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Functional skills for learners with special educational needs amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

Gengen G. Padillo [1*], Cebu Technological University – Main Campus, College of Education, Indonesia https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3591-3059

Raymond C. Espina [2], Cebu Technological University – Main Campus, College of Education, https://orcid.org/**0000-0001-9287-1097**

Reylan G. Capuno [3], Cebu Technological University – Main Campus, College of Education, https://orcid.org/**0000-0002-3426-1650**

Ramil P. Manguilimotan [4], Cebu Technological University – Main Campus, College of Education, https://orcid.org/**0000-0002-5237-5555**

Veronica O. Calasang [5], Cebu Technological University – Main Campus College of Education, https://orcid.org/**0000-0001-9162-0392**

Joedel B. Bellete [6], Cebu Technological University – Main Campus, College of Education , https://orcid.org/**0000-0002-5185-9494**

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Abstract

The key purpose of this study is to determine the functional skills of learners with special educational needs (LSENs) in terms of life skills, social skills and community-based learning skills in the identified schools in Toledo City Division. It employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods to assess the functional skills of LSENs amidst the pandemic as rated by the parents. The respondents were selected through purposive sampling technique. The study utilised an adapted the research tool. The findings show that most of the learners were aged 10 years old or older, male, non-graded and with intellectual disabilities, while most of the parents were poor, housewives and had a high school level. The result also revealed that parents rated LSENs with moderate functional skills. The challenges encountered by parents include lack of relevant training, lack of knowledge about child care and lacks of time. With this, the school administrators should design responses with specific contexts and consider implementation of the functional skills of learners. Hence, the adoption of the parental intervention plan for LSENs is recommended.

Keywords: Functional skills, special educational needs, life skills, social skills, community-based learning skills.

[*] ADDRESS OF CORRESPONDENCE: Gengen G. Padillo, Cebu Technological University – Main Campus, College of Education, Indonesia

Email address: gengen.padillo@ctu.edu.ph

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a broad and profound impact on the educational system across the world. In particular, the schools were closed to ensure the health and safety of the learners, teachers, administrators and school personnel (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). The schools' closure happened in two ways; first, when the learners or school personnel were already infected to prevent further contamination. Second, closing the school to avoid the virus from entering the school premises (Mosites et al., 2020). However, school closure might deteriorate the abilities and skills of LSENs which they had acquired over the years of attending numerous training in schools (Kim et al., 2021). Apparently, school closure has affected both regular learners and learners with special educational needs (LSENs).

The vital concern of education worldwide for LSENs is achieving the long-term goals in providing essential skills for independent living and the actual field of work to function effectively, whether at home or in the community. The implementation of distance learning ensured learning continuity amidst the pandemic, even though coronavirus continued to spread and has imminently impacted the school system. According to Sadeghi (2019), distance learning is a learning process that will link the educational gap through the distribution of educational material in varied distance learning programmes, where learners and teachers are physically distant.

In particular, in the Philippines, educational services for learning continuity for LSENs during the pandemic are a tremendous challenge for the teachers, learners and parents. This challenge has created a dilemma whether to forego the opening of classes, reduce contact, save lives or keep schools open. Despite all these conditions, education is still a top priority. The Department of Education (DepEd) released DepEd Order No. 12 series of 2020 or the Adoption of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan for School Year 2020–2021 in connection to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency and DepEd Order no. 21 s. 2020 or the Policy Guidelines on Adopting the K–12 Transition Curriculum Frameworks for Learners with Disabilities. The said DepEd orders help, support and enhance the needed skills of the LSENs under this new normal of basic education in the country.

Notably, the DepEd orders are needed to ensure the welfare of LSENs. According to Price (2019), LSENs usually have hard times with social interactions, like difficulties mingling with adults and socialising with peers. Teachers, parents and peers must give special attention to these kinds of learners. It was an observation that before the pandemic, performing basic life, social and community skills or functional skills in general of the LSENs were already an issue and persisted as an issue up to the new normal in primary education. It is in a self-contained class where most of the LSENs are having their lessons. Class composition is vital for LSENs to have a positive learning environment (Bertills et al., 2018). For distance learning to be effective for them, it requires the support of parents and educators to strengthen their collaboration through actual experiences and training and help the learner acquire functional skills (BehrozSarcheshmeh et al., 2017). Smith et al. (2018) pointed out that if the LSENs are guided well during this pandemic, they can still be functional. He added that LSENs could adapt functional skills and relates to society. Furthermore, Kourakli et al. (2017) emphasised that learners can improve their cognitive, motor and academic skills with appropriate educational intervention. Educational services for learning continuity for LSENs during this pandemic had been a great challenge for the teachers, learners and parents. Regardless of this situation, ensuring educational continuity is one of the top priorities amidst the crisis. Hence, schools should look into planning and implementing the new normal educational policy, the learners' health and safety and the whole school communities.

To realise an effective new normal educational policy for the LSENs, cooperation among the education stakeholders is significant (Tria, 2020). Teachers are using new methods and strategies to teach online effectively. However, for those teachers who had lacking online teaching experience, they

need to exert more effort to learn online teaching, according to the study of Johnson et al. (2020), while Garbe et al. (2020) specified that parents were contented with the support they received from the teacher and school administration. Still, parents were having problems balancing other responsibilities with the learners' educational needs and accessibility.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a physical, mental and social impact on LSENs. LSENs have limited comprehension of information that they need to be protected from the virus, relying only on their parents and the people who care for them to be vigilant on their behalf during quarantine. Limitations on normal activities are likely to induce mental stress to LSENs, leading to an escalation to challenging behaviours such as the risk of placement breakdown and frequent use of drugs for mental medication (Courtenay & Perera, 2020). The study of Aishworiya and Kang (2021) shows that LSENs require special attention during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to avoid having disproportionate consequences in their life. With the prolonged pandemic and limited available resources, LSENs should be supported in all their needs to develop their functional skills. They, too, are entitled to the same rights as everyone else, including the right to an education, good health and safety amidst a pandemic and a new normal (Courtenay & Cooper, 2021).

