach, relevance, and alignment of the PES Program with the diverse needs of these families. It also investigates the role of the public and private sectors in implementing the PES Program to identify its strengths and areas for improvement.

Realities of Transnational Families

Transnational families often struggle with financial difficulties, the emotional strain of geographical separation, and challenges of parenting from a distance. Despite these challenges, migrant mothers employ various coping strategies to fulfill their parental duties and responsibilities and rely on their substitutes as support systems to raise their children.

Struggles of Transnational Families

One of the primary reasons mothers migrate abroad is financial stability. Many migrant mothers and other OFWs leave their families behind for better opportunities to provide for the daily needs of their children, such as food, housing, healthcare, and education. However, migrant mothers in this study expressed frustration that their sacrifice did not always translate to financial security, as their remittances would not be enough to cover all their families' expenses. Even if their children are in public school, they must provide electric fans, school materials, and other contributions. Several OFWs end up borrowing because of all expenses back home and payments for loans taken out to cover recruitment fees, visa processing, and airfare, as one migrant mother revealed.

OFWs, such as the migrant mothers interviewed in this study, would constantly worry about whether the children they left behind are safe and well taken care of in their absence. This worry was more

pronounced for two migrant mothers whose children suffered from heart ailments that constrained them from keeping up with school. One of these migrant mothers was also particularly concerned about her "son's physical health affecting his self-esteem and ability to engage with his peers." For most of these migrant mothers, they would often think about if their "children have eaten, have done well in school, have received proper discipline and supervision, and have stayed away from negative influence."

Several narrated the emotional strain of being geographically separated from their families. For instance, one migrant mother expressed feelings of guilt about not being physically present to her children. She was anxious about how her absence affected her children's well-being. She could not help but be concerned about whether her children feel "abandoned or unsupported." Another migrant mother shared that she sometimes felt that her support as a mother was lacking despite her efforts. She would experience "emotionally distant" from her children even with her sacrifices.

These findings were further substantiated by the accounts of the children interviewed. Younger children encountered "confusion and uncertainty regarding [their mothers'] absence during the initial months of working abroad." This confusion and uncertainty stemmed from their limited understanding of the circumstances surrounding their mothers' departure and the sudden changes in their family dynamics. Even older children, despite having experienced prolonged periods of separation, would experience recurring episodes of loneliness and yearning for their mothers. This persistent emotional response suggests that the impact of maternal absence extends beyond the initial adjustment period and can have long-lasting effects on left-behind children's well-being.

Despite their best efforts, migrant mothers in this study faced several challenges that made regular communication with their left-behind children difficult. Domestic workers often work long hours and are free late at night or on rest days. Several of them work for employers, who limit their phone usage during working hours. For instance, a migrant mother could not call her children whenever she wants because "there is a security camera monitoring [her] every movement." Some migrant mothers have difficulties making video calls, as their families in the province do not have stable Internet access. A migrant mother also mentioned how her adolescent children seemed to be "preoccupied with their own lives," as they would become less responsive to her calls and messages.

Additionally, migrant mothers in this study discussed the challenges of supporting their children's education while working abroad. They expressed concerns about not being able to guide their left-behind children properly with their studies, attend parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings, and volunteer in school activities due to their absence. They emphasized the importance of education in social mobility, but felt limited in their ability to help with their left-behind children's day-to-day schoolwork. At times, they would regret not being able to personally assist their children's learning.

Coping Strategies of Transnational Families

To address these concerns, migrant mothers in this study employed different strategies to stay involved in their children's lives. They would communicate with their left-behind children through daily video calls. These

video calls allow migrant mothers to interact with their children, talk to them about school and daily activities, and provide emotional support. Many of them would schedule regular calls, usually in the evening, when their left-behind children are home from school and when they are done with domestic work. Several of these migrant mothers would also use instant messaging to check their children throughout the day. They considered text messages to be useful for quick updates when calls were not feasible. Some would use social media platforms, such as Facebook, to monitor their children's activities and stay updated on their lives. For instance, they would check their children's posts and interactions to "gain insights into their emotional problems and social circles."

Despite the challenges of directly getting involved in their children's education, these migrant mothers would find alternative ways to help with their studies. One migrant mother would rely on "[her] sister, who is a teacher, to assist [her] children with their lessons," while a couple of migrant mothers would request their "much older children to teach their younger siblings." Another migrant mother would depend on a hired tutor to supervise her children closely. Others would also use the "group chat with the teachers where [they] receive updates about [their] children's school performance." Aside from guiding their left-behind children to become more independent and responsible, several of these migrant mothers would repeatedly remind their children of the "importance of their education for their future."

These findings clearly show how OFWs face a constant struggle between working abroad to provide financial security and ensuring the well-being and learning of their left-behind children. While they send remittances to meet their children's basic needs, they encounter difficulties in parenting from afar. Recognizing the impact of their absence, OFWs, such as the migrant mothers interviewed in this study, would heavily rely on their support systems to look after their children.

