



ABANDONED BUT NOT FORSAKEN: FROM THE STORIES OF PUPILS WITH PARENTS WORKING ABROAD

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how children with parents working abroad cope with their situation while studying without their parents' guidance. The study aims to understand the lived experiences, challenges, difficulties, coping mechanisms, aspirations, and hopes for the future of these children. The study focuses on the outcomes of students with parents working abroad in the Philippines, specifically their academic and emotional well-being. The phenomenological approach to qualitative research was used, and eight participants underwent in-depth interviews to gather information. Four research questions were addressed to the participants, and the study concludes with the results, discussion, and conclusions of the researchers. The findings of the study provide insights into the challenges faced by these children and the coping mechanisms they use to overcome them. The study highlights the importance of family support, especially for children who have parents working abroad, to ensure their academic and emotional well-being.

KEYWORDS: *Parents working abroad, challenges of the left behind child, lived experiences, challenges/ difficulties coping mechanisms, aspirations and hopes phenomenological study.*

INTRODUCTION

Raising and educating children to become responsible individuals is a significant responsibility of parents. By shielding their children from harm, offering guidance and assistance without any strings attached, parents can instill essential values in their children. However, due to the financial challenges and limited job prospects in the Philippines, some parents are forced to work overseas. Children who are left behind by their parents may experience emotional and psychological problems due to their parents' absence. Studies have shown that children left behind due to parental migration may experience negative impacts on their education, feelings of loneliness and sadness, and potential neglect. It is crucial to address the emotional and psychological needs of left-behind children (Yap, Cuenca, & Reyes, 2009).

A study in Capiz, Roxas City, Philippines, found that OFW mothers tend to leave their children before they start elementary school, while fathers tend to leave before their children are born. Left-behind children in private high schools have average total emotional quotient, but lower interpersonal skills and stress. The findings of this study can inform the development of support systems and interventions that address the emotional and psychological needs of left-behind children, promote resilience and well-being, and contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of children left behind by parents working abroad (Santiago, 2011).

In Sinobong Central Elementary School, a recent study was conducted by a researcher to explore the academic performance and personal struggles of students with parents working abroad. The findings of the study revealed that these learners tend to have lower academic performance and face various problems in their lives. The students also struggle with psychological and emotional stress caused by missing their parents. Despite these difficulties, the students are aware of and accept the reasons why their parents had to be separated from their family to provide for their needs.

This study provides relevant concepts that may inspire future researchers to explore the struggles and issues faced by children left behind by parents working abroad. The study aims to understand how young people with OFW parents fulfill their parenting responsibilities despite being away. It highlights the importance of family support, open communication, and the role of the community in providing assistance to these students.



The findings of the study have significant implications for educators, parents, and policymakers. It emphasizes the need for schools to provide support and guidance to these students, such as counseling services and academic assistance. Parents, on the other hand, should maintain open communication with their children and provide emotional support despite being physically apart. Policymakers can also address the issue by implementing programs that promote the welfare of children left behind by OFWs.

Overall, this study sheds light on the struggles and issues faced by students with OFW parents. It provides a deeper understanding of their experiences and highlights the importance of addressing their needs to ensure their academic success and overall well-being.

Review of Related Literature and Studies

Parental Involvement in School. This refers to the actions that parents take to help their children develop social and emotional skills, both at home and at school. This can lead to better academic performance. The importance of parents in supporting their children's social and emotional learning involves helping them acquire and use knowledge, attitudes, and abilities that enable them to understand and manage their emotions, set goals, show empathy towards others, and make responsible decisions (Taylor et al. 2017).

However, in the study of Epstein and Sanders (2002), parental involvement is often seen as a crucial aspect of a child's education, which can have a significant impact on both academic and overall school experience. The collaboration between families and schools has been a long-standing tradition in formal education. Parental involvement refers to the extent to which a parent is involved in their child's education. Some schools encourage parents to be involved in a constructive way, but parents are sometimes unsure about how to participate. This concept has been supported by Western countries, but there is a growing body of literature that examines the impact of social and cultural factors, as well as parental participation and expectations, on children's growth and education. Schools need to recognize that parents have different cultural backgrounds and participate in different ways.