According to Masi et al. (2021), parents and caregivers of LSENs have difficulty balancing work and childcare during the pandemic. It is difficult for them to adopt and maintain new routines from being confined to one's house, balancing job and family obligations or looking after other family members' needs. Fears of infection, frustration, boredom, a lack of medical supplies and a lack of information, to name a few factors, all contribute to parental stress.

In this regard, the current study contributes to the literature about functional skills of LSENs during the pandemic.

2. Methods

2.1. Research design

The study utilises quantitative and qualitative research methods to look into the significant factors that influence the development of the functional skills of LSENs during the pandemic. Quantitative research aims to identify the demographic profile of the respondents, functional skills of the LSENs and the test of significance between demographic profile and the level of functional skills. Meanwhile, quantitative results could be mixed to triangulate the findings and strengthen the study's outcome (Yousefi Nooraie et al., 2020).

2.2. Respondents and participants of the study

This study was conducted at the identified schools in the district of Toledo City Division that offers special education programmes. There were 31 LSENs respondents and 12 parent participants. Toledo City is located in the western part of Cebu, Philippines.

2.3. Data gathering process

The researchers requested a permission letter from the school principal, supervisor and superintendent to conduct the study. After the approval, the researchers started the data collection. In addition, informed consent from the parents was also requested.

To ensure data privacy, the researchers secure the information and data gathered with utmost confidentiality not to breach privacy or hurt the feelings of all involved. The data they gave was acknowledged and accurately depicted in this study. All information from parents and LSENs were untraceable by anyone other than the researchers; the respondents and participants remained anonymous. Furthermore, to ensure the health and safety of the researchers, respondents and participants of the study, the data collection was carried out through phone interviews.

2.4. Data collection tools

The researchers used the collective ideas of Behroz-Sarcheshmeh et al., (2017). They used the most valuable skills from the two proponents and modified the checklist to create localised functional skills related to the natural home setting. Modification of the questionnaire focused on the learners' functional skills questionnaires, checklists and demographic profiles. The parents chose either of the three evaluation options: (1) if the child cannot do (unskilled), (2) if the child can partially do (moderately skilled) and (3) if the child can do independently (highly skilled). The researchers gathered the findings and concentrated on functional capabilities, using the term 'cannot do' to describe tasks that require full help. An interview guide was used to gather qualitative data on the challenges that the parents faced relevant to the functional of skills of LSENs amidst the pandemic.

2.5. Data analysis

The frequency distribution was utilised to present and to analyse the profile of the respondent groups. Moreover, weighted mean and standard deviation were employed to summarise and interpret the functional skills of LSENs as rated by the parents. The chi-square test was used to measure the significant mean gain between the functional skills of LSENs before and after the utilisation of the identified strategies. A thematic analysis was used for the treatment of the qualitative data. The null hypothesis was tested at a 0.05 level of significance. It claimed that there was no significant relationship between the demographic profile of the learner respondents and their level of functional skills as rated by their parents.

3. Results

This section presents the gathered data regarding the functional skills of LSENs.

3.1. Demographic profile of LSENs

Table 1. Demographic profile of LSENs (*n* = 31)

	Frequency	Percentage
A. Age (in years)		
6–7	4	12.90
8–9	7	22.58
10 and above	20	64.52
Mean: 13.94 Std. dev. 8.56		
B. Gender		
Female	11	35.48
Male	20	64.52
C. Grade level		
1	3	9.68
2	2	6.45
3	3	9.68
6	1	3.23
Non-graded	20	64.52
Transition	2	6.45
D. Disabilities		
Autism	2	6.45
Cerebral palsy	2	6.45
Hearing impairment	8	25.81
Intellectual disability	19	61.29

The result shows that 64.52% of the respondents were aged 10 years old and older, while 22.58% or 7 respondents were aged 8–9 years and 12.90% or 4 respondents were aged 6–7 years. There were 64.52% or 20 males comprising the majority of the respondents, while 35.48% or 11 were females. It revealed that 61.29% or 19 have intellectual disability, followed by hearing impairment (25.81% or 8), cerebral palsy (6.45% or 2) and, finally, autism (6.45% or 2).

3.2. Demographic profile of parents

Table 2. Profile of parents (*n* = 10)

	Frequency	Percentage
A. Combined monthly income (in Pesos)		
Less than 9,100 (Poor)	16	51.61
9,100–18,200 (Low income)	12	38.71
18,200–36,400 (Lower middle income)	2	6.45
36,400–63,700 (Middle income)	1	3.23
B. Occupation		
Businesswoman	2	6.45
Carpenter	1	3.23
Casual welder	1	3.23
Construction welder	3	9.68
Driver	2	6.45
Entrepreneur	1	3.23
Farmer	1	3.23
Fisherman	1	3.23
Food vendor	1	3.23
Housemaid	1	3.23
Houseman	1	3.23
Housewife	14	45.16
Production worker	2	6.45
C. Highest educational attainment		
Elementary level	8	25.81
High school level	16	51.61
College level	7	22.58

As depicted in Table 2, the data on the combined monthly income (in PHP) of the parent respondents showed that 51.61% or 16 of 31 respondents earned less than PHP 9,100.00 monthly, who were categorised as poor, followed by 38.71% or 12 respondents who earned from 9,100 to 18,200 categorised as low income, 6.45% or 2 as lower middle income and 1 or 3.23% as middle income.

Furthermore, in terms of the parents' occupation, housewives had the highest number of respondents with 45.16% or 14, followed by construction worker (3, 9.68%). On the contrary, businesswoman, driver and production worker had parallel (6.45%, 2) respondents each, while there was 3.23% or 1 respondent each for carpenter, casual worker, entrepreneur, farmer, fishermen, food vendor, housemaid and houseman. Also, the data showed that most parent respondents (51.61%) were high school level, 25.81% or 8 were elementary level and 22.58% or 7 were college-level educated.