Support Systems of Transnational Families

The care of left-behind children is typically entrusted to support systems composed of family members, primarily their grandparents, fathers, older siblings, aunts, and uncles. Most migrant mothers in this study would leave their children in the care of their grandparents, especially when their spouses were also working or unable to provide full-time care. This care arrangement is common as stay-behind fathers "may not also be as nurturing or detail oriented as mothers in childcare," as one migrant mother explained. Therefore, grandmothers would take on parenting roles. In households where fathers and grandparents are unavailable or overwhelmed, older sisters would take on parental responsibility. Aunts and uncles would offer additional care and guidance to the left-behind children. This collective approach to childcare underscores the adaptability of transnational families in response to the challenges posed by labor migration while also highlighting the potential strain on family structures.

Although relatives would do their best to look after the left-behind children, they have their own responsibilities and struggles. Some parent substitutes may not be able to provide the same level of care and attention as parents would. For instance, one grandmother in this study had to take care of multiple grandchildren. Another grandmother was "too old to actively raise and oversee the grandchildren left in [her] care." Other parent substitutes would

already have their own concerns, including work, household duties, and the supervision of their immediate family.

As a result, the quality of care provided by parent substitutes varies significantly. Some substitutes struggled to establish the same level of emotional connection or understanding as a parent. Financial constraints would also affect the ability of some parent substitutes to fully provide children's needs. In addition, some left-behind children had to change from one caregiver to another. This temporary nature of caregiving arrangements could create instability and uncertainty for children, potentially affecting their sense of security and overall well-being.

Despite these challenges, parent substitutes for left-behind children would assume the crucial role of ensuring the well-being and learning of children in their care. One of their primary responsibilities is to provide the basic needs of left-behind children, including food, shelter, and clothing. They would carefully manage and budget the remittances sent by migrant mothers to cover household expenses, school-related costs, and healthcare needs. In some instances, these parent substitutes would engage in livelihood opportunities to supplement financial support, so that left-behind children's non-educational and educational needs are met despite financial constraints.

Many of the parent substitutes interviewed in this study would facilitate regular communication between left-behind children and migrant mothers. This support would not only help children feel more connected to their migrant mothers, but would also offer emotional reassurance and a sense of continuity in their relationships. These parent substitutes would also take on the responsibility of keeping migrant mothers informed about their children's lives, needs, and concerns. In this way, migrant mothers could remain involved in their children's well-being and learning, even from afar.

In addition to offering emotional support, several parent substitutes in this study would adopt a disciplinary approach that aligns with the values of migrant mothers. They would enforce household rules, promote good manners, and emphasize the importance of respect and responsibility. One grandmother, for instance, would try to explain to her grandchildren why she disciplines them to ensure that they understand the reasons behind her verbal guidance and advice. Because of this, none of them encountered significant problems and conflicts in raising children, who are not their own.

While some parent substitutes would assist left-behind children with their studies despite their limited education, others would often rely on children's independence or external support. However, they would set aside time to attend PTA meetings and other school-related activities of their wards. Regardless of the extent of their involvement, they would consistently "encourage the children to study diligently by reminding them that education is key to a better future." They would reassure these children about their mothers' absence, ensuring that they understood that their mothers work abroad to secure their future.

Most left-behind children in this study would ask for guidance and assistance from their older siblings when they encounter difficulties with schoolwork. They would also not hesitate to approach their teachers

for clarification regarding lessons. Such external support has helped them "cope with the demands of school," despite the lack of parental involvement in their learning.

Parent Effectiveness Service (PES) Program

RA 11908, or the PES Program Act, caters to solo parents and their parent substitutes, adolescent parents and their guardians, and parents or guardians of vulnerable children, including those at risk, in conflict with the law, exposed to or victims of violence, living in emergency situations due to disasters or armed conflicts, engaged in the worst forms of child labor, living with disabilities or special needs, or coming from indigenous communities and families of OFWs. The PES Program aims to enhance parenting knowledge and skills, particularly for those facing challenges in caregiving, to ensure the optimal development of children in their care.

Although recently enacted, the PES Program traced its roots to 1981 with the release of the "Handbook on Parent Effectiveness Service" developed by the Bureau of Family and Child Welfare of DSWD in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to address the specific needs of Filipino children and families. In 1983, this parenting program became the main component of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) under UNICEF. In accordance with the Local Government Code of 1991, the PES Program was one of the first social welfare and development services that DSWD devolved to LGUs. Years later, the handbook was transformed into a comprehensive training manual to include more topics relevant to parenting and child development, based on the recommendations and suggestions gathered from government agencies, NGOs, communities, and experts involved in the program since its inception. In 2000, the PES Program provided substance to RA 8980, or the ECCD Act, which aims to promote the role of parents and other caregivers as primary educators of children from birth to six years of age. RA 10410, or the Early Years Act of 2013, underscores the importance of effective parenting in strengthening ECCD programs. RA 9344, or the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006, as amended by RA 10630, or the Act Strengthening the Juvenile Justice System in the Philippines, stipulates that the court may require the parents of children at risk (CAR) and children in conflict with the law (CICL) to attend parenting programs, including PES, as part of the government intervention that would promote the welfare and best interests of these children. The PES Program also constitutes the social welfare and development services offered to solo parents and their families under RA 8972, or the Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2000, and RA 11861, or the Expanded Solo Parents' Welfare Act.

