

Parental Absence and Its Impact on Learners' Self-Esteem, Social Skills, and Cognitive Development

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Abstract. The study examined the impact of parental absence on the self-esteem, social skills, and cognitive development of learners in public elementary and secondary schools of San Miguel District, Bohol, during the 2024–2025 school year. It aimed to determine the profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, grade level, socio-economic status, parental absence status, reason, and duration of absence; their levels of self-esteem, social skills, and cognitive development; the significant relationship between the selected variables; and the significant differences of their perceptions when grouped according to profile variables. This study employed a descriptive survey research design using standardized tools, specifically the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS), and the Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI). A total of 115 learners were purposively selected for the study. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including independent samples t-tests, ANOVA, and Chi-Square Test. Results indicated that most learners originated from middle-income families and frequently experienced parental absence due to work-related migration. These learners demonstrated moderate levels of self-esteem and cognitive development. Notably, their social skills—especially in communication and empathy—were well-developed, suggesting resilience despite the familial challenges they faced. A significant link was found between the duration of parental absence and developmental outcomes, although no differences were observed across sex, age, or grade level. Thus, the study concludes that while learners display resilience, prolonged parental absence poses challenges to their self-esteem, social skills, and cognitive development. These challenges are evident in areas such as memory functions and emotional control, which may influence their academic performance. These findings underscore the need for school-based support programs, regular communication between parents and children, and targeted counseling to help mitigate the impact of parental absence on learners. A collaborative effort among schools, families, and communities is essential to safeguard the overall well-being and development of affected learners.

Keywords: Bohol; Cognitive development; Parental absence; Self-esteem; Social skills.

1.0 Introduction

Parental presence is foundational to a child's emotional well-being, social interaction, and academic performance. In environments where consistent guidance, affirmation, and supervision are available, children are more likely to develop a secure sense of self, healthy relationships, and strong cognitive skills. However, in many rural communities, such as the San Miguel District in Bohol, this ideal scenario is frequently disrupted due to various socio-economic factors. Parental absence—whether from overseas employment, internal migration, family

separation, or other circumstances — has become a common experience that carries both immediate and long-term developmental consequences.

In the Philippines, the phenomenon of “left-behind children” has grown in tandem with the rise in labor migration. More than 10 million Filipinos live overseas, according to recent data from the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (2021). Many of these individuals are parents who provide financial support for their families while living apart from them. As a result, children are often left under the care of guardians or extended family members. While financial remittances ease economic burdens, they cannot replace the crucial role of parental guidance and involvement in a child's daily life. Research has shown that parental absence is associated with poorer self-esteem, trouble forming relationships with peers, and uneven academic achievement (De Leon & Biana, 2020; Nuqui & Cruz, 2022). Additionally, recent studies emphasize the adverse effects of parental absence on children's social and cognitive development, beyond emotional distress. According to Tullao et al. (2019), children in the Philippines who were left behind reported higher levels of anxiety, social disengagement, and decreased involvement in class. In a similar vein, Dizon et al. (2021) highlighted that although caregivers attempt to fill in for the role of parents, the lack of daily interaction and emotional ties from parents leads to decreased motivation and poorer problem-solving abilities. Moreover, Gonzales and Amparo (2023) found that students with absent parents performed worse on classroom tasks and had worse self-regulation scores, indicating the long-term developmental effects of interrupted parental presence.

Further, this study anchored Family Code of the Philippines which establishes the rights and duties of parents and guardians in relation to children, emphasizing parental authority, custody, support, and the overall welfare of the child and mandates that parents provide for the development of their children's moral, mental, and physical well-being, and outlines substitute parental authority in cases of parental absence or incapacity. Additionally, Republic Act No. 7610 is designed to protect children from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation, and discrimination. It provides legal mechanisms for intervention when a child's rights are violated and prescribes penalties for those who violate them. While these laws establish broad protective measures, they do not specifically address the nuanced psychosocial and cognitive challenges faced by left-behind learners—such as issues of self-esteem, social skills, emotional well-being, and learning difficulties resulting from prolonged parental absence. A significant gap remains in implementing research-based school programs tailored to the specific needs of these children. There is also a notable lack of empirical research on the psychosocial and cognitive development of learners in rural public schools, as most existing studies primarily focus on the economic benefits of labor migration (Rivera & Capuno, 2020) and health-focused reviews that highlight psychosocial gaps in interventions for left-behind children in the Philippines (Dominguez & Hall, 2022). This highlights the pressing need for comprehensive, context-specific studies to inform local interventions and policies.

