

Parent's Engagement in the Learning Needs of Learners with Down Syndrome in the New Normal Education

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Abstract

This study probed parental engagement in the learning needs of the learners with Down syndrome (DS) in their homes in Zamboanga Sibugay, Philippines, during this new normal education. Parents of a child with DS were the primary participants of this study. Merriam's case study approach was utilized as a research design. Multiple data sources were considered, such as interview transcripts and observation notes during the actual interview. The results show that parents exerted more effort to ensure their children's educational success amidst the pandemic. The findings of the study reveal parents' efforts to catch the attention of their children during the delivery of learning at home. Although parents struggled to extend their children's limited attention span, they managed to find suitable strategies to keep their focus, like using different reinforcements and utilizing videos from social media platforms to teach their children. It is recommended that parents or guardians of children with DS consider pieces of training on how to effectively facilitate their children's learning process. Special Education (SPED) teachers must guide the parents on how to facilitate learning at home together with the school principal, who could initiate teaching pedagogy seminars and training for parents. The seminars and training would help parents and guardians facilitate their child's learning process.

Keywords: *Learners with Down Syndrome; Parent's engagement; New normal education*



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INTRODUCTION

Special education program extends to children with intellectual disability, including those with Down Syndrome (DS). The situation with children with DS is that they have an extra chromosome which the medical community labels as Chromosome 21; hence the other term for Down Syndrome used by the medical community—is trisomy 21. According to Asim et al. (2015), this extra chromosome causes physical and mental developmental delays and disabilities.

Cuskelly et al. (2021) of the non-profit organization Down Syndrome Education International asserted that one of the common learning problems that children with DS experienced was short memory and attention span. According to Mc Brien (2012), based on her pediatric-neurological research of children with DS, attention span may be relatively shorter among these children due to underlying medical reasons. It borders on Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). Individuals with D.S. tend to have a shorter working memory span than typical people, and this is quite evident among children (Costa et al., 2015). The effect that DS has on specific learning areas is also evident in other research studies.

Nationally speaking, in the Philippines, according to writer-researcher Edu Punay (2015), a Filipino with DS is born every 4 hours. According to the Down Syndrome Association of the Philippines

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Inc. (D.S.A.P.I.), around 100,000 households in the Philippines have a patient with Down syndrome (The Manila Times, 2014).

Learners with DS have grave learning difficulties. The study explored how their respective parents provided for their children's learning needs during this time of pandemic when there were no face-to-face classes. They were in better physical proximity with their children to guide and teach them than their teachers. Parental engagement is vital in this pandemic since parents play an essential role in their children's learning (Gecolea, 2021). Parents in the new normal were more active in helping their children (Garen et al., 2021).

What assessment tool or evaluation method did parents utilize? These questions are gaps that are absent from most academic and educational research institutions. The researchers further believe that this fundamental query is necessary as the answers would serve as a baseline for designing a comprehensive pedagogical and academic approach to a special education program intended for learners with DS. Lastly, it is believed that the findings would help further improve the quality of special education delivery to learners with DS.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory of Proximal Development

This study was based on Lev Vygotsky's Theory of Proximal Development. According to Shabani et al. (2010), there are three primary levels of learning that all learners undergo: The first level is the Independent Learning Level, wherein learners perform on their own without any help from others. The second level is the Zone of Proximal Development, where learners perform with the assistance or guidance (also known as 'scaffolding') from their teachers and other adults considered as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). Lastly, the third level is the Unattainable Learning Zone, which refers to the zone where learners are yet to learn, even if with maximal assistance and guidance. This study utilized the concept of Zone of Proximal Development in studying how parents, as the children's MKO, used scaffolds to help them learn and perform in their academic activities.

The educational system expands the horizons of the learning capabilities of learners. Learners learn more on their own and more things that learners learn from the assistance of mentors, who could be parents or teachers. The area where learners have not learned and cannot perform yet slowly diminishes (Shabani et al., 2010).