Lived Experiences. Lived experiences are subjective experiences of individuals based on their unique perspectives and interpretations of events, situations, and phenomena they have encountered. In the context of pupils having parents working abroad, lived experiences may refer to the unique experiences, challenges, and opportunities that these pupils face due to their parent's absence. Save the Children (2006) stated that the children left behind in real areas did better in school, but emotionally, they felt lonelier and sad owing to the departure of one or both parents.

Moreover, in the study of Aquino (2019), she explains that children of OFWs are frequently deprived of attention and guidance from their parents, who yearn to provide the care they are unable to due to working away from home to provide their basic needs. Therefore, as children start to study, parents must help guide, teach, and lead their children. It is the responsibility of parents to care for their children; it is challenging for students to have someone to guide them, particularly in their studies.

Challenges and Difficulties of Learners with Parents Working Abroad. The Challenges and difficulties faced by learners with parents working abroad may refer to various adverse effects or obstacles they encounter due to their parent's absence. These may include emotional, psychological, social, and academic difficulties such as loneliness, anxiety, depression, lack of parental guidance, poor academic performance, and behavioral problems. The departure of a family member for another country creates a problematic situation that affects the children, spouses, and elderly family members in the household. There is always a suggestion or hypothesis that being away has adverse effects, especially on the psychological well-being of children left behind. Most descriptions of Filipino children are derived indirectly through adults' accounts or behaviors toward children. Children are often overprotected and strictly disciplined (Osteria, 2011).

Overseas Filipino Workers are employed in various parts of the world, and working as an OFW is not always as perfect as expected. The reality is that they face different challenges aside from leaving their families in the Philippines to have a better future. Communication, finances, and the work and living environment are just some of the challenges they encounter. This research assessed the life challenges of selected overseas migrant workers. The comprehensiveness of this study contributes to a vast understanding of the challenges faced by OFWs. This information helps the respondents better understand themselves and other OFWs going through similar situations. By following the advice of experts, they can also minimize issues with money, homesickness, or job burnout. According to the researchers, "job burnout is an uncomfortable and unhealthy disorder that individuals and organizations would like to improve." (Santos, 2020).

Parental Migration. The migration of parents abroad has both positive and negative effects on children who are left behind. One positive effect is that parents often earn more money abroad, which can provide their children with more financial and educational



resources. However, missing their parents can negatively impact children's well-being. Some studies show adverse effects on children when they miss their parents, while others show positive effects of parental migration, particularly for school achievement. The results depend on the family environment, the country where the study is conducted, and the available data (Botezat & Pfeiffer, 2014).

The migration of Filipino parents abroad has led to long-term separations of parents from each other and their children. Western-based analysis may predict negative educational outcomes for children due to parental absence. However, it has been found that separations caused by overseas migration often have neutral or positive effects on educational outcomes, particularly among older children. In general, girls perform better than boys in terms of educational attainment. Boys are often more affected by environmental factors, such as their parents' international migration (Arguillas & Williams, 2010).

Coping Mechanism. This refers to behaviors that individuals use to manage, reduce, or tolerate the adverse effects of stress, trauma, or challenging situations. For students with parents working overseas, these mechanisms may include building emotional resilience, seeking support from friends and family, pursuing hobbies or extracurricular activities, practicing self-care, and seeking professional assistance if necessary. Childhood and adolescence are critical stages of life that involve significant changes for individuals. Children's development is influenced by various factors, including social and cultural environments and family circumstances.