Educational institutions play a vital compensatory role for children affected by parental absence. For instance, Lifshin et al. (2020) applied Bowlby's Attachment Theory to demonstrate that teachers' attachment orientations significantly predict children's school adjustment. This finding underscores the importance of secure emotional bonds within the classroom environment, in line with Erikson's Psychosocial Theory. Connolly and Celsi (2021) emphasized that supportive relationships with educators and peers play a crucial role in fostering students' identity formation and self-esteem, particularly for those who lack consistent parental care. Moreover, Qi and Yang (2023) utilized Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to illustrate that students' resilience is shaped by dynamic interactions across family, school, and community systems, thereby highlighting the essential function of the school as a stabilizing environment when home support is disrupted.

Thus, this study was conducted to examine the impact of parental absence on learners' self-esteem, social skills, and cognitive development in public elementary and secondary schools of San Miguel District, Division of Bohol, during the 2024–2025 school year. Specifically, it aimed to determine the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, grade level, socio-economic status, parental absence status, reason, and duration of absence; their levels of self-esteem, social skills, and cognitive development; the significant relationship between the selected variables; and the significant differences of their perceptions when grouped according to profile variables. This is to inform the development of school-based interventions and guidance programs. Understanding the impact of parental absence on different aspects of a learner's development enables schools, teachers, and policymakers to offer more effective and targeted support to this growing, vulnerable group within the Filipino

student population.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive survey design that incorporated both correlational and comparative approaches. This design was chosen because it effectively facilitated the identification of patterns, relationships, and differences among learner-respondents experiencing parental absence. Through the use of structured data collection and appropriate statistical analysis, the researchers were able to examine the impact of parental absence on learners' self-esteem, social skills, and cognitive development across various demographic profiles.

2.2 Participants and Sampling Technique

The study participants were 115 learner-respondents from selected public elementary and secondary schools in the San Miguel District, Bohol. Specifically, the sample included seventy-eight (78) elementary learners and thirty-seven (37) secondary learners. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that only learners who experienced parental absence due to labor migration, family separation, or abandonment were included in the study. The inclusion criteria required respondents to have experienced parental absence for a significant period, while those with present and actively involved parents were excluded to maintain the study's focus. Given that the majority of the participants were minors, informed consent was obtained from both the learners and their parents or guardians. The researchers also ensured the privacy and confidentiality of all participants' information in accordance with ethical research standards.

2.3 Research Instrument

This study employed a standardized questionnaire composed of four major parts. The first part, Demographic Profile of Learners, collected information on age, sex, grade level, socio-economic status, and details regarding parental absence. The second part, Self-Esteem Assessment, utilized the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), a validated 10-item instrument that measures overall self-worth. This scale has been confirmed as reliable in the Filipino context by Duque et al. (2025). The third part, the Social Development Scale, utilized the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) by Gresham and Elliott (2008), which comprises 46 items assessing various social skill domains. The fourth part, Cognitive Development Scale, incorporated the Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI), referenced by Hodgson (1992), designed to evaluate learners' metacognitive awareness, including both knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognitive processes. To ensure consistency and clarity, all instruments used a 4-point Likert scale format. Moreover, these standardized and validated instruments have already been tested for reliability and validity in similar contexts. They have been widely used and psychometrically validated in numerous previous studies involving comparable populations, ensuring accurate measurement of the intended constructs. With established measurement properties, these tools reduce the need for preliminary testing to refine or validate the questionnaire items. Therefore, conducting a separate pilot test was deemed unnecessary.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection process was conducted in close coordination with school heads and designated teachers. Prior to distribution, formal research permissions were obtained from the relevant school authorities, and approval was secured to ensure adherence to institutional protocols. Informed consent forms were distributed to and signed by the parents or legal guardians of the learner respondents. At the same time, assent was also obtained from the learners themselves to ensure their voluntary participation in the study. The standardized questionnaires were distributed to the learner-respondents through face-to-face administration, following prescribed health and safety guidelines. Teachers were present to assist the learners, ensuring that they clearly understood the study's purpose, the content of the questionnaire, and the instructions for completion. The entire data collection period lasted for two weeks, allowing sufficient time for the distribution, retrieval, and clarification of responses as needed. Completed questionnaires were systematically gathered, encoded, and organized for statistical analysis to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data collected from the standardized instruments were analyzed using both descriptive and

inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics—such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation—were utilized to summarize the learner-respondents’ demographic profile as well as their levels of self-esteem, social skills, and cognitive development. Inferential statistics, including independent samples t-tests, ANOVA, and Chi-square tests of independence, were applied to assess significant relationships and differences based on variables such as demographic profile and the duration of parental absence. The standardized tools used in this study have demonstrated reliability and validity in prior research, ensuring the accurate measurement of the constructs. Given their widespread acceptance and psychometric validation, pilot testing was considered unnecessary, aligning with standard practices in educational research. These robust statistical techniques strengthened the analysis, supporting sound, evidence-based conclusions on the impact of parental absence on learner development.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to ethical research principles throughout all stages of the research process. Informed consent was obtained from school administrators, teachers, and the parents or legal guardians of the learner-respondents, ensuring voluntary participation. Participants were fully informed about the nature, purpose, and scope of the study before involvement. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and they were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequence. All collected data were used solely for academic and research purposes and were handled with strict confidentiality to safeguard the rights and welfare of all participants, particularly given the involvement of minors in the study.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Profile of Learners

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the learner-respondents based on age, sex, grade level, socio-economic status, and parental absence.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Learners (n=115)				
Profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Rank	
1.1 Age				
7-9 years old	22	19.13	3	
10-12 years old	58	50.43	1	
13-15 years old	23	20.00	2	
16-18 years old	9	7.83	4	
19-21 years old	3	2.61	5	
Total	115	100.00		
1.2 Sex				
Male	41	35.65	2	
Female	74	64.35	1	
Total	115	100.00		
1.3 Grade Level				
Grade 1-3	13	11.31	3	
Grade 4-6	65	56.52	1	
Grade 7-10	37	32.17	2	
Total	115	100.00		
1.4 Socio-Economic Status				
Low Income	22	19.13	2	
Middle Income	90	78.26	1	
High Income	3	2.61	3	
Total	115	100.00		
1.5 Parental Absence Status				
Absence of Father				
Yes	87	75.65	1	
No	28	24.35	2	
Total	115	100.00		
Absence of Mother				
Yes	76	66.09	1	
No	39	33.91	2	
Total	115	100.00		
Absence of Both Parents				
Yes	50	43.48	2	
No	65	56.52	1	
Total	115	100.00		

1.6 Reasons for Parental Absence			
Work Related	63	54.78	1
Separation or Divorce	45	39.13	2
Abandonment	6	5.22	3
Death of a Parent	1	0.87	4
Total	115	100.00	
1.7 Duration of Parental Absence			
Less than 1 year	32	27.83	1
1 to 3 years	31	26.96	2
4 to 6 years	22	19.13	4
More than 6 years	30	26.09	3
Total	115	100.00	