The focus of Vygotsky's Scaffolding model is on the Zone of Proximal Development, where learners learn under the guidance and assistance of their respective 'scaffolds', which are commonly the learner's parent or teachers. The Scaffolding model emphasizes how parents and teachers act as the learner's scaffolding as they build into their learning experiences and improve one area upon another as they move through the stages (Sarikas, 2020). In other words, parents' involvement in their children's education and engagement in the learning-teaching processes manifests in the Zone of Proximal Development, where learners, especially learners with special needs, learn better

Parental Engagement in Education and Special Education

Parental Engagement has been defined as the pragmatic application of the formed partnership among families, schools, and the community at large, at which point this partnership provides crucial technical information to parents and related skills on how to best engage in their children's education (Emerson et al., 2012). The same research also provides a sobering conclusion from the consolidation of various studies on this subject matter that adequate parental engagement has greatly contributed to the

successful completion of the educational process by the learners and one that is marked by quality improvement in specific ways such as graduation rates, tardiness, better social and emotional development.

Another specific aspect that parental engagement positively but indirectly influences learning is the self-esteem aspect. Parents who are engaged in their child's education positively influence their (the learners') sense of self-esteem as well, which affects their academic performance (Wairimu et al., 2016). Parent engagement has a significant influence on the motivational aspect of learning (Sheldon & Jung, 2015).

The research of Lima and Kuusisto (2019) emphasized the difference between parental engagement and parental involvement, explaining that while parental engagement also meant involvement, it also meant more than just involvement. Accordingly, parental involvement is simply a parent's participation in their child's education, while parental engagement means deeper and more active participation that applies skills. The higher level of engagement that parents render in their children's education means a higher success rate for their children in terms of academics (Durisic et al., 2017). This is consistent with that of Lara and Saracostti's (2019) study, which showed that the quality of parental involvement in a child's education meant the quality of academic achievement for the child.

Increased involvement of parents in special education programs enhanced the output of said partnerships in specific areas of concern.

The learning needs of learners with special needs were easily addressed and in the most effective way possible (Dameh, 2015). According to Bariroh (2018), parental involvement influences the learning motivation and learning achievement of children with special needs. The author concluded in the said study that there is a 'huge magnitude' that parents' involvement has on their child or children's motivation and learning achievement. Parents play a vital role in helping shape their children's peculiar needs, considering that they know their children better than any non-related teacher (Longsdon, 2021).

Learning Difficulties Experienced by Learners with Down Syndrome

Cuskelly et al. (2021) asserted that children with DS are usually two years behind in learning numeracy skills. Students with DS in Romania have far more difficulty comprehending mathematical concepts and principles than mainstream learners (Agheana & Duță, 2014). This finding is corroborated by the study of Janier et al. (2015) in their need analysis for children with DS to develop learning materials aided with multimedia technology. According to the researchers, learners with DS have the poorest performance in the learning areas of mathematics compared to all other learning areas. Accordingly, this has been the most challenging aspect in the overall cognitive development of a child with DS. The learning of numeracy skills has been especially crucial in the early childhood learning of pupils with DS for their future practical use in financial management (even at the elementary school stage), time telling, and even simple arithmetic (Mackinnon, 2015).

Taken from Cuskelly et al. (2021) consolidation of different research studies on behalf of Down Syndrome Education International, the researchers found that on one side, word reading was easier as compared to mathematics. Recognition of letters as symbols of words and their respective meanings is one of the strengths of a child with DS. On the other hand, Pope and Romito (2020) noted that children with DS usually had delayed speech and language development. The Boston Children's Hospital - Down Syndrome Program (2016) clarifies the seeming dissonance between the acquisition of language learning and effective communication. Children with DS usually have decreased muscle tone, strength, and coordination in the mouth and throat. This means that while the learners with DS's acquisition of

language information (words, letters, symbols, grammar) is usually normal and at par with normal children, expressing themselves is more difficult due to the aforementioned problems. The study of Ivić (2016) delved into the communication skills of one particular learner with DS in Croatia. It was having strong pedagogical and adequate preparations on the part of the teachers as well as strong coordination and partnership with the parents of children with DS that made the child's learning easier and achieving the desired outcomes more attainable (Ivić, 2016).