3.3. Life skills of LSENs as rated by parents

Table 3. Life skills of LSENs as rated by parents (*n* = 10)

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1.) Put clothes in a basket, make laundry and fold	2.42	Highly skilled
2.) Choose clothes to wear and put clothes on	2.45	Highly skilled
3.) Take a bath, brush teeth and hair	1.84	Moderately skilled
4.) Make a basic meal, help with cooking and plan and prepare meals	2.45	Highly skilled
5.) Wear socks, shoes and tie shoelace	1.52	Unskilled
6.) Write a journal and write down things you're grateful	2.07	Moderately skilled
7.) Dance to music and do something creative	1.52	Unskilled
8.) Read a book like some spiritual literature	2.07	Moderately skilled
9.) Know the name, phone #, address and fill out a form	1.42	Unskilled
10.) Learn to swim	1.13	Unskilled
11.) Simple sewing	1.87	Moderately skilled
12.) Answer the phone properly	1.65	Unskilled
13.) Purchase items at a store, count and make change	1.58	Unskilled
14.) Read/understand medicine labels and dosage	1.06	Unskilled
15.) Know how to pay bills	2.19	Moderately skilled
16.) Puts on and remove pants	2.10	Moderately skilled
17.) Puts on and remove a jacket	2.13	Moderately skilled
18.) Threads and buckles a belt	2.19	Moderately skilled
19.) Buttons by self	2.10	Moderately skilled
20.) Separates clean and dirty clothes by putting them into a hamper	2.26	Moderately skilled
21.) Select clothes that fit and match	2.16	Moderately skilled
22.) Select clothes appropriate to the weather	2.39	Highly skilled
23.) Eats with plate, spoon, and fork	2.10	Moderately skilled
24.) Sets and clears table properly	1.90	Moderately skilled
25.) Gets and prepares own food (breakfast, lunch and dinner)	2.26	Moderately skilled

26.) Able to identify spoiled foods	1.68	Moderately skilled
27.) Able to prepare groceries and sort them	2.39	Highly skilled
28.) Able to use the toilet and other toiletries	2.39	Highly skilled
29.) Take shower independently	2.10	Moderately skilled
30.) Able to use deodorants and brush teeth individually	2.36	Highly skilled
31.) Applies to make up and comb hair by self	2.03	Moderately skilled
32.) Make and arrange own bed	2.19	Moderately skilled

Range: 1.00–1.67 = unskilled; 1.68–2.34 = moderately skilled; 2.35–3.00 = highly skilled.

Table 3 shows that the indicators such as choose clothes to wear and put clothes on, make a basic meal, help with cooking and plan and prepare meals got the highest mean of 2.45 (highly skilled).This was followed by the indicators such as put clothes in a basket, make laundry and fold with the mean of 2.42 (highly skilled). However, the indicators read and understand medicine labels and dosages got the lowest mean of 1.06 (unskilled).

3.4. Social skills of LSENs as rated by parents

Table 4. Social skills of LSENs (*n* = 10)

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1.) Pays attention to someone speaking	2.52	Highly skilled
2.) Grasps or holds large toys or objects	2.52	Highly skilled
3.) Scraps of holds crayons or pencils	2.23	Moderately skilled
4.) Pushes pull and turn toys	2.42	Highly skilled
5.) Follow one-step directions about toys or objects	2.45	Highly skilled
6.) Plays simple hide-and-seek games (peek-a-boo, hunts for missing toys)	2.32	Moderately skilled
7.) Sits and plays alone for up to 5 minutes.	2.26	Moderately skilled
8.) Imitates movements and gestures	2.52	Highly skilled
9.) Stacks toys such as blocks up to three high	2.00	Moderately skilled
10.) Stacks toys such as blocks up to six high	2.29	Moderately skilled
11.) Scoops, sand, water or beans from one container to another	2.07	Moderately skilled
12.) Cuts with scissors	2.39	Highly skilled
13.) Paste with a glue stick	2.13	Moderately skilled
14.) Scribbles with a crayon staying on paper	2.35	Highly skilled
15.) Colours with a crayon, mostly in the lines	2.35	Highly skilled
16.) Does simple non-interlocking puzzles	1.81	Moderately skilled
17.) Does simple non-interlocking puzzles up to 4 pcs	1.74	Moderately skilled

18.) Does simple non-interlocking puzzles up to 12 pcs	1.52	Unskilled
19.) Does simple non-interlocking puzzles up to 25 pcs	1.42	Unskilled
20.) Plays simple matching games such as memory matching	1.68	Moderately skilled
21.) Plays simple board games such as Chutes and Ladders	1.48	Unskilled
22.) Plays more complex board games such as Sorry or Life	1.42	Unskilled
23.) Plays more complex board games such as monopoly, chess, checkers or backgammon	1.48	Unskilled
24.) Plays computer or video games once they are set up by an adult	1.77	Moderately skilled
25.) Can load, turn on and set up a video or computer game	2.07	Moderately skilled
26.) Works with other children using same okay materials	2.07	Moderately skilled
27.) Shares and tales turn into play	2.00	Moderately skilled
28.) Throws and catches a large ball within 2 feet	2.13	Moderately skilled
29.) Throws and catches a large ball 3–6 feet	2.00	Moderately skilled
30.) Throw and catches small ball 3–6 feet	2.00	Moderately skilled
31.) Hits ball when pitched	1.58	Unskilled
32.) Aims basketball at the basket at an appropriate height for age or size	1.84	Moderately skilled
33.) Dribbles basketball standing in place	1.87	Moderately skilled
34.) Dribbles basketball while running	1.87	Moderately skilled
35.) Kicks a ball at goal or target	2.00	Moderately skilled
36.) Kicks the ball while running	2.19	Moderately skilled
37.) Rides a tricycle	2.19	Moderately skilled
38.) Rides a two-wheel bike	2.07	Moderately skilled
39.) Swims-in safe near water	2.07	Moderately skilled
40.) Maintains proximity to peer within 1 foot	1.74	Moderately skilled
41.) Observes peers in play vicinity within 3 feet	1.81	Moderately skilled
42.) Parallel near peers using the same or similar materials (e.g. playing cars, near a peer who is also playing cars.	2.07	Moderately skilled
43.) Physically imitates peers	1.94	Moderately skilled
44.) Verbally imitates peers	1.94	Moderately skilled
45.) Takes turns appropriately during simple games	2.07	Moderately skilled
46.) Shares toys and talks about the activity with peers, even though the play agenda of the other children are different	1.81	Moderately skilled
47.) Physically and verbally responds to interaction from peers (accepts toy from a peer and answers questions	2.03	Moderately skilled
48.) Returns and initiates greetings with peers.	1.97	Moderately skilled