Reach, Relevance, and Alignment

Although the core principles of effective parenting are widely appreciated, the PES Program could be better tailored to fit the realities of transnational families, based on its reach, relevance, and alignment.

Reach. When the migrant mothers, their substitutes, and left-behind children were asked about their awareness of the PES Program, all of them "had not heard of this parenting program," were "unsure of its details," or "did not know how it works." They were unfamiliar with such a government program for transnational families. This limited awareness of the PES Program among transnational families is corroborated by accounts from the social

workers interviewed in this study, as most LGUs reported little to no participation from migrant parents in the PES sessions.

Even though migrant mothers in this study expressed interest in the PES Program because it could help them "become better parents," they admitted that it would be a struggle to find the time to participate. All of them reported that their weekdays were usually filled with work. Holding online sessions during their days off is a suggested option that affords them flexibility. Coordinating with the Philippine embassy to schedule this parenting program is another way to widen its reach. However, some migrant mothers were hesitant to attend during their days off, since those were their only days to rest.

Parent substitutes in this study held varied sentiments about attending parenting programs. Several of them would have the time to participate, whereas others, such as stay-behind fathers, would mostly be unavailable because they must earn a living. While some parent substitutes, such as grandmothers, were keen to learn about raising left-behind children, a few expressed reluctances because they already have "enough experience as a parent." Others worried about the incidental costs of attending the program, such as expenses for transportation and meals.

Notably, the PES Program is more widely attended by at-risk families. It has effectively reached parents of CAR, CICL, and Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) beneficiaries to help them fulfill their roles in child development and protection to prevent child abuse, neglect, and juvenile delinquency. Court-mandated participation ensures PES attendance among CAR and CICL parents, as explained by social workers in this study. However, no such enforcement exists for transnational families, except if left-behind children are considered CAR or CICL. Interestingly, the PES Program of one LGU only caters to parents availing their daycare services in compliance with RA 8980, or the ECCD Act, and RA 10410, or the Early Years Act of 2013. This LGU does not have court-mandated participation in its PES Program.

Most PES sessions encounter attendance problems, as parents and their substitutes prioritize livelihood needs and household duties. If available, mothers usually attend the PES Program, as fathers are "too busy at work," and parenting is often viewed as a mother's responsibility. The social workers also disclosed that several parents felt reluctant about the parenting program due to long-standing beliefs that "parenting comes naturally." Other parents are hesitant because attending a parenting program implies "inadequacy as parents." There seems to be a stigma attached to inclusion in the PES Program as this government intervention is associated with "parents of troubled children." Hence, some parents would feel "embarrassed" or "judged" if they attended such programs. They also believe parenting programs are unnecessarily intrusive as "family matters are private." Others consider the PES Program an intervention for problematic families rather than a form of parental support.

Relevance. Based on the IRR of RA 11908, or the PES Program Act, and the current PES manual, parent effectiveness is characterized by a deep understanding of a parent's roles and responsibilities, strong family relationships, and the ability to nurture a child's overall development in a safe and supportive environment. Effective parenting begins with self-awareness of parental responsibility, in which caregivers recognize their strengths and weaknesses,

set family values and goals, and cultivate a positive relationship within the family. This self-awareness allows parents to provide stability and guidance to their children amidst the evolving dynamics of modern Filipino families brought about by globalization, economic shifts, and technological advancements.

Effective parenting requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses a deep understanding of child development, behavior management, and children's rights. To provide appropriate support and guidance tailored to their children's specific needs, parents must be informed of the various stages of their children's physical, emotional, and cognitive development. Instead of punitive approaches, childrearing focuses on the use of positive discipline techniques to instill good behavior. By applying their knowledge of child rights and protection, parents can protect their children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Parents are more effective if they continue to provide guidance as their children become adolescents. They help them navigate through identity formation, peer influence, and exposure to risky behaviors, such as substance abuse and early pregnancy. By fostering open communication and encouraging responsible decision-making, parents can successfully support their children's transition into adulthood.

Providing proper nutrition, healthcare, and a safe environment in which children can thrive is another essential aspect of parent effectiveness. By being aware of basic health concerns, mental wellness, reproductive health, and access to medical services, parents can ensure their children's physical and emotional well-being. They can protect their children in times of crisis and secure their safety during unexpected situations as they are knowledgeable about disaster preparedness and emergency responses.

Lastly, the PES Program underscores the importance of well-managed homes and sound financial planning. Effective parents can balance childcare, household responsibilities, and work commitment through time and stress management. They promote a safe physical environment for their families by maintaining cleanliness and orderliness in the household, in addition to observing proper waste disposal and sanitation. Effective parents demonstrate financial literacy by carefully managing their income and expenses not only to cover essential needs but also to set aside savings for emergency situations or unforeseen circumstances. They instill financial literacy in their children by teaching them the value of savings and responsible spending at an early age.