Children with DS appeared to exhibit behavioral problems such as anxiety (nervousness), repetitiveness/monotonous mannerism, and withdrawal. It should be noted, though, that while these are easily observable to children with DS, these behavioral expressions are not exclusive to children with DS. Many youngsters during this stage appear to exhibit one or more of these problems (Janier et al., 2015). Citing the consolidated studies of Cuskelly et al. (2021), social development is, among the aforementioned learning domains, the least problematic in children with DS. This finding is supported by the study of Faragher et al. (2019), wherein the authors asserted that forming emotional connections and personal engagement with children with DS is not at all out-of-the-ordinary tedious educator's work and does not require extreme measures.

The researchers infer that having a comprehensive description of the laymen '*pedagogical practices*' that parents of children with DS utilized to help meet the learning needs of their child with DS.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study utilized a case study design because of its qualitative and explorative nature. According to Hamilton (2011), a case study is applied as the qualitative research type when the researcher is trying to establish a clearer descriptive presentation of the situation using different methods of collecting data, such as gathering narrations of experiences, perspectives, and insights of diverse individuals involved in the theme of the research. In this study, the researchers aimed to build a rich picture of the learning process, cognitive processing, needs, specific issues, and challenges those learners with DS were experiencing as described and elucidated by their parents or guardians.

An in-depth comparative documentary analysis of the three case study models named after their proponents (Yin, Merriam, and Stake) was conducted by Yazan (2015), which the researchers used as a major reference in determining the most fitting model for this study. The researchers employed Merriam's Case Study model, which was found most fitting. According to Yazan (2015), Merriam's model and semantics of a case study were a 'holistic description and analysis of a phenomenon, practice or institution and the researchers must follow the procedures to conduct effective interviews, careful observations, and data-mining. Figure 1 shows these procedures.