49.) Know appropriate ways of joining in an activity with the peer.	2.26	Moderately skilled
50.) Invites others to play.	2.45	Highly skilled
51.) Takes turns during structured activities	2.32	Moderately skilled
52.) Obeys game rules.	2.36	Highly skilled
53.) Request toys, food and materials from peers	1.97	Moderately skilled
54.) Plays cooperatively with peers during imaginative play	2.32	Moderately skilled
55.) Makes comments about what he/she is playing to peers.	1.90	Moderately skilled
56.) Organises play (suggests ideas to peers on how to play)	2.10	Moderately skilled
57.) Follows peer play plans	2.26	Moderately skilled
58.) Takes turns during unstructured activities without a time limit.	2.00	Moderately skilled
59.) Offers toys, food and materials to peers.	2.13	Moderately skilled
60.) Identifies likes and dislikes	1.90	Moderately skilled
61.) Identifies emotions in others	2.19	Moderately skilled
62.) Justifies emotions once identified (eating because I'm hungry	2.03	Moderately skilled
63.) Refrains from aggressive behaviours towards peers.	2.26	Moderately skilled
64.) Uses different tones of voice to convey messages.	2.03	Moderately skilled
65.) Deals with being teased in acceptable ways.	1.94	Moderately skilled
66.) Deals with being left out of a group	1.97	Moderately skilled
67.) Accepts not being first at a game or activity.	2.13	Moderately skilled
68.) Accepts losing at a game without becoming upset/angry	2.23	Moderately skilled
69.) Able to say 'I don't know'	1.87	Moderately skilled
70.) Able to end conversations appropriately.	1.94	Moderately skilled
71.) Accepts making mistakes without becoming upset/angry	2.13	Moderately skilled
72.) Continues to try when something is difficult	1.87	Moderately skilled
73.) Ignores others or situations when it is desirable to do so	2.07	Moderately skilled
Aggregate mean	2.04	Moderately skilled

Range: 1.00–1.67 = unskilled; 1.68–2.34 = moderately skilled; 2.35–3.00 = highly skilled.

As presented in Table 4, the social skills of LSENs as rated by parents showed the following indicators with highly skilled interpretation: paying attention to someone speaking, grasping or holding large toys or objects and imitating movements and gestures, which had the highest mean of 2.52. However, the indicators with the lowest mean of 1.42 were does simple non-interlocking puzzles up to 25 pcs and plays more complex board games such as Sorry or Life.

3.5. Community-based learning skills of LSENs

Table 5. Community-based learning skills of LSENs as rated by parents

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1.) Identify jobs within the community like teachers, nurses, doctors, security guards and police	2.26	Moderately skilled
2.) Travel from home to school	1.90	Moderately skilled
3.) Practice appropriate transportation behaviours like riding a bus, tricycle or private cars	1.55	Unskilled
4.) Recognise how the vehicle runs like bus, cars and tricycle	1.55	Unskilled
5.) Able to calculate money for jeepney and bus fares	1.45	Unskilled
6.) Identify the exact location of the school	2.00	Moderately skilled
7.) Exhibits socially responsible behaviour like morning and afternoon greetings	2.42	Highly skilled
8.) Exhibits socially responsible behaviour like courtesy words and calls like please and thank you	2.23	Moderately skilled
9.) Able to locate the exact location of the classroom	2.13	Moderately skilled
10.) Able to calculate money for snacks and allowances	1.55	Unskilled
11.) Travel from home to market	1.55	Unskilled
12.) Able to buy basic needs at the market	1.48	Unskilled
13.) Able to identify what to buy based on the list	1.55	Unskilled
14.) Able to identify a change of payment	1.42	Unskilled
15.) Locate five items preselected and list the cost of each item	1.52	Unskilled
16.) Identify and find five items in the store	1.61	Unskilled
17.) Practice socially responsible hospital behaviours in the market	1.65	Unskilled
18.) Demonstrate appropriate behaviour like giving way to other PWDs like physically handicapped and blind	1.68	Moderately skilled
19.) Exhibit socially responsible behaviours to elderly	1.87	Moderately skilled
20.) Identify a vehicle/bus stop near a school or home	1.65	Unskilled
21.) Locate banks in your community	1.32	Unskilled
22.) Locate a church in your community	1.74	Moderately skilled
23.) Locate emergency stations in your community	1.74	Moderately skilled
24.) List items that can be purchased	1.48	Unskilled
25.) Demonstrate how to ask for help finding an item	1.58	Unskilled
26.) Identify different areas of a hospital and their uses	1.71	Moderately skilled
27.) Identify areas of a terminal and their uses	1.48	Unskilled
28.) Recognise prices on items	1.48	Unskilled
29.) Locate a plaza in your community	1.52	Unskilled
30.) Locate recreation centres in your community	1.77	Moderately skilled

Aggregate mean	1.69	Moderately skilled

Range: 1.00–1.67 = unskilled; 1.68–2.34 = moderately skilled; 2.35–3.00 = highly skilled.

Table 5 presented the data on the community-based learning skills in LSENs as rated by parents, which revealed that indicators with the highest mean of 2.42 were 'exhibit socially responsible behaviour like morning and afternoon greetings'. And the lowest indicator was 'identify the change of payment', with a mean of 1.42.