The majority of learners (50.43%) were aged 10–12 years old, indicating that most participants are in the upper elementary level, a period crucial for emotional and cognitive growth. Female learners (64.35%) outnumbered males (35.65%), suggesting that gender-sensitive interventions may be necessary when addressing the effects of parental absence. In terms of grade level, Grades 4 – 6 had the highest representation (56.52%), emphasizing the need for tailored support during middle childhood—a key stage in identity and skill development. Regarding socio-economic status, most respondents came from middle-income families (78.26%), while 19.13% belonged to low-income households. This demographic distribution reflects the economic diversity of rural public schools in the province of Bohol. Notably, 75.65% of respondents reported the absence of their father, 66.09% indicated the absence of their mother, and 43.48% reported the absence of both parents. The primary reason cited for parental absence was work-related migration (54.78%), consistent with previous findings that highlight the prevalence of labor migration among Filipino families (De Leon & Biana, 2020; Nuqui & Cruz, 2022). The duration of absence was commonly less than 1 year (27.83%) or between 1 and 3 years (26.96%), suggesting that while separation may be temporary for some, a significant portion experiences long-term parental absence. These patterns have implications for learners' psychosocial needs, aligning with Tullao et al. (2019), who reported that long parental absence can affect children's social engagement and school participation.

The demographic data emphasizes the necessity for school-based interventions that consider age, grade, and family background, echoing findings from Gonzales and Amparo (2023) that such factors influence self-regulation and classroom performance among left-behind children.

3.2 Learners' Self-Esteem

Table 2 illustrates the descriptive results on learners' perceptions of their self-esteem based on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

Table 2. *Learner-Respondents' Perceptions of Their Self-Esteem Amid Parental Absence (n=115)*

Statements	Weighted Mean	DI	Rank
1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	3.05	A	1
2. At times, I think I am no good at all.	2.52	A	8
3. I feel that I have several good qualities.	2.90	A	2
4. I can do things as well as most other people.	2.85	A	4
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	2.55	A	7
6. I certainly feel useless at times.	2.45	D	10
7. I feel that I am a person of worth.	2.73	A	5
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.	2.72	A	6
9. All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure.	2.46	D	9
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.	2.88	A	3
Average Weighted Mean	2.71	A (Moderate Self-Esteem)	

Legend:

Rating Scale	Description	Interpretation
3.25 – 4.00	Strongly Agree (SA)	High Self-Esteem
2.50 – 3.24	Agree (A)	Moderate Self-Esteem
1.75 – 2.49	Disagree (D)	Less Self-Esteem
1.00 – 1.74	Strongly Disagree (SD)	No Self-Esteem

The highest weighted mean of 3.05 was recorded for the statement “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself,” indicating a generally positive self-perception among learners despite the emotional challenges brought on by parental absence. In contrast, the lowest weighted mean of 2.45 was obtained for the item “I certainly feel useless

at times,” falling under the “Disagree” or “Less Self-Esteem” category according to the scale. This suggests that while feelings of worthlessness are not prevalent among the respondents, they persist in a significant subset of the sample. The average weighted mean of 2.71, interpreted as “Agree” or “Moderate Self-Esteem,” indicates that learners generally maintain a moderate level of self-esteem. They recognize their strengths and demonstrate a degree of emotional resilience, despite occasional moments of self-doubt. These findings suggest that, although respondents exhibit an overall healthy self-concept, the emotional challenges posed by parental absence may still affect certain aspects of their self-view. The relatively low agreement with negative self-perception items suggests that many respondents are coping effectively with their negative self-perceptions. However, a subset remains vulnerable to internalizing negative beliefs, highlighting the need for targeted psychological or social support interventions. These results align with the findings of Jones and Harris (2020), who emphasized that self-esteem is not only critical for academic achievement but also influences students’ engagement, resilience, sense of self-worth, and goal-setting behavior. Their study further explained that self-esteem acts as a protective factor against stress and failure, fostering better adjustment among learners facing adverse circumstances such as parental absence.

3.3 Learners’ Social Skills

Table 3 presents the descriptive results on learner-respondents’ self-assessed social skills across various domains, such as communication, cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, engagement, and self-control, with their corresponding average weighted means:

Table 3. *Learner-Respondents’ Perceptions of Their Social Skills amid Parental Absence (N=115)*

Statements	Average Weighted Mean	DI	Rank
3.1 Communication	3.17	A	1
3.2 Cooperation	3.10	A	3
3.3 Assertion	2.95	A	5
3.4 Responsibility	3.11	A	2
3.5 Empathy	3.05	A	4
3.6 Engagement	2.89	A	6
3.7 Self-Control	2.80	A	7
Composite mean	3.02	A (Satisfactory)	