Moreover, migration is a crucial factor that has an impact on children and families. It is a global phenomenon that has existed throughout human history. Relocating to a new country can affect children and teenagers in various ways, such as their family dynamics, social interactions, and academic performance (Watters, 2008; SuárezOrozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001)

Aspirations and Hopes. This pertains to the positive goals, ambitions, and aspirations of these students for their future, despite facing challenges and difficulties. These aspirations include educational and career objectives, personal growth and development, and the desire to reunite with their parents. It is crucial to acknowledge and encourage the hopes and aspirations of these students, as they can provide motivation and a sense of purpose in the face of adversity. In Vu's study, titled "Struggling yet Hopeful in the Streets of Ho Chi Minh City: A Family Life Survey on Children of Poor Migrant Families," cited by Juliawan (2016), the children's concerns are always centered around the necessities of life and the needs of their family. Their desires for material and spiritual things are genuine and important. However, these dreams are always based on the notion that they do not want their parents to go back overseas. These children dream of having a happy and healthy family and aspire to establish a good family life. Moreover, their dream of helping the poor demonstrates that these children have a strong social connection, and they understand the predicament of impoverished individuals who are in the same situation as themselves.

Zhao, Wang, Zhou, Jiang and Hesketh (2018), the study discovered that children faced obstacles to their psychosocial health primarily due to prolonged separation from their parents. These children, who were left behind, experienced emotional turmoil, which was evident in their feelings of isolation and unhappiness. These same emotions are why the children of overseas parents do not want to leave their locality, as they do not want to miss their families and subject them to the loneliness and sadness of being alone.

Research Questions

The study explored the experiences, concerns and challenges encountered and insights of the Elementary Learners. The following research questions are raised:

1. What are the lived experiences of the informants whose parents work abroad?
2. What are the challenges or difficulties encountered by the informants whose parents work abroad?
3. How do the informants cope with challenges or difficulties they encountered?
4. What are the aspirations and hopes of the informants?

SCOPE AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This research study explored the lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, aspirations, and hopes of pupils of Sinobong Central Elementary School, Sinobong, Veruela, Agusan del Sur. The study participants were selected from Grade 4 to 6, out of the 42 pupils enrolled in Kindergarten to Grade 6 whose parents work abroad in the School Year 2022-2023. There were 8 participant selected in the in-depth interview. The sample size was adequate to represent the population.

I acknowledge the limitations and weaknesses of this study. The findings provide valuable insights into the experiences of pupils at Sinobong Central Elementary School, it is important to recognize that the research may not have achieved the expected generalization. Some of the participants' answers may have been rejected because they were not relevant to the study's objectives. The veracity of the



students' responses cannot be guaranteed. There may have been some inaccuracies or misrepresentations due to factors such as the fallibility of human memory. However, the study's findings still provide valuable insights into the experiences of pupils at Sinobong Central Elementary School and can be used to inform future research and interventions.