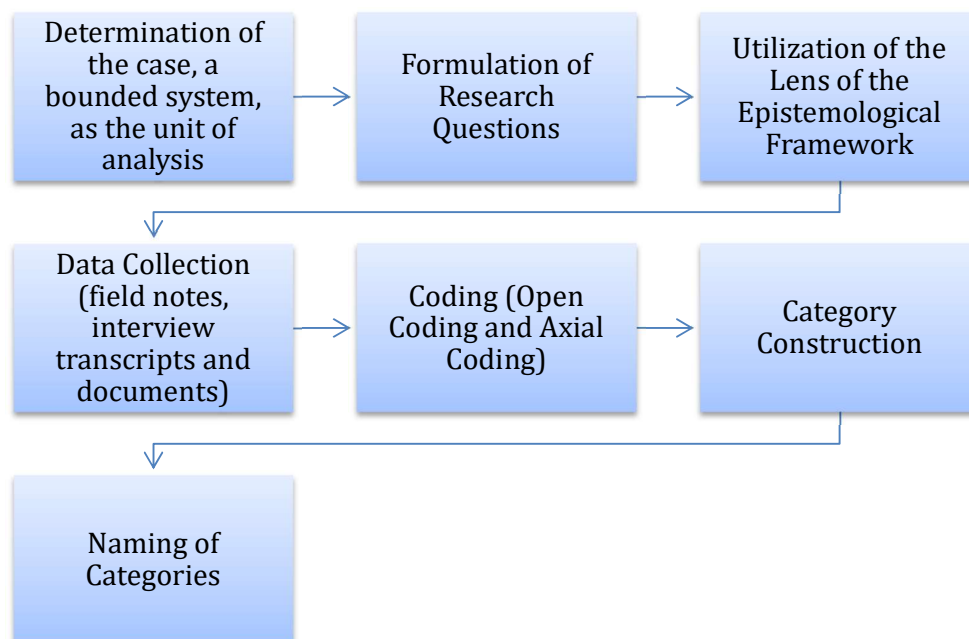


Figure 1. Flow Chart of Merriam's Method for a Case Study

A *qualitative case study* is a bounded system that could be a person, a program, or an event. Once the case has been determined, research questions are formulated as the bases for setting the boundaries of the case and in the data analysis. An appropriate epistemological framework is utilized by using it as a lens for understanding the phenomenon or case. Data collection can be through observation/s recorded in field notes, interviews, or focus group discussions recorded in transcripts, and a checklist of documents needed and their collection. Data analysis for a case study is a complex process of moving back and forth between the collected data and the intention of the study to construct meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Coding is a process of making notations on segments from the data that are responsive to the research questions. Open coding is the process of highlighting keywords lifted from relevant transcripts. In contrast, axial coding is the process of grouping open codes that seem to go together and come from interpretation and reflection on meaning (Richards, 2015, cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Category construction is derived from the classification system reflecting the recurring regularities or patterns that become the categories or themes. The categories are conceptual elements that cover units of data from the coding. These are abstractions derived from the data and not the data themselves (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Holistically, this research design made this study even more viable as this allowed the researchers to explore the nature of the case. It also made helped the study to achieve in-depth knowledge of the situation.

Research Environment

Being a third-class municipality, Titay, Zamboanga Sibugay, Philippines, does not have a state-of-the-art facility that provides the highest quality of education to learners with DS compared to the most advanced metropolitan cities of the country or developed countries. Most of the participants belonged to

the middle-class economic strata and provided education to their child-learner according to budget and availability in the municipality and nearby municipalities.

The place is a third-class municipality. Most of the residents are living within borderline poverty levels. Based on the data garnered during initial enrolment, most parents of the child with DS do not have bachelor's degrees. This could factor into the data this research intended to gather—parental intervention or parenting style on helping to provide for the learning needs of a child with DS. This is important as their respective situations at home had a tremendous influence on how their specific learning needs were being met.

Research Participants

The research participants were the five parents of a child with DS who are enrolled in a special education school. The study employed purposive sampling in selecting the target participants.

Research Instrument

The main instrument of this study is the researchers guided by an interview guide, which included three (3) sets of questions: an engaging question, exploratory questions, and a concluding question. The interview guide was developed to explore the parents' perspectives, observations, and actual experiences in relation to their involvement in their child's learning. The researchers utilized an audio recording device during the interview proper to focus on the participants' responses and generate a "verbatim transcript" after the interview.

The researchers wrote their observations in their field notes, which contained the researchers' record of non-verbal data and nuances about the environmental context in which the study was conducted. The behavior and activities observed provide a holistic representation of the research problem.

Lastly, a checklist of the needed documents was prepared as a guide in finding these relevant documents to substantiate the data collection even more.

Data Gathering Procedure

As soon as the interview guide was validated, the researchers sought permission from the Department of Education office in Zamboanga Sibugay through the office of the Schools Division Superintendent, the District Supervisor of Titay (Elementary level), and the School Principal of the undisclosed school in Titay. Once permission was granted, the researchers sent letters of invitation and requested consent from the target research participants—the parents of the child with DS. Once the parents gave their consent to participate in the study, the researchers asked for an appointment date for a formal interview proper with them.

Before the actual data-gathering process, the researchers prepared audio-visual recording gadgets to record the conduct of the in-depth interview. Before the interview proper, the researchers first discussed the rights of the target participants. They asked permission to record the entire interview using an audio-recording gadget for later transcriptions.

On the day of the interview appointment, the researchers reiterated to the interviewees their rights as participants, especially their right to withdraw during the interview. The researchers started the audio recording prior to the actual interview. Each interviewee was allowed to express their side and answer the questions.

Data Analysis

The researchers have to think about the purpose of the study---about what the study wanted to find out. They have to look through the epistemological lens to be able to construct meaning from the data. They code the data focusing on the patterns relevant to the research questions and guided by the chosen theoretical frame. The constant back and forth between inductive and deductive analysis of the open codes refined the coding process. From the codes, categories are derived through a constant comparative method of combining codes into fewer, more comprehensive categories.