Legend:

Rating Scale	Description	Interpretation
3.25 – 4.00	Strongly Agree (SA)	Very Satisfactory
2.50 – 3.24	Agree (A)	Satisfactory
1.75 – 2.49	Disagree (D)	Fairly Satisfactory
1.00 – 1.74	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Did Not Meet Expectations

The highest average weighted mean was observed in the communication domain, at 3.17, with notable strengths in courteous behaviors, such as saying “thank you” and being polite. These positive behaviors may be attributed to early foundational teachings at home or reinforcement of social norms in school environments. However, lower scores in listening suggest challenges in deeper communicative engagement—possibly linked to emotional hesitation or psychological barriers stemming from the lack of immediate parental support. The responsibility domain yielded an average weighted mean of 3.11, ranking second among all domains, with learners demonstrating care in using others’ belongings and returning borrowed items on time. However, lower means in keeping promises and admitting mistakes may reflect hesitancy in accountability—possibly influenced by fear of criticism or a lack of modeled behavior at home.

Cooperation ranked third, with an average weighted mean of 3.10, driven by strong performance in the item “I play games with others,” which suggests that peer interactions remain a common and enjoyable avenue for social bonding. This is supported by a relatively high level of agreement in working well with classmates and following group rules, indicating learners’ ability to function within collective settings. However, more structured, or reciprocal behaviors, such as turn-taking in conversation, received lower scores, indicating potential areas for improvement in disciplined group interaction.

In contrast, assertion, empathy, engagement, and self-control reflected moderate but slightly lower social functioning. The assertion averaged 2.95, suggesting that learners were less inclined to stand up for others, admit when mistreated, or openly express their feelings. Similarly, self-control had the lowest domain average weighted

mean of 2.80, characterized by difficulties in staying calm during teasing, ignoring distractions, and regulating emotions when upset. These findings may indicate challenges in managing emotions—skills that are often reinforced through consistent caregiver presence.

Overall, the composite mean score of 3.02, described as “Agree” or “Satisfactory,” indicates that learners generally demonstrate acceptable levels of social competence, though not at an optimal level. This moderate competence level may be influenced by limited parental presence and reduced guidance at home, which can affect development in areas such as assertion and self-control. These findings support Antony (2022), who frames childhood resilience through Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, which underscores the critical role of the family in shaping social and emotional development. Parental absence, as suggested by the results, may reduce opportunities for emotional scaffolding and guidance, thereby impacting skills like self-regulation, assertiveness, and peer-related problem-solving.

3.4 Learners’ Cognitive Development

Table 4 presents the descriptive results on learner-respondents’ self-assessed cognitive development across multiple domains, as to knowledge cognition in declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge; and regulation of cognition in planning, information management strategies, comprehension monitoring, debugging strategies, and evaluation with their corresponding average weighted means:

Table 4. *Learner-Respondents’ Perceptions of Their Cognitive Development amid Parental Absence (N=115)*

Statements	Average Weighted Mean	DI	Rank
4.1 Knowledge Cognition in:			
4.1.1 Declarative Knowledge	2.97	A	5
4.1.2 Procedural Knowledge	2.95	A	7
4.1.3 Conditional Knowledge	3.04	A	2
4.2 Regulation of Cognition in:			
4.2.1 Planning	3.02	A	3
4.2.2 Information Management Strategies	3.01	A	4
4.2.3 Comprehension Monitoring	2.95	A	8
4.2.4 Debugging Strategies	3.05	A	1
4.2.5 Evaluation	2.96	A	6
Composite Mean	2.99	A (Satisfactory)	
Legend:			
Rating Scale	Description	Interpretation	
3.25 – 4.00	Strongly Agree (SA)	Very Satisfactory	
2.50 – 3.24	Agree (A)	Satisfactory	
1.75 – 2.49	Disagree (D)	Fairly Satisfactory	
1.00 – 1.74	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Did Not Meet Expectations	

The composite mean of 2.99, falling under the “Agree” category, indicates that the learners generally demonstrate a satisfactory level of metacognitive awareness, though with observable areas for improvement.