3.6. Functional skills of LSENs as rated by the parents

Table 6. Functional skills of LSENs as rated by the parents

Functional skills	Mean	Interpretation
A. Life skills	2.00	Moderately skilled
B. Social skills	2.04	Moderately skilled
C. Community-based learning skills	1.69	Moderately skilled
Overall aggregate mean	1.91	Moderately skilled

Range: 1.00–1.67 = unskilled; 1.68–2.34 = moderately skilled; 2.35–3.00 = highly skilled.

It is affirmed in Table 6 that, with regard to the functional skills of LSENs, social skills got the highest mean of 2.04 (moderately skilled), followed by life skills of 2.00 (moderately skilled) and community-based learning skills of 1.69 (moderately skilled).

3.7. Test of significant relationship

Table 7. Relationship between functional skills of LSENs and profile of the respondents

Variables	Chi square	df	Critical value	Significance	Result
A. Life skills					
Age	5.997	4	9.488	Not significant	H0 accepted
Gender	1.614	2	5.991	Not significant	H0 accepted
Grade level	9.750	6	12.592	Not significant	H0 accepted
Disabilities	4.403	6	12.592	Not significant	H0 accepted
Combined monthly income	5.419	6	12.592	Not significant	H0 accepted
Occupation	25.008	24	36.415	Not significant	H0 accepted
Highest educational attainment	1.326	4	9.488	Not significant	H0 accepted
B. Social skills					
Age	3.508	4	9.488	Not significant	H0 accepted

Gender	2.794	2	5.991	Not significant	H0 accepted
Grade level	10.000	6	12.592	Not significant	H0 accepted
Disabilities	4.705	6	12.592	Not significant	H0 accepted
Combined monthly incom	7.529	6	12.592	Not significant	H0 accepted
Occupation	32.265	24	36.415	Not significant	H0 accepted
Highest educational attainment	4.705	4	9.488	Not significant	H0 accepted
B. Community-based learning skills					
Age	8.750	4	9.488	Not significant	H0 accepted
Gender	2.898	2	5.991	Not significant	H0 accepted
Grade level	5.143	6	12.592	Not significant	H0 accepted
Disabilities	5.641	6	12.592	Not significant	H0 accepted
Combined monthly income	5.819	6	12.592	Not significant	H0 accepted
Occupation	34.135	24	36.415	Not significant	H0 accepted
Highest educational attainment	3.954	4	9.488	Not significant	H0 accepted

The test of the relationship between the functional skills of LSENs and the profile of the respondents showed no significant relationship, i.e., all the computed chi-square values are lesser than their respective critical values.

4. Discussion

With regard to the demographic profile of LSENs, most of them were 10 years old or older (20, 64.52%), male (20, 64.52%), non-graded (20, 64.52%) and had intellectual disabilities (19, 61.29%). A particular disability of LSENs would affect other developmental skills. For example, if the learner has language difficulty, he/she would also have difficulty in mathematics and writing skills (Patel et al., 2020). For LSENs, it cannot be assumed that they will act according to their actual age; instead, they are developmentally younger than their actual age. According to Kozina et al. (2019), a 10-year-old child with special educational needs would be developmentally comparable to a 3-year-old or an even younger child.

Meanwhile, some studies revealed that LSENs are still capable of learning. They are capable of learning with a flexible learning environment/open and distance learning (ODL). The flexible learning environment has already modernised the conservative education system and has already globalised teaching LSENs (Ambeth & Saravanakumar, 2020). Nevertheless, the benefit of flexible learning will become a weakness if the learners cannot answer the problems encountered during the learning process. The results of Naidu's (2019) study show that learners with learning disabilities perceived flexible learning as challenging to conceptualise. It needs a personalised learning strategy

for the learners, which will be difficult to administer by parents who are not experts on the learning strategy (Thomas et al., 2017). The undying issue of accessibilities and the need for resources in implementation would always be a great challenge for the teachers, learners and parents (Kadoic et al., 2017; Wong, 2019). The issue of accessibilities would mean the late submission of assignments and activities and poor results on the said activities (Mutanana, 2019). Moreover, learners' feelings of being socially significantly isolated could impact their academic performance (Dwivedi et al., 2020). To eliminate the disadvantage of flexible learning environment/ODL, the use of modern technologies and new teaching pedagogies is utilised in the learning environment. New tools, techniques and teaching strategies are being used to ensure learning and collaborative teaching among teachers. Collaborative activities for learners have been used in new forms, according to Jena (2020). Using an online application for delivering instruction and sharing data will also help LSENs (Abd Rahman, 2020).

The profile of parents shows that majority of the parent respondents received a combined monthly income of less than PHP 9,100 (16, 51.61%), were housewives (14, 45.16%) and had a high school level (6, 50.00%). This indicates that the parent respondents have a combined income of PHP 9,100 per month and are considered poor according to the National Economic Development Authority. Most parent respondents are not earning for they are plain housewives, taking care of their family's basic needs, and the highest educational attainment for most of them are high school level. The study by Taderera and Hall (2017) stressed that parents of learners with learning disabilities find it challenging to care for their child because of financial problems and lack of knowledge of government policy, programmes and services that cater to their children's needs. To solve parental issues on managing their child's life, parental involvement is needed (Kozina et al., 2019). With the problem encountered by the parents of children with special educational needs, parental self-efficacy can be developed through parental training programmes (Hohlfeld et al., 2018). The support training programmes will create a quality of life for parents who have children with special educational needs (Misura & Memisevic, 2017).