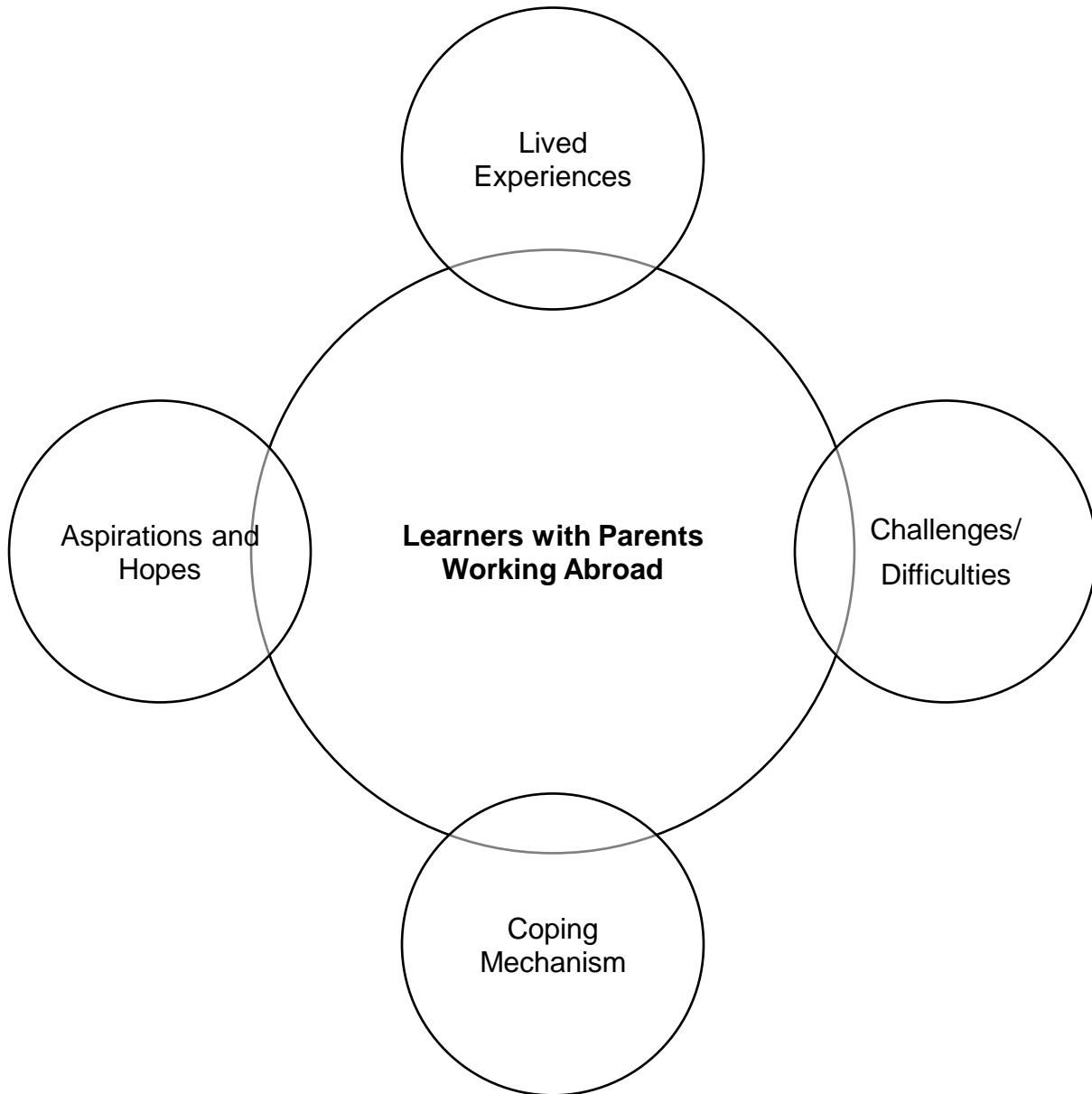


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Learners with parents working abroad may face unique challenges that can impact their academic performance, mental health, and social support

The coping mechanisms used by learners with parents working abroad may vary depending on their individual circumstances

Aspirations and hopes may serve as a source of resilience and motivation for learners with parents working abroad



Overall, this conceptual framework aims to provide a structure for understanding the experiences of learners with parents working abroad, as well as the factors that may influence their academic and personal well-being. By identifying key variables and relationships, the study can help to shed light on the challenges faced by these learners and the coping mechanisms that can help them to thrive.

METHODS

The study conducted at Sinobong Central Elementary School, Sinobong Veruela, Agusan del Sur. The Study used a phenomenological approach to qualitative research, which aimed to understand the lived experiences of participants. Eight participants were chosen, all of whom had parents working abroad. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather information about their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, aspirations, and hopes for the future. Four research questions were addressed to the participants, and the interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The study utilized a phenomenological approach to qualitative research to understand the lived experiences of participants who had parents working abroad. The research aimed to explore the challenges, coping mechanisms, aspirations, and hopes for the future of these students. Eight participants were chosen for the study, and in-depth interviews were conducted to gather information about their experiences. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The study addressed four research questions to the participants, which were designed to elicit rich and detailed responses. These questions focused on the impact of parental absence on academic performance, the challenges faced by students with OFW parents, their coping mechanisms, and their aspirations for the future. The interviews were conducted in a safe and supportive environment to encourage participants to share their experiences honestly and openly.