In knowledge recognition, the highest average weighted mean of 3.04 was recorded in conditional knowledge, suggesting that learners understand the importance of context in applying learning strategies. They learn best when they have some prior knowledge about the topic, thus underscoring the value of prior knowledge. However, for procedural knowledge, learners reported the lowest average weighted mean of 2.95, suggesting they use learning strategies but may not always do so purposefully. Learners often use helpful learning strategies automatically, but struggle to identify the specific purpose behind each strategy. This suggests that while they employ these strategies, they may do so without intentionality or a clear understanding of their application.

According to Jones and Harris (2020), consistent parental engagement not only fosters emotional regulation but also promotes cognitive adaptability in children. Importantly, they emphasized that children with active parental involvement exhibit better emotional resilience, which is linked to their academic performance.

Meanwhile, regarding the regulation of cognition, learners scored highest in debugging strategies, with an average weighted mean of 3.05, reflecting their adaptability when facing learning difficulties. They emphasized that they re-evaluate their assumptions when they get confused. However, a lack of initiative in changing strategies when

they fail to understand suggests some reluctance or uncertainty in modifying strategies. However, the comprehension monitoring got the lowest average weighted mean of 2.95, indicating moderate self-checking during learning. Additionally, in terms of planning domain, an average weighted mean of 3.02 was obtained, showing satisfactory pre-task preparation; for information management strategies (3.01), suggests moderate use of techniques for handling information as well as indicates inconsistency or misunderstanding in applying this strategy and lastly, in the domain of evaluation (2.96), shows that learners reflect on their learning outcomes, though with some uncertainty.

Overall, these results suggest that while learners possess a satisfactory level of metacognitive awareness, gaps remain in areas such as strategy intentionality, pre-task questioning, and real-time comprehension monitoring. These findings are consistent with the perspectives of Chen et al. (2022) and Antony (2022), who frame childhood resilience through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, emphasizing the influence of the home environment on cognitive development. The observed gaps highlight the importance of school-based interventions that aim to enhance metacognitive skills, particularly for learners experiencing parental absence.

3.5 Association between the Duration of Parental and the Learner's Self-Esteem, Social Skills, and Cognitive Development

Table 5 presents the inferential results of the test of association between the duration of parental absence and the self-esteem, social skills, and cognitive development of learners.

Table 5. *Test of Association between the Duration of Parental Absence and the Learners' Self-Esteem, Social Skills, and Cognitive Development (N=115)*

Variables		X ²	df	p-value	Interpretation	Decision
Duration of Parental Absence	Self-Esteem	60.20	4	<.001	Significant	Reject H ₀
	Social Skills	16.00	4	0.003	Significant	Reject H ₀
	Cognitive Development	82.50	4	<.001	Significant	Reject H ₀

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

For self-esteem, the results revealed that there is a significant association between the duration of absence of parents and the learners' self-esteem, $X^2(4, N=115) = 60.20, p < .001$. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This finding suggests that the duration of parental absence plays a significant role in shaping learners' self-esteem. Prolonged parental absence may contribute to lower levels of self-worth, emotional insecurity, or social withdrawal. In contrast, shorter or less frequent absences may help maintain a more stable sense of self among learners.

As eloquently phrased by Chen et al. (2022), there is a considerable and generally negative correlation between students' self-esteem and the length of parental absence: the longer a parent is away, the more likely it is that a child will have low self-esteem. Youngsters and teenagers who experience extended or frequent parental absence—whether because of physical or emotional absence, divorce, or employment—tend to interpret this absence as a sign of rejection, which can result in enduring low self-esteem.

For social skills, the results revealed that there is a significant association between the duration of absence of parents and the learners' social skills, $X^2(4, N=115) = 16.00, p < .001$. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. The results indicate that the length of time children are separated from their parents has a significant impact on their social development. Learners who experience prolonged parental absence—whether due to work overseas, domestic employment in distant locations, or other reasons—may have fewer opportunities to receive emotional support, guidance, and direct role modeling from their parents. This lack of presence can lead to difficulties in managing social interactions effectively.