However, the life skills of LSENs, as rated by parents, show that the learner respondents can choose clothes to wear and put clothes on, make a basic meal, help with cooking and plan and prepare meals, which got the highest mean of 2.45 (highly skilled). They are highly skilled in the tasks mentioned above, for they learned it with their parents as their first teacher. The learners were rated highly skilled in the task mentioned above because their parents have administered behavioural interventions directed to a reasonable reduction of their behavioural problems (Coates et al., 2015). Parents who attended parental behavioural training learned well-established handling for the behaviour of preschool and elementary school-aged children with special educational needs (Evans et al., 2018). Parents' encouragement to the learner with special educational needs can help the learners demonstrate the task with competence and mastery and learn something new (Crumpler, 2019). The said skills were further enhanced when they went to school and were taught using assistive technology. This result was supported by the study of Erdem (2017), which stated that learners with special needs had developed their life skills with the use of assistive technology by the teacher, which gives a positive result to the learner. Teachers using assistive technology like games with therapeutic effects and appropriate learning procedures positively impact the learners with LSENs (Kourakli et al., 2017). While they are unskilled in reading and understanding medicine labels and dosages, they have an IQ of 50–80, which is below normal (Ramadhani & Kustiawan, 2017). Ningrum and Wibowo's (2019) study revealed that IQ is a significant predictor of reading comprehension. Moreover, according to the study of Celik et al. (2017), LSENs have problems in working memory, which has a vital role in reading comprehension, which would lead to academic failure.

In terms of the social skills of LSENs, 'paying attention if someone is speaking', 'grasping or holding large toys or objects' and 'imitating movements and gestures' got the highest mean of 2.52 (highly skilled). Whereas the indicators 'doing simple non-interlocking puzzles up to 25 pieces' and 'playing more complex board games such as Sorry or Life' got the lowest mean of 1.42 (unskilled).

LSENs pay attention when their teachers, classmates and parents speak to them when they play with large toys with their classmates and even when they follow the movements or gestures of their classmates. LSENs do not require advanced social skills to be supported or recognised by their peers (Garrote, 2017).

The social skills of LSENs require social support in every activity and opportunity on hand; increased social awareness is essential to be responsive to their needs (Gurbuz et al., 2019). Social support is needed for LSENs; it was concluded in the study of Beckmann and Minnaert (2018) that LSENs have common behaviours like low self-confidence, do not like school and are socially withdrawn. Nevertheless, people's social skills with LSENs improved through interactive teaching strategies such as collaborative learning, peer tutoring and support groups (Garrote, 2017). The study of Grossard et al. (2017) stressed the use of information communication technologies capable of training social skills through serious games. It introduces diverse skills from varied conditions similar to real life. Expert-facilitated computer-based social skills training with the supplementation of actual training can also help LSENs (Tanaka et al., 2017). It also disclosed that designed video games embodied with genuine interaction and guided with teacher instruction facilitated students' abilities in the motor, cognitive and socio-emotional domains (Contreras et al., 2019).

With regard to the community-based learning skills of learners with special needs as rated by parents, the indicator 'exhibited socially responsible behaviour like morning and afternoon greetings' had the highest mean of 2.42. And the lowest mean of 1.42 was for the indicator 'able to identify the change of payment'. For LSENs to develop community-based learning skills, they need to be engaged in cooperative learning; it is their opportunity to interact with one another in an atmosphere that nurtures natural supports (Grenier & Yeaton, 2019). Smogorzewska et al.'s (2019) study revealed that when LSENs joined inclusive classrooms, they developed community-based learning skills faster than in an entire special education classroom due to their involvement and cooperation with regular students in different classroom activities. A positive result in cooperative learning was increasing regular students who would want to play, be a teammate and desk-mate with children with LSENs (Capodieci et al., 2019). Hopkins and Dymond (2020) pointed out that to develop community-based learning skills for LSENs, the teachers must consider the learners' existing and upcoming needs.

Furthermore, the teacher should consider the current skills required in the community and the learners' ability to learn the necessary skills. Family members and teachers should use a combination of simulated and community-based instructions to achieve and generalise the importance of community-based learning skills for learners to develop independent living skills (Barczak, 2019; O'Neill & Gutman, 2020). During the pandemic, if LSENs are given a chance to cooperate, work and participate within their communities, they can accomplish such tasks. Ultimately, they will improve their community-based learning skills (Choiseul-Praslin & McConnell, 2020). Even if LSENs stay at home during the pandemic, they can still be productive at home if given direct instructions. In Eratay's (2020) study, the direct instruction method develops skills for young individuals with intellectual disabilities and eventually develops their social skills.

The functional skills of our learner respondents, which are categorised as life skills, social skills and community-based learning skills, have an overall aggregate mean of 1.91, with an interpretation of moderately skilled. The main contributor for learners being considered moderately skilled with function skills is parents' insufficient knowledge about intellectual disability, inadequate teaching and training of service providers (Kleintjesi et al., 2020). The lack of specific long-term plans and communication among family members for the child's future with special educational needs will put the child to a disadvantageous side (Lee et al., 2019).

Marginalised parents did not encourage self-advocacy to their child with special educational needs or use the traditional programmes; rather they were surrounded by capable and helpful advocates until they were highly skilled in the functional skills (Boyce et al., 2020). The study of

Hazarika and Choudhury (2020) pointed out that parents with a child with special educational needs would deny the reality that their child has an intellectual disability, which would delay the treatment and rehabilitation of the child. Guardians' refusal will influence parental decision-making, which would affect the support provided to parents by health professionals (Edwards et al., 2018). The geographical area of parents with a child who has special educational needs, without a doubt, influences and affects the functional skills of the learner because of the family's livelihood and support is provided by clinicians, school faculty, and most importantly, help from the larger community (Jigyel et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, the relationship between the functional skills of LSENs and the profile of the respondents has shown no significance. Those LSENs, if appropriately trained, will perform a task they are skilled with (Goo et al., 2019). The study of Baragash et al. (2020) discloses that augmented reality can be practical and helpful for persons with disabilities to assist them to perform daily choices and guide their behaviour in society.