Ethical Considerations

In a qualitative study, researchers should anticipate and deal with the ethical issues that arise during the study. Shawa (2017) provided the following guidelines for conducting educational research considering the ethical issues and the recommended practices that address them. The researchers ensured that the following guidelines were followed: (1) *Rights to be informed*. The participants had the right to be informed of the nature, content, and topic of the research study and their rights as participants. Hence, the researchers ensured that the participants were duly informed of the nature of the research. (2) *Rights to be treated with dignity and respect*. One of the research participants' rights was the right to be treated humanely. As such, the researchers ensured that the participants were treated as such. During the data-gathering, the researchers took extra precautions so no physical, verbal, or other abuse or harm would fall upon them. (3) *Rights to withdraw*. Another right of the research participants was the right to withdraw their participation at any time during the course of the data-gathering process. The researchers also ensured that this was presented to the participants before the in-depth interview. (4) *Rights to data privacy and confidentiality*. As such, the researchers ensured that the personal information of the participants, as well as that of their child with DS, were not divulged to the public or any third party. (5) *Data preservation*. Shawa (2017) also emphasized that the integrity of the data was safeguarded from manipulation and alteration for any purpose. The researchers then ensured an objective and impartial treatment of the data gathered herein. (6) *Proper citation*. As a given ethos in formal research studies, proper credit should be given to whom they are due. And this was applied here in this research study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the case study of parents with a child with DS, their experiences and insights on the phenomenon were explored. Each parent had codes such as P1 for parent 1. Each child also had codes such as ChildwithDS# (Child with DS). Coding was used to maintain the confidentiality of their profile. An observation checklist consisted of the participants' observed positive attributes utilized.

Table 1. Participant's Profile

Participant	Code	Details
Parent 1	P1	Housewife
Parent 2	P2	Housewife
Parent 3	P3	Chain Saw Operator
Parent 4	P4	Public School Teacher
Parent 5	P5	Housewife

The cases emphasized the parents' engagement in the learning needs of children with Down Syndrome in the new normal. P1, P2, and P5 were housewives; P3 was a working father, while P4 was a mother at the same time, a school teacher. These parents were identified as the primary persons who facilitated their child's learning needs with Down Syndrome in the new normal for this school year, 2021-2022.

Parents' Engagement in the Learning Needs of Learners with Down Syndrome in The New Normal Education

The data gathered by the researchers during the interview manifested a strong engagement of parents and guardians in ensuring that their child with Down Syndrome was motivated to engage in literacy, numeracy, communication, and social activities. Generally, parents encountered different levels of difficulties per category.

Parent Engagement to Motivate their Child with Down Syndrome. Motivating a child with Down syndrome takes a lot of bargaining. The parents and guardian expressed their experiences in keeping their children motivated. Some of them allowed their child to watch movies or eat their preferred snacks before teaching their modules. One of the parents also mentioned that taking their child to a friend's house helped them answer the modules smoothly. This is evident in the following statements:

"I motivate him before teaching. I would not approach him directly because he would get shocked. I will let him watch a movie. Aside from that, I provide him with food. Then I let him sit so he would not be surprised. He is attentive when I say come here. You need to approach him slowly because he is different from normal ones; If he stops, I will let him rest for a while, then I will call his name and guide him on his activity again."-P1

"I guide her and appease her. I let her watch television, then minimize the sound. When we get started on the activity, I set the TV off. She would not mind the TV, and she'd continue doing the activity. If she got distracted, I bought her food to stay calm, and she would continue until we were done with her module."-P2

"If he can finish early with his module, we really try our best to give him a reward, like taking him to his friend's house. So, whenever it is our time to answer the modules, he will really answer them right away."-P5.

Parents truly manifested how they wanted to make their child's learning comfortable despite their situation. When parents shared how they managed to comfort their children, they showed how much effort they exerted to prepare them for the next activities (Ramirez et al., 2022). It was observed that these parents did not allow stress to overcome their desires for their children. Parents were even happy to provide what was best for their children, even in the most difficult situation.