As disclosed by Lee and Johnson (2023), more extended periods of parental absence have a detrimental effect on students' social development, making it harder for them to engage with peers, participate in class, and form relationships. A lack of parental direction and emotional support exacerbates problems like introversion, sensitivity, and social disengagement. The likelihood of social skill deficiencies and developmental delays is increased when both parents are absent, particularly in the early years of life. The necessity for focused interventions to support social and emotional well-being is highlighted by the fact that supportive caregivers and community involvement can help lessen these impacts.

For cognitive development, the results depicted that there is a significant association between the cognitive development of learners and the duration of parental absence, $X^2(4, N=115) = 82.50, p < .001$. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that the length of time parents are away from their children significantly affects the learners' cognitive development. Learners with long-term parental absence may lack the necessary support and encouragement at home, which can negatively affect their learning and academic progress. In contrast, children with more present parents often receive consistent help and guidance, leading to better thinking skills and improved school performance.

According to Wang and Liu (2019), the length of parental absence has a significant impact on students' cognitive development. Long periods of time without direct parental care can alter brain development, particularly by increasing the volume of gray matter in areas associated with memory and emotional processing. Therefore, this implies that extended parental absence could impair intellectual functioning and cognitive development.

3.6 Difference Between Learners' Self-Esteem, Social Skills, and Cognitive Development by Sex Profile

The results presented in Table 6 revealed that there is no significant difference between the self-esteem, $t(113)=0.517, p=0.607$, social skills, $t(113)=0.660, p=0.511$, and cognitive development, $t(113)=0.838, p=0.404$, of male and female learners with the absence of their parents.

Table 6. Test of Difference between Learners' Self-Esteem, Social Skills, and Cognitive Development by Sex Profile ($n_1 = 41; n_2 = 74$)

Variables	Mean		t-value	p-value	Interpretation	Decision
	Male	Female				
Self-Esteem	2.74	2.70	0.517	0.607	Not Significant	Do Not Reject H_0
Social Skills	3.04	2.99	0.660	0.511	Not Significant	Do Not Reject H_0
Cognitive Development	2.95	3.02	0.838	0.404	Not Significant	Do Not Reject H_0

*Difference is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

This suggests that both male and female learners are similarly affected by parental absence in terms of their self-esteem, social skills, and cognitive development, indicating that the impact of being away from their parents does not significantly vary by gender. The results align with Santiago and Fernandez's (2020) findings, which suggest that both male and female learners are similarly affected by parental absence in terms of self-esteem, social development, and cognitive growth, highlighting that the negative impacts of parental absence are universal across genders. Challenges such as lowered self-worth, social difficulties, and cognitive delays do not significantly differ between boys and girls. Recognizing this is important because it highlights the necessity for inclusive support systems and interventions that cater to the needs of all learners equally, regardless of gender. Moreover, it highlights that parental absence poses a significant risk to children's development, necessitating comprehensive strategies to foster resilience, emotional well-being, and academic success for both males and females.

3.7 Difference Between Learners' Self-Esteem, Social Skills, and Cognitive Development by Age Profile

The results illustrated in Table 7 discloses that there is no significant difference between the self-esteem, $F(3, 111)=1.73, p=0.166$, social skills, $F(3, 111)=1.55, p=0.207$, and cognitive development, $F(3, 111)=1.07, p=0.363$, of learners with the absence of their parents when they are grouped according to age profile.

Table 7. Test of Difference between Learners' Self-Esteem, Social Skills, and Cognitive Development by Age Profile ($n_1 = 22; n_2 = 58; n_3 = 23; n_4 = 12$)

Variables	Mean				F	p-value	Interpretation	Decision
	7-9 yrs	10-12 yrs	13-15 yrs	Above 15 yrs				
Self-Esteem	2.54	2.73	2.77	2.82	1.73	0.166	Not Significant	Do Not Reject H_0
Social Skills	2.87	3.01	3.09	3.12	1.55	0.207	Not Significant	Do Not Reject H_0
Cognitive Development	2.88	3.00	2.99	3.14	1.07	0.363	Not Significant	Do Not Reject H_0