5. Challenges of parents in relation to functional skills of learners with special needs

LSENs are one of today's most socially stigmatised population. They are susceptible to numerous forms of exclusion that affect them differently, based on factors such as their handicapness, where they live and which culture or class they belong to. According to UNICEF (2013), developing countries have the most children with special needs, with an estimated 85% in the Philippines.

The participants were asked about the difficulties they face when it comes to the functional skills of learners with special needs. The following are the emerging themes based on the qualitative data collected during the interviews: all that matters is training, knowledge is power, busy bees, all that cares and out of focus.

5.1. All that matters is training

This is an attempt to engage and train parents in helping their special needs children. The causes for parent engagement are studied before explaining and contrasting the range of theoretical orientations and parenting talents that have been addressed in this work and the impact of parent and child traits. The effectiveness of the training methods used is given careful attention. The parents were proud to share their views regarding the challenges they encountered concerning functional skills of learners with special needs.

When I asked participant 2 regarding her challenges, she simply replied:

> *I lack training in handling children with intellectual disabilities.*

Parent 3 stated that:

> *I do not know how to tutor my child, who has an intellectual disability*

Parent 4 added that:

> *I do not have a problem because I know my child is intellectually slow. But I do not know how to handle him since I do not have any training on this.*

Moreover, Parents 6 and 7 said that:

> *Ma'am, it is difficult on our part since I do not know how to interpret sign language. (Parent 6)*

Parent 7 added that:

> *I know nothing about sign language.*

The difficulties that parents face differ from one another. This is true because LSENs vary from one another. Parent 8 responded to the researcher's questions as follows:

It is hard for a parent since I do know about this disability.

Parent 9 acknowledged that she needs additional training on how to deal with her child, saying:

Sometimes, I cannot understand his actions and his attitudes. Indeed, I do not know him that much.

Parent 10, on the other hand, acknowledged the reality that teaching her child without the aid of a teacher seems to be difficult for her.

Because I lack training, it is not enough to teach our children.

5.2. Knowledge is power

The primary goal of any parent is to help their children develop independence. There are progressive windows of opportunity to cultivate abilities at various developmental stages that will eventually lead to liberation. It is common knowledge that parents want their children to be ready for these changes. Learners with special needs can gain the necessary skills for employment with the proper preparation and determination.

The parents of learners with special needs recognise the importance of learning how to care for their children.

According to Parent 1,

My child does not have a focus. I have difficulty because I do not know about sign language.

During the interview, Parent 2 admits to her lack of knowledge. She responded by saying:

I have insufficient knowledge on how to handle intellectual disability

Parents 3 and 5 stated that they are unsure what to do while dealing with their special needs children. They mentioned that:

I do not know how to teach my child who has an intellectual disability.

Also, Parent 5 said that:

Lack of sufficient knowledge in handling exceptional cases.

Parent 11 said that:

As a parent of a child with special needs, you must extend your patience.

She also answered,

Parents need patience and understanding to handle their children with special needs.

5.3. Busy bees

The majority of parents were willing to figure out how to improve their special needs children's opportunities for growth and development. Having the opportunity to contact other parents in similar situations, share experiences and receive practical advice, despite busy schedules, can be pretty valuable.

Support groups are created specifically to meet these needs. Working parents may benefit from such gatherings. Parents are frequently unprepared to deal with the emotional challenges that

arise while dealing with special needs children and the families, despite their training to work with children. As a result, some parents find that joining a support group is beneficial. Others think it is an excellent source of parent referrals. They are also comforted by the fact that, in addition to themselves, others help these parents.

Parents 6 and 7 work hard for their children to meet their families' everyday necessities. As Parent 6 replied:

> *Sometimes, I do not know what he is talking about; I am busy.*

Parent 7 answered:

> *There are times that I forgot to attend to his needs for I am busy with my work.*

5.4. All that cares

Parents must acknowledge that the learner and his/her handicapness are distinct while dealing with special needs learners. A visual impairment child has different needs than that of a child with behavioural difficulties. The severity of the challenges posed by each handicap differs for each child. In other cases, parents need only to make minor changes to day care to participate fully. Trying to change the childcare programme, on the other hand, may necessitate more time, effort and money.

The parents got emotional during the interview when discussing their special needs children's behaviour.

According to Parent 1:

> *Her functional skills are all functioning well, but sometimes in sharing her belongings may lead to chaos. She doesn't want to share her things/stuff with others.*

While Parent 10 mentioned that her child

> *Hillary needs more assistance, especially since parents don't know how to sign language, just the basics. Sometimes we cannot cater to what he wants/needs because we cannot understand what he is trying to express.*

5.5. Out of focus

Despite their inability to concentrate, learners with special needs benefit greatly from being in the company of other children and receiving consistent attention from caring parents. Typically, developing learners benefit from having a classmate with a special need because they learn respect for a child whose abilities are different from theirs and how to respond appropriately and offer help to the child. Because the majority of children are distracted in some way, parents must be more compassionate with them. The parents are aware that having children would cause them to lose focus on certain parts of their bodies and even their thinking abilities. Parent 2 responded that her son

> *Glenn is so active in everyday activity, especially with the peers around, but in terms of school activities (modules), he tends to be out of focus on what he is doing.*

Parent 3 responded that:

> *In this situation, what we need is a constant reminder that we have to work.*

Parent 5 mentioned that her daughter

> *Keira quickly gets bored with the things that she usually does, the reason why she cannot finish a particular task or activity (modules).*

Parent 7 says that:

> *Breanna is improving in some functional skills because she is now focused on her routine every day at home. Sometimes she quickly forgot.*

According to Parent 8,

> *As the mother, the challenges that I've encountered with Judith are that sometimes I cannot understand her situation/thoughts, especially nowadays in answering the modules. Maybe she has her ways of expressing her thoughts, but I cannot interpret or understand maybe because of the lack of knowledge to handle her disability as a parent.*

However, Parent 9 mentioned that:

> *Leah's parents sometimes don't know how to handle it; if ever she will be angry if her request/wants will not be given/granted they don't know how to handle it. Sometimes they also have difficulty with Leah in training how to handle money. According to them, the parents sometimes disregard the feelings of Leah because they don't know how to handle them.*

According to Jaya et al. (2018), life skills are essential and valuable for individuals with special needs; they need to be educated. This skills education programme is an element of life skills. It is hoped that even by providing this service, LSENs will live alone and rely less on others. The skills training focuses on the different abilities required to create a product in useful real-world objects. Children with exceptional needs can obtain perceptual, appreciative and creative experience by acquiring the many tasks expected from them. Blind children, hard-of-hearing children, mentally challenged children, tuna barrel children, gifted children and children with special learning issues are all examples of children with disabilities. They have a wide range of IQs, as shown by the condition. As a result, some children have both a high cognitive disability and a low cognitive ability. Some have a severe disability, while others have a minor one. Given this situation, the types of life skills cultivated for children with impairments are general life skills and occupational life skills.