According to Shabani et al.'s exposition of Vygotsky's Theory of Proximal Development (2010), learners could easily perform the given tasks when supported by their parents or caregivers. Reflecting on the answers of the parents/guardian on how they engaged themselves in order to keep their child with Down Syndrome motivated in learning at home, it was manifested that parents/guardians were all eager to assist their child's academic performance despite having limited knowledge on how to engage a child with Down Syndrome in a modular class. With all the different kinds of motivations and reward systems that they did, it was clear that their child became more enthusiastic about answering their modules. Parents/guardians were also willing to lengthen their patience during the engagement.

Furthermore, the observation and analysis of their responses were aligned with the findings of the research by Al-Salahat (2016), in which the author found using videos to help motivate learners with DS

to perform could be quite effective. As Al-Salahat (2016) found, the learners, though with DS, performed well in the daily living tasks assigned to them after video lessons were used as instructional material. Earlier research by Cannella-Malone et al. (2011) found similar results to their study on utilizing videos as instructional materials in teaching learners with intellectual disabilities on normal routine tasks. As Quinn (2011) explained, children with DS were usually visual learners, which could justify why videos/movies/television had helped motivate and prepare them for the learning mindset.

Quinn (2011) added also explained why repetition, reminding, and calling of attention were important in parental engagement in the children with DS learning process—children with DS required them as they usually had short memory and attention spans. Quinn also added that having ample time for engagement was very important because teaching children with DS was time-consuming and required extraordinary effort and attention.

Thus, parental engagement of children with DS would require both extra material resources and psychological and technical preparations.

Parent Engagement in Literacy and Communication Activities. Parents and guardians shared their experiences with engaging their Children with Down Syndrome in terms of Literacy and Communication. Parents shared the importance of making eye contact with their children with DS. They believed that looking straight into their child's eyes with D.S. allowed a strong and sincere connection to their child. Avoiding "baby talk" was their way of strengthening their child's communication skills. Parents also learned to utilize videos on YouTube to increase their literacy skills. This is evident in the following statements;

"We really make sure that we talk to him properly and to make sure that we do not employ baby talk. If there are times when he mispronounces some words, we correct him immediately. During learning, I also let him watch Youtube, which I find him learning a lot from it."-P1

"If ever we talked to her, we really tried to make eye contact with her to make sure that he would see our facial expressions and to make her feel that we were interested. When learning, I make sure to read the instructions very well and explain it very well after."-P4.

"Regarding his communication, he knows by himself, maybe because he can hear it from his siblings. When we still had television, he always watched it. One of the ways he learned from what he saw in the videos. Then they do practice speaking with his siblings."-P3

During the interview, parents manifested how they tried to compensate for the needs of their child with Down syndrome. Their effort to provide accurate learning for their child was undeniably commendable. Establishing eye contact was an intelligent idea because that would make the child feel valued. Avoiding baby talk would keep the child in a mature state where he could act upon his age. These things were well provided to ensure academic success despite their condition and limitations. During the interview, the parents were confident with their words. They wanted nothing else but to see their child live life to the fullest.

Vygotsky's Theory of Proximal Development supported the situation of the abovementioned parents/guardian who was willing to teach their child in order for them to learn the basics. Although parents/guardians encounter so many struggles and uncertain delays in their desired outcome for their child yet, according to this theory, learning occurs if there is a constant interaction between the child and the people in their environment. Taken from the experienced of the participants as parents at the same time tutor their child with Down Syndrome, it was observed from their answers how tirelessly they taught their child with DS, even if some of them were unresponsive and impatient. A guidebook on

Teaching Children with Down Syndrome provided by Kehe (2015) reiterated that repetition and constant practice were vital in teaching literacy skills and encouraging Children with DS to express themselves and communicate their thoughts. This suggested that these parents/guardians were on the right track in motivating their children to learn. After all, Wairimu et al. (2016) strongly believed that if parents are actively engaged in their child's education, it positively influences the learners' sense of self-esteem, which affects their academic performance.