These concepts of effective parenting make up the eleven topics that are part of the PES Program. These topics seek to equip parents and their substitutes with the knowledge and skills necessary to create a nurturing, secure, and supportive environment for their children's well-being and learning.

When the topics included in the parenting program were enumerated, migrant mothers and parent substitutes interviewed in this study believed that the PES Program could help them fulfill their duties and responsibilities to children left behind. They are willing to attend such programs because they are for the best interests of their children. One of the left-behind children interviewed in this study expressed the need for a parenting program, particularly when "transitioning" or when their migrant parents are about to leave for work abroad. This sentiment was also raised by several migrant

mothers during interviews when they heard of a parenting program for transnational families.

Topics that most migrant mothers and parent substitutes found relevant in their situation were child development and adolescent behavior. Many migrant mothers struggle to understand the emotional and psychological changes their children undergo, particularly as they grow older, without direct parental supervision. One migrant mother, for instance, brought up the "need to understand what [her] teenager is going through." Another observed how her "child's behavior changed after nine months of being away." She feared that her child might develop poor habits or misbehave due to a lack of proper discipline. Given these instances, both migrant mothers and their substitutes expressed that they would benefit from being guided to recognize and address the needs of left-behind children based on their developmental stage. In addition to strategies for maintaining meaningful communication and ensuring that children feel emotionally connected to their migrant parents, a discussion on ways to stay involved in their children's daily lives and arrange for co-parenting with substitutes would be helpful.

Most parent substitutes felt that financial management was another aspect of the PES Program that could be useful for transnational families. Given that they bear the responsibility of managing the remittances sent by migrant mothers for the family's needs, many parent substitutes, as reflected in the interviews, would face financial constraints as they raise the children left in their care. One of the most recurring concerns among parent substitutes is the challenge of budgeting remittances to cover school expenses and daily necessities. If equipped with financial literacy, these parent substitutes can effectively allocate resources, prioritize essential expenses, and cope with unforeseen financial burdens.

Alignment. The current PES manual is an enriched version of the 1991 edition. Released in 2001, the manual contains nine modules that aim to help parents better fulfill their role in confronting the many challenges of parenting. The PES modules are based on the principle that parenting is a learned skill and significant responsibility for parents. The philosophies that both parents should rear their children together and that parents with strong relationships should be better equipped to raise their children have also guided the development of the modules. The PES manual was written for the use of facilitators from the DSWD and the social welfare and development offices in different cities and municipalities. Presently, the PES manual is undergoing review and revision by the DSWD in consultation with key stakeholders to align it with RA 11908, or the PES Program Act.

Noticeably, the principles and philosophies underlying manual development mainly consider parents as the audience. They do not include the unique role of parent substitutes as caregivers. Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of these parent substitutes in childrearing can enhance their sense of purpose and value in participating in PES Program.

Considering that the PES manual was intended to be used by social workers, there was no clarity regarding their roles and responsibilities in implementing the parenting program. The manual quickly discussed its purpose and content without identifying the capacities and qualifications to facilitate the modules to the parents. These aspects need to be identified early so

that social workers will be more effective in achieving the aims of the PES Program.

The current PES manual instructs social workers to use verbatim scripts while facilitating the parenting program. However, these scripts are only available in English. As such, social workers need to translate the module content into the local language to make it suitable for their intended audience. However, social workers interviewed in this study revealed that several topics, such as the stages of child development, can be "too technical and challenging to facilitate" in the local language.

The topics within each module are also broad, encompassing a substantial amount of information. Consequently, the duration of each session was rather long, particularly considering that there were approximately one to three activities to complete for each module. If parents or their substitutes attend all these modules, it would require approximately 35 hours in total. For instance, one LGU holds the parenting program for three consecutive days with grocery items provided to parents as compensation for their time. Given the target audience's limited ability to dedicate time to the PES Program, there is a need to reassess whether the duration can indeed be effective.

Furthermore, several social workers voiced concerns that existing modules from DSWD are outdated or too lengthy to be practical for today's working parents. The current PES manual focuses on general parenting, but lacks specific modules for raising left-behind children. There are no tailored PES modules for left-behind children or for transnational families in most LGUs. Two of these LGUs acknowledged the need for new PES modules to address parental absence, emotional resilience, and digital parenting. Most PES sessions of LGUs prioritize face-to-face engagement with physically present parents or substitutes, making migrant parents functionally excluded from direct participation. While some LGUs have introduced community-based outreach strategies, these initiatives do not explicitly incorporate digital or remote learning options that would allow migrant parents to engage in parenting programs. The lack of flexible or technology-driven PES alternatives significantly limits the program's alignment with the realities of transnational families.

Given these findings, the PES Program does not officially recognize transnational families as a target population. In practice, social workers are not required to track the participation of migrant parents and their substitutes, compared to those mandated by the court.

Role of the Public and Private Sectors

Nonetheless, the implementation of the PES Program demonstrates several key strengths in public and private sector collaboration. LGUs, in partnership with NGOs, schools, faith-based organizations, and the private sector, have played an active role in customizing their PES Program to meet the specific needs of their communities.