*Difference is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

This suggests that the effects of parental absence on learners' development do not vary significantly across different age groups, indicating that age is not a determining factor in how children are emotionally, socially, or cognitively affected by their parents' absence. Moreover, the data shows that the absence impacts all learners similarly, regardless of their educational stage. Furthermore, Zhai et al. (2021) found that the emotional, social, and cognitive effects of parental absence were consistently manifested across every age group within their Chinese cohort, indicating that these impacts are universal rather than age-dependent. Additionally, Kim et al. (2020) observed similar levels of academic and psychological distress among elementary, middle, and high school students, confirming that the difficulties associated with parental absence span multiple developmental stages.

3.8 Difference Between Learners' Self-Esteem, Social Skills, and Cognitive Development by Grade Level

The results shown in Table 8 discloses that there is no significant difference between the self-esteem, $F(2, 112)=0.618, p=0.541$, social skills, $F(2, 112)=0.858, p=0.427$, and cognitive development, $F(2, 112)=0.700, p=0.499$, of learners with the absence of their parents when they are grouped according to grade level.

Table 8. *Test of Difference between Learners' Self-Esteem, Social Skills, and Cognitive Development by Grade Level ($n_1 = 13; n_2 = 65; n_3 = 37$)*

Variables	Mean			F	p-value	Interpretation	Decision
	Gr. 1-3	Gr. 4-6	Gr. 7-10				
Self-Esteem	2.60	2.71	2.75	0.618	0.541	Not Significant	Do Not Reject H_0
Social Skills	2.93	2.99	3.07	0.858	0.427	Not Significant	Do Not Reject H_0
Cognitive Development	2.89	2.98	3.04	0.700	0.499	Not Significant	Do Not Reject H_0

**Difference is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

This suggests that the grade level of learners does not significantly impact the effect of parental absence on their emotional, social, and cognitive development. In other words, learners in different grades – whether in Grade 1-3, Grade 4-6, and Grade 7-10 – do not experience differing levels of self-esteem, social, or cognitive development based on how long their parents have been absent. Meanwhile, parental absence has a consistent effect on students' emotional, social, and cognitive development at every grade level, according to Thompson and Baker (2022). Regardless of age, adverse effects include lower test results, diminished self-esteem, and difficulties integrating socially, underscoring the need for comprehensive assistance solutions for all affected students.

4.0 Conclusion

This study concludes that learners' perceptions of parental absence hurt their self-esteem, social skills, and cognitive development. These challenges are particularly evident in areas such as memory function and emotional regulation, which can, in turn, impact their academic performance. Despite these difficulties, learners demonstrate resilience in social domains like communication, cooperation, and empathy. However, prolonged parental absence can also lead to social challenges, including difficulty forming friendships and maladaptive coping behaviors such as withdrawal or aggression. Findings also revealed that these effects are consistent across gender, age, and grade level, suggesting that interventions do not necessarily need to be tailored to specific demographic groups. Instead, broad-based emotional and cognitive support programs can be applied effectively.

The study highlights the importance of metacognitive strengths among these learners, particularly in conditional knowledge and strategy adjustment, despite their emotional vulnerabilities. This supports the integration of metacognitive training and socio-emotional learning into school curricula, especially in high-risk communities. Educational implications include fostering classroom environments that prioritize self-regulation, critical thinking, and reflective learning. Teachers should be equipped to recognize signs of emotional distress associated with family structures and apply strategies that foster metacognitive awareness. At the policy level, the study recommends embedding psychosocial support systems—such as counseling, peer mentoring, and caregiver substitutes—into the educational system to mitigate the developmental gaps caused by parental absence. For future research, longitudinal studies are recommended to explore the long-term effects of sustained metacognitive training on both academic and emotional outcomes. Furthermore, qualitative investigations involving learners' personal narratives could provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences underlying the quantitative patterns revealed in this study.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The authors confirm the significant contributions, proportionate to their assigned tasks, that enabled the completion of this study.

6.0 Funding

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

None

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