Parent Engagement in Numeracy Activities. Parents shared their experiences on how they engaged their children in numeracy. Parents mentioned using sticks, toys, real-life scenarios, videos, and even online games. These strategies facilitated their child's numeracy achievement. They found it effective to use because their child with DS gained a lot of improvements during the time that they had used those learning activities. This is evident in the following statements;

"My strategy was using sticks; then I guided him in counting 'one, two' so he could count with me. When I teach him on his module, I prompt his hand, and then I will say this is 'one, two, and three' then he would listen."-P1

"She got small toys in the house that I used to teach her numbers. I grouped all her blocks, and I let her count each group with the same colors. She really liked that activity, especially when she could see different colours."-P2.

"When we are in the wet market, I always ask him to count the different things in the market, like I let him count the fish and fruits. I can see that he is happy doing."-P3.

"To teach my child properly, I myself tried searching on YouTube on how to teach a child with DS; Like how to teach geometric shapes; I found it on YouTube that using pebbles to bury the shapes and let the child look for them and once found the child will name it accordingly. I can say that my child is so happy doing that activity while naming each shape."-P4.

"Do you know the show Blippi? We let him watch that show. Most of its topics are numbers and shapes. Through that show, he learned to identify numbers and shapes and also count."-P5.

In order to provide adequate learning for their child with DS, parents tried to employ different ways to improve the numeracy skills of their child. Online resources and real-life scenarios were even utilized to make sure that their child would learn something from them. Parents have shown commendable skills in thinking of different ideas to ameliorate their child's condition. During the interview, the parents were already well-adjusted to their situation. They already knew how to deal with their children during learning sessions.

The Zone of Proximal Development by Vygotsky (1978) gave a clearer outcome of what would happen if there was persistent academic guidance to a person struggling to achieve academic success. Not only did the child would master numeracy or literacy, but they also have a stronger foundation for both. Parents/guardian showed their hard effort in teaching their child how to count even if there were times when their child showed resistance to learning. Parents' persistence and eagerness to help their child attain their full potential even with their condition showed an effective way to build a scaffold. During the interview, it was observed that parents got a spark in their eyes which could be translated into a positive desire to gain improvements for their child's learning condition. The use of physical materials like "sticks" was one of the oldest ways yet effective to teach the concept of Mathematics. Horner (2007) explains that physical materials were necessary to visually represent numeric concepts of order, quantity, comparison, and basic arithmetic computations. With respect to repetition, the 'Kumon' Theory was worth mentioning. According to the study by Sam (2007) explaining the 'Kumon' Theory,

learners with DS had a short memory span. Therefore, constant and consistent repetition was necessary for them.

Parent Engagement in the Learning Assessment. Learning assessment was imperative for parents who played the role of their child's teachers during this time of the pandemic. Parents admittedly shared that observation, preparing a checklist, conducting a short quiz, answering verbal questions, and creating a portfolio were some of the assessments parents made to ensure that their child with Down syndrome learns from their lesson. Parents were ecstatically grateful that despite their limited knowledge, they were able to assess their children and see their progress. This is evident in the following statements;

"I always try to do observation to my child to confirm if there are improvements in his learning. Through that, I can attest that there is really a fruit in my labor" -P1

"Every time I teach her a new lesson like addition and subtraction after our lesson, I always ask her to answer my question to check if she is really learning."-P2.

"I am using a checklist for the child. This really helps me a lot to identify her positive changes, like his knowledge in math which I have recorded in my checklist from learning how to count and read numbers. My friend gave this idea to me so I could use this to track my child's progress."-P3.

"I conduct simple quizzes on my child after our lesson. It's only a simple quiz like checking the correct answer and putting an X to the wrong one."-P4.

"I love taking pictures, and it becomes my way of referencing my child's progress. Through taking pictures, I was able to create a portfolio of my child's learning progress. Those pictures were uploaded to my Facebook account with captions. On my Facebook, I can see there the progress of my child. Before, he was really having a hard time counting, but now he knows already."-P5.