One LGU, in partnership with the corporate social responsibility arm of a chain of convenience stores, recently launched PES on Wheels to bring the parenting program closer to parents and their substitutes. PES on Wheels seeks to expand the program's reach, particularly to parents or their substitutes, who might not otherwise attend traditional PES sessions due to barriers, such as distance, time constraints, or lack of awareness. This mobile parenting program utilizes a van to take the PES Program closer to barangays, parks, and other accessible

community spaces. Instead of requiring parents to attend sessions at a fixed location, PES facilitators set up learning stations in public areas where parents and their substitutes could participate voluntarily. Even bystanders or those who do not actively engage can benefit from PES on Wheels, as they can learn from the information they heard.

LGUs have employed various strategies to address program accessibility. Three LGUs have integrated PES sessions with other social welfare and development programs, such as livelihood training and daycare services. Two LGUs held parenting programs during PTA meetings to reach more parents. One LGU, in collaboration with NGOs, offered food packages and logistical support to parents to motivate them to attend PES sessions. Most LGUs have also used social media platforms to increase public awareness of the PES Program.

However, parenting programs are often constrained by funding for materials, food, and transportation. As such, most LGUs hold PES Program on an annual or quarterly schedule. Many LGUs also face a shortage of social workers to facilitate the PES Program. Given this shortage, social workers manage several social welfare and development programs simultaneously. Some LGUs tap resource persons from local government offices, NGOs, and faith-based organizations to facilitate certain topics. Other LGUs utilize daycare workers or community volunteers to address staffing gaps.

Although the PES Program has established a solid foundation in numerous communities, forging deeper partnerships, especially with private stakeholders, is crucial for its continued success. Even those with strong community networks expressed the need for more formal support from government agencies and broader institutional partnerships to sustain and expand their PES Program. Although there are some instances of collaboration with NGOs, schools, and faith-based organizations, consistent support from the private sector, such as through co-sponsorships or resource sharing, has not yet become widespread.

Policy Discussion and Recommendations

In transnational households, the involvement of parents in the well-being and learning of children left behind often takes adaptive and indirect forms. Migrant mothers send remittances for their families' daily needs and stay emotionally present with their children through regular video calls, text messages, and social media to offer affection and guidance. To support their children's education, they communicate with teachers through group chats, delegate academic supervision to older siblings or tutors, and emphasize the importance of schooling when communicating with them. Meanwhile, parent substitutes assume daily caregiving roles by ensuring that left-behind children's basic needs are met, assisting in schoolwork, attending PTA meetings, and enforcing discipline aligned with the values of the migrant parent.

One of the aims of the PES Program is to support migrant parents and their substitutes in responding to the non-educational and educational needs of children left behind. However, OFWs, parent substitutes, and children in transnational families were generally unaware of the program's existence. The PES Program is more commonly implemented for parents of CAR, CICL, or 4Ps beneficiaries, with little deliberate outreach toward transnational households despite their inclusion under RA 11908. Nevertheless, migrant parents and their substitutes expressed interest in the PES Program when informed of its objectives, especially on topics, such as child development, adolescent behavior, and financial literacy.

To raise awareness about the parenting program, LGUs can develop easy-to-understand infographics and short videos in local languages that explain what the PES Program is and how it can help transnational families. These materials can be disseminated through social media platforms, home visits by social workers, and commonly accessed places in the community. To reach more transnational households, DSWD and LGUs can coordinate with the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), and Philippine embassies in integrating the PES Program into pre-departure orientation seminars, reintegration briefings, and community events abroad. They can also work with NGOs and faith-based organizations supporting migrant workers and left-behind children in holding the parenting program. LGUs can also use barangay assemblies, PTA meetings, and school events to introduce the PES Program to caregivers and substitutes, who assume parenting roles for children left behind. LGUs can update their program-tracking systems to include data on migrant parents and their substitutes, disaggregating attendance and feedback by household type to assess reach and effectiveness.

Long working hours, employer restrictions, and limited rest days can hinder migrant parents from participating in the PES Program, which is typically delivered face-to-face and in lengthy formats. However, transnational families practice co-parenting and use video calls, group chats, and social media for regular communication. This reality of transnational families presents an opportunity to integrate digital technology into PES delivery. For instance, LGUs can adopt flexible, modular, and technology-mediated formats, such as asynchronous video modules and online forums, to reach more migrant parents and their substitutes. Restructuring PES sessions into shorter,

more manageable modules can make it easier for busy parents and substitutes to consistently engage.

Some parent substitutes face logistical and financial constraints in attending sessions, such as a lack of transportation or incidental expenses. To address these constraints, approaches, such as PES on Wheels or school-based sessions, can be scaled and tailored to transnational households. LGUs in partnership with NGOs and the private sector can also provide financial subsidies, logistics support, food packs, or certificates to incentivize attendance, especially for parent substitutes, who may miss work or incur travel costs.