The phenomenological approach used in this study provided a rich and detailed understanding of the experiences of students with OFW parents. The study highlights the importance of providing support and guidance to these students and their families to ensure their academic success and overall well-being. The findings of the study can inform the development of programs and policies that promote the welfare of children left behind by OFWs.

Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of students with OFW parents. It underscores the importance of understanding their unique challenges and aspirations and the need for support and guidance to ensure their academic success and overall well-being.

The researcher ensured that the study was conducted ethically and that the participants' rights were respected by following the basic ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report. The researcher obtained informed consent from participants, informed them of the risks and benefits of participation, and stressed that participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time. The researcher also assured participants that they would receive benefits from participating in the study. Ethical considerations are essential in all human studies, and researchers must ensure that participants' rights are respected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the challenges that children with parents working abroad face and how they cope with them. The study found that the children reported experiencing negative emotions such as loneliness, sadness, and anxiety due to their parents' absence. Despite these challenges, the children also showed resilience and bravery in dealing with their situation. The study identified various coping mechanisms used by the participants, including seeking support from friends and relatives, participating in extracurricular activities, and prioritizing their academic goals.

The study revealed that the participants faced several challenges in their academic and emotional well-being. These challenges included problems with time management, lack of parental guidance and supervision, and financial constraints. The participants also reported feeling disconnected and isolated from their parents due to the distance and lack of communication.

The participants used various coping mechanisms to deal with these challenges. For instance, they relied on friends and relatives for emotional support and guidance. They also engaged in extracurricular activities such as sports, music, and dance to keep themselves occupied and distracted. Additionally, they focused on their academic goals and used their parents' absence as motivation to succeed.



The study also identified the participants' aspirations and hopes for the future. These included reuniting with their parents, pursuing higher education, and achieving their dreams. The participants expressed their desire to be reunited with their parents and to have a normal family life. They also hoped to use their experiences to inspire and help others who are in similar situations.

The study found that the participants experienced various emotional and psychological challenges, such as loneliness, sadness, and anxiety due to their parents' absence. However, they also displayed resilience and courage in the face of their situation, which suggests that they possess the necessary skills to overcome adversity. The study identified several coping mechanisms used by the participants, such as relying on friends and relatives for support, engaging in extracurricular activities, and focusing on their academic goals. The study also found that schools and communities can play a crucial role in supporting these children by providing them with a safe and nurturing environment.

The study highlights the importance of understanding the challenges faced by children with parents working abroad and the coping mechanisms they use to overcome their situation. The participants showed resilience and courage in facing their situation, which suggests that they possess the necessary skills to overcome adversity. However, it is essential to provide them with the necessary support and assistance to ensure their emotional security and family unity. The study also suggests that schools and communities can play a crucial role in supporting these children by providing them with a safe and nurturing environment. Overall, this study emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to address the emotional and psychological needs of left-behind children, promote resilience and well-being, and ensure family unity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Based on the findings, the following implications for practice are offered.

On Experiences in School Encountered without Parents. The research participants had different experiences in school they encountered without their parents. The experiences mentioned were sad, need care, and missing. Meanwhile, these encounters were based on their experiences in school without their parents.

On Some Instances in School that Need Parents Most. As noted in the findings of this study, the instances where participants needed their parents most were during academic activities and classroom meetings. These instances imply that the students needed their parents on days when they accomplished a milestone or received awards.

On Feelings Have When Classmates Have Parents During School Activities Done. Based on the feelings expressed by the participants, it could be inferred that they felt sad, hurt, and jealous, and some felt that it was fine when it was not.

On Challenges/Difficulties Encountered in Life that are Faced and Embraced Alone. The challenges and difficulties that the participants encountered in their lives were school-related activities like making assignments and during Math challenge competitions. It is implied that in these school activities, students had decided to face their challenges alone as they had no choice but to do it alone.

On Ways of Guardian to Help in Studies. As pointed out by the participants, their fathers and sisters helped them with their assignments. This clearly shows that even in the absence of one parent, the other parent or siblings can still help with schooling tasks. With this, it is encouraged that the remaining family members should check and monitor the child's needs and progress, not just in areas of learning but in their personal lives as well.