To ensure that learning would take place, parents skillfully made their way to assess their child's learning progress. Using different assessment tools, parents became confident that their children learned something from the way they were taught them. Parents were surprised at how their child's learning progress took place because they knew from the beginning that they were just parents and not a teacher. However, their actions showed how grateful they were that all their efforts paid off.

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) conveyed strong support for parents who did everything to ensure that their children were progressing despite their natural disabilities. As shown in the participants' responses, they constantly and consistently shared how they became their child's mentor by looking at their learning progress and ensuring that learning would take place in their home learning environment. Parent's engagement in this matter proved how they valued their children's education during this pandemic.

The Zone of Proximal Development by Vygotsky clearly explained the goal of the parents. Parents knew that their child with DS did not only need to memorize numbers and letters. Parents' ways of assessing their children were to determine how well their children could respond to questions as part of the scaffolding. Dangle and Sumaoang (2020) mentioned the pointless role of assessment as part of the self-learning modules as it did not support effective learning. Although parents of children with DS did not directly say about the ineffectivity of their child's learning module, their ways of assessing their child using repetition gave everybody a hint of dislike. As noticed, they had their assessment, as informal as they were, and not necessarily sanctioned by the DepEd agency; they were, however, the best way as these parents saw fit to assess the levels of scaffolding (known, proximal development zone, and

unknown) their child needs. A consolidated study by Shepard (2005) showed the indispensable link between 'scaffolding' and assessment. Based on the consolidation of various literature on Vygotsky's 'scaffolding' theory and assessment, the author went on to elaboratively explain how proper and adequate assessment leads to proper placement of the learning scaffolds according to correct and sufficient knowledge/information of what the child already knew and what was yet to be known/learned.

IMPLICATION

Based on the findings of the study and the interpretation thereof in connection to related literature and studies, the researchers were able to conjure the following implications from the data:

In the learning process of a child with Down syndrome Yashima (2018) wrote that their physical defects impede them from grasping learning. Children with Down syndrome have cognitive mathematical, cognitive language, psychomotor, and affective difficulties. The parents of these children are tested among these natures. The new role of parents in the pandemic is to provide for their child's basic needs and act as their child's teacher.

Children with Down Syndrome were indeed a challenge to teach, considering that they have setbacks that could hamper their learning, such as their short attention span, tantrums, and frustrations in expressing themselves, leading to stubbornness. Despite their condition, they were still teachable, using appropriate teaching strategies and technical knowledge aided by suitable instructional materials and paraphernalia. During distance learning, parents were called to facilitate their child's learning process with DS. While doing so, parents needed to devote their time and patience when engaging in their child's learning, especially in such a predicament as having Down Syndrome. Acceptance of their child's condition made them creative and effective para-teachers who could provide for their child's learning needs. Through this, Special Education Institutions may do very well by giving special training to parents of children with Down Syndrome to better engage in their child's education despite the situation.

CONCLUSION

This study truly helps improve the quality of special education delivery to Down Syndrome learners. Parents' engagement in the learning needs of learners in this new normal shows a remarkable effort to ensure that their child's educational success will continue amidst the pandemic and even with their disability. Despite the limited knowledge of the parents in facilitating learning, the study's findings show their best effort to catch their child's attention while learning at home. Although parents struggle to extend their child's limited attention span, they still find suitable strategies to keep them interested, like using different reinforcements and videos from any social platform to teach their children, especially numeracy.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

The researchers cannot further delve into specific aspects of the study, such as a definitive quantitative assessment of Down Syndrome learners' intellectual and academic competence relative to the intellectual and educational competence of their peers who do not have Down Syndrome. The study cannot cover another aspect: an in-depth assessment of the personal character and individual attitudes of the parents/guardians-participants of the study. In the future, researchers could conduct studies similar to this that could delve deeper into the learning needs of Learners with Special Education and

how to best address these and provide inclusive quality education despite these learners' peculiar situations.

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