Noticeably, the lack of participation among stay-behind fathers in the PES Program due to entrenched gender norms that frame parenting as a mother's domain has led to the underutilization of critical resources in the household. Studies have shown that paternal involvement is related to better behavioral, psychological, and educational outcomes in children (Jeynes, 2015). To involve more fathers in their children's well-being and learning, social workers can revitalize and incorporate the Empowerment and Reaffirmation of Paternal Abilities (ERPAT) Program, which was initiated in 1995 by DSWD as a community network to promote shared parenting, into the PES Program. This program can help fathers to better understand their roles in child development, discipline, and emotional support. Highlighting fatherhood as a vital component of educational support for children helps dismantle gendered assumptions around parenting.

While some parent substitutes are interested in PES, others feel overburdened or assume that they already know enough about parenting from experience. Furthermore, attendance in parenting programs is sometimes viewed as admission for poor parenting. Currently, the PES Program is associated with problematic families, leading to embarrassment or reluctance among parents to participate. DSWD and LGUs can counter stigma against parenting programs by repositioning the PES Program as an opportunity to strengthen the home-school environment of children in their care. Their public messaging can highlight stories of empowered PES parents, emphasize support for transnational families, and frame parenting as a learned skill rather than an indicator of failure. In this effort, the DSWD and LGUs can creatively rename the PES Program to better resonate with the context of transnational families.

Additionally, the existing PES manual requires revision to address modern challenges related to parental absence, digital parenting, and emotional resilience, among others. It also lacks modules that are specific to transnational parenting. In updating the manual, the DSWD can develop modules that reflect contemporary parenting realities and can be adapted to different delivery modes and audiences. Regular consultations with transnational families can guide revisions of PES content and delivery, ensuring that it remains responsive and inclusive. Engaging caregivers themselves in co-designing parenting modules can empower them as partners, not just recipients of intervention. These modules can cover topics, such as providing age-appropriate strategies for emotional and educational support, co-parenting with substitutes, managing household finances, and supporting children's mental health during geographic separation. They can be made available in local languages and developed with literacy barriers and cultural applicability in mind.

The finding that only 18% of LGUs have fully implemented the PES Program is a critical concern. Awareness among transnational families remains low, and participation is often absent, not because of disinterest but because implementation has been uneven and fragmented across LGUs. This inconsistency reflects a broader structural issue: the challenges of decentralization. As EDCOM II has noted, the devolution of education- and welfare-related programs has often led to disparities in service quality, as not all LGUs possess the same fiscal capacity, technical expertise, or institutional infrastructure to carry out national mandates. What emerges is a highly uneven landscape, where some families benefit from PES while many others remain excluded, depending largely on their LGU's initiative and capacity.

Addressing this requires more than expanding coverage numerically; it calls for a deliberate devolution pathway that clarifies the responsibilities of national government agencies vis-à-vis LGUs in the implementation of the PES Program. Without this clarity, PES remains vulnerable to the same pitfalls as other devolved programs: inconsistent rollout, reliance on individual LGU champions, and susceptibility to local political priorities. National government agencies, such as the DSWD and DMW, can play a stronger role in setting minimum standards, providing technical support, and integrating PES with other programs targeting transnational families, while LGUs can focus on contextual adaptation.

Furthermore, many LGUs lack the personnel and resources to hold regular PES sessions. As a result, the PES Program is only one of several responsibilities of a limited social welfare staff. Capacity-building, such as targeted investments in training, streamlined module design, and financial support for logistical costs are necessary if LGUs are to carry out PES effectively. Lessons can be drawn from health-sector devolution, where capacity-building, peer learning among LGUs, and targeted grants helped normalize service delivery despite disparities.

Additionally, the existing PES manual does not clearly define the facilitators' roles or training needs. To address these challenges, social workers and facilitators require clearly defined roles and responsibilities. LGUs can tap into local volunteers or teachers with experience in transnational family contexts as co-facilitators to ensure relevance and cultural sensitivity. In partnership with NGOs and faith-based organizations supporting migrant workers, as well as higher education institutions, LGUs can build the capacity of these facilitators to respond to the unique dynamics of transnational parenting.

There are also positive models for emulating. Valenzuela City's Education 360° Investment Program demonstrates how LGUs can adopt holistic approaches to family and community support by integrating education, health, and social welfare into a coherent local strategy. In the same way, PES can be localized not just as a stand-alone parenting intervention but as part of a broader LGU commitment to supporting families and children. Other high-performing LGUs have shown creativity in delivery, such as PES on Wheels, which brings sessions directly into barangays and public spaces. These experiences suggest that innovation is possible even in resource-constrained environments if LGUs are empowered and incentivized.

Finally, public-private partnerships remain underutilized. While some LGUs already collaborate with NGOs, schools, and faith-based organizations, these efforts

are sporadic and dependent on local initiative. Formalizing such partnerships through co-sponsorships, resource pooling, or integration into corporate social responsibility programs can ease the burden on LGUs and create more consistent access for families. The private sector, for example, can contribute logistical support, digital tools, or even safe spaces for PES sessions, ensuring that migrant parents and their substitutes can participate more flexibly.