On Reasons of Disliking Some Aspects of Having Parents Working Abroad. The participants preferred to avoid having their parents work abroad because their parents would not be with them, no one could accompany them in school activities, and their parents must not have another partner.

On Ways of Managing to Overcome All Difficulties in School. In order to overcome all the difficulties of the participants in their school, they prayed, reached out to their father for support, defended themselves, talking to their teacher, found ways to seek help from a parent abroad, and just by being humble.

On Learning Gained from all the Problems Encountered. Based on their experiences and problems encountered, the participants learned to defend themselves, know household chores, and know the limit of asking and the need of their parents in times of sickness.



On Expectations from Parents in the Near Future. All the participants hope that their parents will not leave the country again in the near future.

On Reasons Why or Why Not Want to Go Abroad When Having His Own Family in the Right Time. Based on the findings, as they were asked if they want or not want to go abroad when they have their own family, reasons revealed that they do not like to as they do not want to miss their family, and they do not want to make his family feel the sadness they felt.

On Reasons Why or Why Not Go Abroad if Asked by Parents to Live There for Good. When the participants were asked their reasons why or why not to go abroad, even if their parents asked them to live there for good, few responses said that they did not want to go as they would miss their family here in the Philippines.

On Learning Gained from the Experiences of Having No Parents that You Will Apply in the Near Future. The learning gained by the participants in their experiences of having no parents that they will apply in the near future was not to leave their family, not to go abroad, to want to go abroad to provide for the family, to work for their grandparents, and to work to provide their basic needs.

On Biggest Dream in the Near Future. All the participants have dreams in life: to become a soldier, a policeman, an engineer, and a pilot. As revealed, the participants have no dream of going abroad, just like their parents did.

The study revealed several implications for future research. One suggestion is to conduct a similar study among high school and college students to explore their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations when their parents work abroad. Another possible research area is to investigate the impact of having both parents working abroad on the child's academic performance and social-emotional development. Additionally, future research could explore the experiences of Filipino migrant workers and their families, including the children left behind in the Philippines.

CONCLUSION

This study focuses on the experiences of students who are left behind by parents working abroad, highlighting their challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations. The study found that these students have mixed feelings about their situation and their parents' absence. They feel sad and lonely but also encouraged, knowing that their parents are working for their future. The study also found that students feel envious of their classmates who have their parents around. However, both students and parents abroad use various communication methods to stay connected. The study also revealed that some students are willing to work abroad, while others prefer to stay in the country to be with their families. Additionally, some students would consider living abroad for good, while others would not. Lastly, the study found that the participants have different dreams for their future, but they all share the same desire to help their families and their country.

In summary, the findings highlight the importance of schools and communities in supporting these children by providing them with a safe and nurturing environment. The results can inform the development of programs and interventions that address the emotional and psychological needs of left-behind children, promote resilience and well-being, and contribute to a better understanding of their experiences. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of family unity and emotional security in the lives of children with parents working abroad. Policymakers, educators, and parents can use these findings to design programs that support these children's emotional and psychological needs, promote their well-being, and ensure that they have the necessary resources to succeed in life. By doing so, we can help ensure that children with parents working abroad can thrive and reach their full potential.

SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE STUDIES

The study conducted on pupils with parents working abroad was limited to the responses of students from Sinobong Central Elementary School in Sinobong, Veruela Agusan del Sur. However, the implications for future research are numerous. One suggestion is to conduct another study with a different group of students from the same school. Additionally, another research study with a similar focus could be conducted in another location within the same municipality to further explore the experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations of pupils with parents working abroad. A re-interview of the same research participants and informants could be conducted to determine whether their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations have changed over a period of time. Furthermore, the study was conducted in a public elementary school, and further research could be done to investigate the same phenomenon among private elementary schools. Finally, while the study was conducted on elementary learners, further research could explore the experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations of high school students and college students with parents working abroad.



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