
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Assessing the Behavioral Disorders and Social Skills of the Learners with Special Educational Needs

Rowella Jane G. Labajo¹, Shiena Marie C. Autida² and Michelle G. Resuento³

¹²³ *Cebu Technological University Main Campus, Philippines*

Corresponding Author: Rowella Jane G. Labajo, **E-mail:** rowellajane@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs) often experience challenges in managing their behavior and interacting with others, which can affect their learning, relationships, and overall development. This study sought to explore behavioral disorders, social skills, and their relationship among learners with special needs in Talisay City and Lapu-Lapu City, Philippines. Using a descriptive correlational approach, researchers collected data via structured surveys completed by convenience-sampled parents from three designated schools. The study examined student demographics, parent-reported behavioral traits, social skill development, and the connection between behavior and social abilities. Findings indicated that most participants were male, aged 5–12, with one to two siblings, from low-income families, and had parents who were mostly college graduates. While behavioral issues and social skills were generally observed, some challenges appeared, particularly in emotional regulation and complex play. No significant link was found between overall behavioral disorders and social skills. However, limitations in the study design prevent firm conclusions. The demographic insights and varying needs highlight the importance of comprehensive, evidence-based strategies that address behavioral and emotional development, family support, and individualized interventions. The study recommends improving future research by using broader samples and additional informants and proposes a matrix-style intervention framework to support learners with special needs better.

| KEYWORDS

Special Education, behavioral disorders; descriptive-correlational; inclusive education; Lapu-Lapu City, Talisay City, Philippines

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs) face challenges that extend beyond academics and often affect their behavior, social interactions, and emotional well-being. Although schools strive to provide appropriate instruction and support, many learners still struggle to build positive relationships, communicate effectively, and manage their emotions and behavior across different situations. These challenges can affect not only their learning experiences but also their participation in school and community life. Understanding the behavioral and social characteristics of LSENs is therefore essential to creating educational environments that are inclusive, supportive, and responsive to their individual needs. Despite the growing emphasis on inclusive education, there remains limited local evidence on how behavioral disorders and social skills manifest among learners with special educational needs and how these factors may be related.

This study is grounded in the belief that understanding learners requires a holistic perspective that accounts for both individual and environmental influences. It draws on the Stress-Coping Model of Lazarus and Folkman, which explains how individuals respond to challenges based on their perceptions and coping strategies (Lazarus, 2000); Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes that behaviors are learned through observation and interaction with others (Bandura, 2021); and the principles of Behaviorism, which highlight the role of environmental factors and reinforcement in shaping behavior (Skinner,

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1984; Watson, 2017). Together, these perspectives provide a meaningful framework for understanding why some learners may exhibit behavioral difficulties while others demonstrate positive social behaviors despite similar circumstances. They also underscore the importance of creating supportive learning environments that encourage appropriate behavior, strengthen coping mechanisms, and foster positive social interactions.

Several studies highlight the importance of assessing both behavioral and social dimensions among learners with special educational needs. Studies have shown that social skills interventions can help reduce behavioral concerns and improve learners’ ability to interact effectively with others (Beelmann & Lösel, 2021). Similarly, social-emotional learning programs have been found to contribute positively to behavioral regulation and social competence (Daunic et al., 2021). Other researchers have emphasized the value of inclusive programs, peer-mediated interventions, digital learning strategies, and technology-assisted approaches in supporting the social and behavioral development of learners with disabilities (Herrerías, 2025; Mir & Srivastava, 2024; Pierson, 2022; Tohara et al., 2021).

This study is reinforced by Philippine laws and educational policies promoting inclusive education for learners with disabilities. Republic Act No. 11650, the Inclusive Education Act, affirms their right to support, while Republic Acts Nos. 10533 and 9442 emphasize quality education and equal opportunities. DepEd Order Nos. 44, s. 2021 and 21, s. 2021 provide policy frameworks for services, and the MATATAG Curriculum advocates a needs-based, learner-centered approach (DepEd, 2021; 2023). Guided by these policies and the literature, this study assesses the behavioral disorders and social skills of learners with special needs in Cebu to help educators, parents, and policymakers develop effective interventions and inclusive practices that enable LSEs to reach their full potential.

2. Purpose of this Study

This study aimed to develop a comprehensive understanding of the behavioral disorders and social skills of learners with special needs (LSEs) in selected schools in Talisay City and Lapu-Lapu City as the basis for an evidence-based intervention plan. It specifically examined the profile of the learners in terms of age and gender, parents’ highest educational attainment, number of siblings, and combined family monthly income; the extent of manifestation of behavioral disorders of the learners as perceived by their parents; the level of manifestation of social skills of the learners as perceived by their parents; and whether there is a significant relationship between the behavioral disorder manifestation and the social skills of the learners.