By making improvements in design, delivery, and targeting, the PES Program can become a truly responsive mechanism to support the unique parenting realities of transnational families. These reforms would not only strengthen developmental outcomes for left-behind children, but also honor the sacrifices of migrant parents and their substitutes.

Hence, a suitable model of shared accountability and engagement for enhancing the PES Program involves collaborative partnerships built on the principles of collective impact, community empowerment, and multisectoral cooperation. In this model, families, schools, and communities function as interconnected pillars supported and enhanced by strategic interventions from public and private stakeholders.

Families play a critical and proactive role in ensuring the success of the PES Program by actively engaging with available resources and interventions, rather than being mere recipients of services. Migrant parents and their substitutes can support the program's success by integrating parenting knowledge and skills into their daily interactions and practices at home. Additionally, transnational families can advocate for increased awareness among peers, actively communicate their evolving needs to program facilitators, and participate in community dialogue to help shape the program's ongoing relevance and responsiveness. This empowered participation allows transnational families to become partners and co-creators in the PES Program, directly contributing to its positive outcomes.

Schools are central points of engagement and coordination that provide direct support through inclusive educational policies and family-centered outreach activities. Schools can host regular PES sessions during PTA meetings, embed parenting information into school communication, and utilize social media for program awareness and parental engagement. Moreover, schools can facilitate peer support groups among parents and substitutes to create supportive networks that encourage shared accountability for children's well-being and learning. Educators and school counselors can collaborate with social workers to bridge the gap between school-based academic support and community-based parenting interventions.

Communities form the foundation for sustained engagement and operate through active collaboration between LGUs, NGOs, faith-based organizations, and the private sector. LGUs can leverage existing social welfare programs to deliver PES sessions more effectively and address common logistical challenges through partnerships with private and local businesses. NGOs and faith-based organizations can offer resource persons, volunteers, and training facilitators to alleviate staffing constraints in social welfare offices. Additionally, community-based approaches, such as participatory assessments, regular community dialogues, and volunteer-led initiatives, can ensure that the PES Program remains responsive to evolving family and community needs.

Robust partnerships with the private sector are essential to strengthen and sustain this shared accountability model. Private entities, through corporate social responsibility programs, can provide consistent and formal support, co-sponsorships, logistical resources, and funding. Such engagements can expand a program's reach, enhance delivery, and ensure sustainability. Institutionalizing formal agreements or memoranda of understanding (MOU) among LGUs, schools, NGOs, private businesses, and community groups can provide a structured framework for sustained collaboration.

A critical component of this shared accountability model is consistent monitoring and evaluation. Establishing a community-based feedback mechanism and conducting periodic reviews will ensure that the interventions remain aligned with the lived realities of transnational families and effectively address the identified challenges.

Ultimately, this envisioned model prioritizes collective responsibility, inclusivity, and active participation from families, schools, communities, and public-private stakeholders. Through collaborative planning, resource-sharing, and joint accountability, this model can significantly enhance the PES Program's impact and sustainability, effectively support transnational families, and promote the well-being and learning of left-behind children.

Research Implications

While the PES Program aims to strengthen the home-school environment to support the well-being and learning of left-behind children, its design, delivery, and targeting seem to be misaligned with the lived realities of transnational families. Further empirical research is necessary to build a more robust evidence-based foundation for policymaking, program design, and delivery.

First, further research should explore barriers to participation in PES Program among transnational families, particularly those related to negative perceptions and stigma. Given that this study identified that some parents and their substitutes are reluctant to participate in parenting programs due to embarrassment or the belief that parenting is an innate skill, future studies should examine how program design and framing might influence these attitudes. These studies can investigate whether reframing parenting programs and integrating them into familiar platforms, such as PTA meetings, church occasions, or barangay assemblies, can raise interest and reduce stigma. Insights from these studies can help inform more culturally responsive and socially acceptable parenting programs for these families.

Second, there is a need for research that includes the voices of children and caregivers, often left at the margins of policy discourse. Given the limited number of interviews with left-behind children, migrant parents, and their substitutes in this study, a broader sample can yield richer insights into how these children understand and experience parental involvement in contexts of absence, hardship, and caregiving by proxy. Children's perspectives on what makes them feel supported, whether academically, emotionally, or socially, can

provide valuable feedback for the design and delivery of a child-centered PES Program. On the other hand, caregivers' perspectives on what hinders them from engaging in the PES Program can offer insights into how these barriers can be addressed. Future research can explore how they interpret parental roles, how confident they feel about supporting schoolwork, and what kinds of capacity-building they would need.

Third, further research is needed to assess how PES Program operates across LGUs. There is limited knowledge about the capacities, constraints, and practices of LGUs, especially in terms of facilitator preparedness, fidelity to the training manual, and partnerships with local stakeholders. Cost-effectiveness analyses can also help to determine which strategies, such as PES on Wheels, modular PES in schools, or digital delivery through social media, yield the greatest impact relative to investment. These findings can inform scalability, identify barriers, and guide the crafting of standards for replication across diverse regions, particularly in LGUs that face resource limitations or lack private sector partnerships.