Learners with special needs may find it challenging to develop relationships with their peers in inclusive education. A vital requirement for developing successful contacts with peers has age-appropriate social skills. Students who lack a basic set of social skills appear to be more likely to be excluded.

Kob and Janz (2021) described that young people with special educational needs (SENs) have a significantly lower social position than those without SENs on average. Teachers justified this by utilising (a) individual-related, (b) interaction-related and (c) class level-related characteristics. Students with exceptional needs are not socially integrated into their peer group. There are poor relationships between social status and social skills, but this is not the case for students with behavioural problems. Their social status is directly related to their ability to interact with others. This group may benefit from social skills training to help them maintain contact, partnerships and connections with their peers.

Ferreira et al. (2017) conducted a study on learners' social skills with intellectual disability. The findings revealed that children with learning difficulties were less liked and more likely to be rejected than their peers. Compared to peers without learning disabilities, learners with learning disabilities were more likely to be rated as aggressive, immature, having personality problems and difficulty attending class. The evaluation instruments utilised, gender and ethnicity all played a role in the differences in the outcomes. Even though social skills develop with age, the disparity between

children with and without LD continues. Learners with intellectual disabilities frequently struggle with daily chores, necessitating training to gain functional independence.

Despite their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other challenges, learners with special needs are thought to benefit from full participation for inclusion to be successful. Even if they did not have a disability, the students would attend schools close to their homes to be easily monitored. As a result, involving children with disabilities in the educational system is a step towards enrolling special needs students.

Even though self-actualisation can be achieved in various ways and by multiple assessments, it is an important goal for students with disabilities. A child with impairments can realise his/her aim of self-actualisation with the encouragement of individual skills and capacities and assistance in successfully engaging with her surroundings (McCarthy et al., 2019). Adult loving relationships are life-enhancing for people with intellectual disabilities, along with everyone engaged in their lives. As a result, it is not proper or fair to overlook this aspect of life.

Bruke et al. (2020) presented these interventions that promote self-determination that can benefit students of all ages, disabilities and locations. There is still a need to encourage self-determination among students with and without disabilities and students from all-inclusive, general education settings.

Disability does have an impact on both the individual and the social environment. When it comes to explaining disability, the social model has ethical and economic implications. The social impact of disability is more significant than what may be considered a disadvantage for the impaired individual. Parent training programmes, teacher attitudes and the accessibility of materials and equipment always impact inclusive education for students with special needs. The extent of a limitation in carrying out their responsibilities conscientiously, whether minor or severe, influenced the parents' opinions negatively or positively.

The participants were questioned about the difficulties they face when it comes to the functional skills of learners with special needs. The following are the emerging themes based on the qualitative data collected during the interviews: 1) working heroes, 2) lack of Training, and 3) the child needs care.

Parenting children with learning difficulties involves extensive knowledge and access to resources, information, and support. As a result, addressing children's learning and other developmental problems, particularly problems connected to preventive and supportive interventions, is difficult in the Schools Division of Toledo City.

Parents play a significant role in developing the functional skills of LSENs. According to Taderera and Hall (2017), learning disabilities are difficult to define; nonetheless, she believes that 'learners with special educational requirements' and 'learners with learning obstacles' are two viable definitions. This indicates that community perceptions, cultural attitudes and institutional shortcomings increase the challenges faced by parents of students with special needs.

As Greenway and Eaton-Thomas (2020) viewed, parents felt inadequate and unprepared, and many worried that their child's education and mental health would suffer because of their absence from school. Parents also spoke about the adverse effects of homeschooling on themselves and their families. Finally, SES and SEND-type were not linked to parents' homeschooling experiences. It was supported by the study of Krol (2020), which shows that distance learning education technologies, in the opinion of parents, are not favourable to the concentration of attention on the part of the student with special educational needs.

Students with learning disabilities, when compared to ordinary students, require more attention because they may have special needs (Dangoisse et al., 2020). Most parents struggle because they have not learned how to deal with disabilities or teach fundamental life skills to their

children. Due to a lack of accurate knowledge regarding learning disabilities, extended family members may be unwilling to contribute to and support a child's upbringing with LDs, fearing prejudice and stigmatisation.

6. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused varied challenges to all SPED teachers, parents and LSENs. The study concludes that learners' functional skills (life skills, social skills and community-based learning skills) based on the parents' responses were moderate. School administrators in schools implementing special education programmes must redesign contextualised transition activities to improve LSENs functional skills in the new normal. However, these learners cannot continuously follow the teachings on television, and many did not attend the online classes.

7. Recommendations

The researchers strongly recommend that the special education teachers provide audio-video supplementary instructions to parents to teach functional skills at home and assess these skills. It is also recommended that both special education teachers and parents undergo school-based training and seminars about the new approaches and strategies in teaching exceptional education learners in the new normal.

8. Limitations

The data were gathered from the identified schools in the Division of Toledo City, Cebu, Philippines. Also, the researchers did not include the support given by the family members of the LSENs towards their functional skills during the pandemic. However, the researchers believe that the family support of the LSENs is essential for them to develop their functional skills during this pandemic.

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