Fourth, future studies should investigate how formal and informal networks in the community can sustain parental involvement in the well-being and learning of children from transnational households. Formal networks, such as ERPAT, and informal networks, such as neighborhood groups, church-based family ministries, and daycare volunteer programs, often serve as de facto parenting support systems. Further research can examine these grassroots efforts in detail to determine how they might be integrated into school- or LGU-led initiatives. Understanding how trust, social capital, and cultural norms influence parental involvement is essential in designing inclusive and bottom-up interventions.

Fifth, with the increasing relevance of remote caregiving and technology-mediated communication in Filipino family life, there is a need to explore the role of digital innovation in parenting support. Studies can investigate how digital tools, such as asynchronous learning modules, recorded sessions, or mobile apps, can be leveraged to reach more transnational households. Research can also explore whether blended approaches, including community radio, infographics in the local languages, and short instructional videos shown during tricycle rides or market days, can benefit parents and their substitutes without smartphones, stable Internet, or formal schooling. Understanding their digital habits and preferred learning formats is crucial to designing interventions that truly include and empower them.

Sixth, additional studies can explore how the PES Program affects educational outcomes, such as school attendance and academic performance, among left-behind children. Aside from in-depth examination of how program design and delivery may lead to these educational outcomes, more narrative accounts of changes in parents' behavior, child motivation, and family routines due to participation in the PES Program are needed to further understand how to better facilitate parental involvement in the well-being and learning of left-behind children.

Seventh, there is a need for longitudinal studies that examine the educational trajectories of children whose caregivers participate in PES and other government programs aimed at promoting parental

involvement. These studies can follow children over multiple years to determine whether exposure to these programs correlates with measurable improvements in attendance, school performance, classroom behavior, and overall well-being. Tracking these outcomes can help establish whether these government programs foster not only better parenting practices but also enhance children's life chances. This can offer stronger justification for expanding these programs and securing sustainable funding. Such research can also help to assess whether early gains are sustained over time or diminish without continued support.

Finally, future research can adopt comparative approaches to better understand how PES Program influences parental involvement across household types. Low-income nuclear families, single-parent households, transnational families, and extended caregiving arrangements (e.g., grandparents or older siblings as guardians) may respond differently to the same interventions. Comparing outcomes across these household structures can allow policymakers, government agencies, and LGUs to refine the PES Program for better reach and effectiveness.

These research directions highlight the need for a more comprehensive, inclusive, and outcome-based research agenda on parental involvement in the well-being and learning of children from transnational households. The PES Program needs to be evaluated rigorously and refined continually based on evidence that reflects the evolving realities of transnational families. By deepening our understanding of what works, for whom, and under what conditions, future research can help ensure that the PES Program truly supports left-behind children's learning, well-being, and long-term ability to escape the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Conclusion

Parental involvement, although often constrained by poverty and migration, remains a cornerstone of the overall well-being and learning of left-behind children. This study examined the PES Program, focusing on its responsiveness to the complex realities of transnational families and their unique caregiving arrangements. The findings revealed that while migrant parents significantly contribute to their children's material needs through remittances, their absence creates emotional and educational gaps that remittance alone cannot bridge. Although essential, parent substitutes vary in their ability to provide consistent emotional support and academic guidance, highlighting the need for targeted interventions.

Despite its potential, the PES Program currently faces challenges in terms of reach, relevance, and alignment. Transnational families exhibited limited awareness of this parenting program, with participation hindered by logistical and cultural barriers, such as time constraints, stigma, and assumptions about parenting roles. However, there was considerable interest among migrant parents and substitutes once they were informed about the program, especially in topics addressing child development, adolescent behavior, and financial management.

To maximize its impact, policy recommendations include developing specialized PES modules tailored explicitly to transnational parenting dynamics, integrating flexible delivery modes, such as digital platforms and mobile outreach initiatives, and fostering collaborations across public and private sectors. Additionally, addressing socio-cultural barriers by normalizing parental education and clearly recognizing transnational families within program guidelines will further empower families in their caregiving roles.

Ultimately, the success of the PES Program hinges on shared accountability among families, schools, and communities supported by meaningful partnerships with NGOs, private businesses, and government agencies. By adopting inclusive, flexible, and culturally responsive strategies, the PES Program can more effectively strengthen the home-school environment and enhance the educational outcomes and overall well-being of Filipino children from transnational households.

This study underscores the need to transform parental involvement from an ideal into a practical, inclusive, and shared responsibility, one supported by responsive programs, cross-sector collaboration, and ongoing research grounded in the realities of Filipino family life. By redefining parental involvement as a shared responsibility across physical, emotional, and institutional boundaries, education can become a truly inclusive and collective endeavor.

Bionote

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About EDCOM 2

The Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) is a national Commission established through Republic Act No. 11899, tasked to undertake a comprehensive national assessment and evaluation of the performance of the Philippine education sector, and to propose transformative solutions, from 2023 to 2025. It is composed of lawmakers from both the Senate and the House of Representatives, and is guided by an Advisory Council, and assisted by the Technical Secretariat.

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