Table 1
Age and Gender of the Learners
n=54

Age (in years)	Female		Male		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
21 and above	4	7.41	1	1.85	5	9.26
13 – 20	10	18.52	19	35.19	29	53.70
5 – 12	7	12.96	13	24.07	20	37.04
Total	21	38.89	33	61.11	54	100.00

3. Research Methodology

The study utilized a descriptive correlational research design. Descriptive research aimed to obtain information concerning the status of the phenomena being studied, while correlational research describes the relationships between variables using correlational statistics (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022; Siedlecki, 2022; Temizhan et al., 2022). The study respondents were the 54 parents, while the subjects were the LSEs in the three schools, randomly selected through convenience sampling. Convenience sampling involved sampling units that were readily available to participate in the study (Andrade, 2021).

Data were gathered using structured surveys, which are questionnaires consisting of closed-ended questions requiring yes/no responses, multiple-choice options, or rating scales (Taherdoost, 2022; Aithal & Aithal, 2020). One survey collected data on respondents’ demographic profiles, while the other two surveys measured the subjects’ behavioral disorders and social skills using a 4-point rating scale. The data were collected over a week, then analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequency, percentage, and weighted mean, and inferential statistics, such as Pearson’s r. Data analysis was performed using statistical software, and Pearson’s r was used to describe the relationship between behavioral disorders and subjects’ social skills. The correlation coefficient determined the strength and direction of the relationship. Descriptive statistics organized and summarized the data collected.

4. Results and Discussion

This section discusses the study's results and findings.

4.1 Profile of the Respondents. The succeeding tables present a summary of key results on the profiles of the parent respondents and learners who participated in the study, including age and gender, parents' educational attainment, number of siblings, and combined family monthly income.

Table 1 shows the age and gender profile of the learners. Based on the data, most learners were aged 13-20 years (53.7%) and 5-12 years (37.04%), with a few over 21 years (9.26%). More were male (61.11%) than female (38.89%). The majority of male teenagers provided insights into adolescence as a developmental period, while the presence of younger learners and the absence of more adult learners posed limitations.

Adolescence was recognized as a critical period, with physical, cognitive, and social changes influencing learning behaviors (Pfeifer & Allen, 2021; Silvers, 2022). Younger children also necessitated age-appropriate strategies divergent from those of older participants (Magnusson & Bäckman, 2022). While gender variation across ages remained unclear, the overall male bias restricted nuanced understanding, calling for more balanced sampling in future research (Ceci et al., 2023).

Table 2
Parents' Highest Educational Attainment
n=54

Educational Attainment	Mother		Father	
	f	%	f	%
Master's Graduate	1	1.85	1	1.85
Master's Level	1	1.85	2	3.70
College Graduate	11	20.37	21	38.89
College Level	10	18.52	10	18.52
High School Graduate	20	37.04	8	14.81
High School Level	3	5.56	8	14.81
Elementary Graduate	6	11.11	3	5.56
Elementary Level	2	3.70	1	1.85
Total	54	100.00	54	100.00

As shown in Table 2, mothers mostly attained the high school graduate level (37.04%), while fathers attained the college graduate level (38.89%). Educational backgrounds varied widely. On the other hand, fathers generally held higher post-secondary qualifications than mothers, consistent with prior research indicating that women face disproportionate barriers to pursuing further education (Du Plessis, 2025). Furthermore, characterizing parental profiles provided meaningful context, as lower maternal education has previously been linked to limited home literacy resources, which, in turn, have been shown to affect children's academic involvement (Ha, 2023; Schochet et al., 2020). The diversity suggested that learners came from a full spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds. Learners whose parents had attained a high school education likely had greater access to educational support systems than peers from less-educated families (Deep et al., 2025; Misirli & Ergulec, 2021).

Table 3
Number of Siblings of the Learners
n=54

Number of Siblings	f	%
More than 4	8	14.81
3-4	14	25.93
1-2	27	50.00
None	5	9.26
Total	54	100.00

Table 3 showed that the majority (50%) of learners came from families with 1-2 siblings. Additionally, the next largest group (25.93%) had 3-4 siblings. Smaller proportions had more than 4 siblings (14.81%) or none (9.26%). There were a few possible explanations for these results. Families with 1-2 children allowed parents to dedicate more focused attention and resources to each child's needs. Furthermore, households with 3-4 children may have spread parental engagement more thinly as children competed for assistance. Also, very large families of 5+ children could further strain parental support.

These findings suggest that most learners' home environments facilitated positive socio-emotional development through optimal sibling interaction and parental involvement. However, over a quarter came from larger families that research suggests face challenges meeting all children's needs. Consequently, this could potentially have influenced learners' performances and experiences.

Studies have found that smaller family sizes of 1-2 children optimize conditions for childhood development by enabling equitable resource distribution and peer socialization opportunities (Acoci et al., 2023; Boylan et al., 2021; Dalgaard et al., 2022). Conversely, parental engagement decreased with each additional child, as families with 3-4 children must have stretched limited time and attention across more recipients (Giannotti et al., 2022; Shao et al., 2022).

Table 4
Parent-Respondents' Combined Family Monthly Income
n=54

Monthly Income (in pesos)	f	%
Above 30,000	5	9.26
25,001-30,000	5	9.26
20,001-25,000	4	7.41
15,001-20,000	8	14.81
10,001-15,000	13	24.07
10,000 and below	19	35.19
Total	54	100.00

As shown in Table 4, the majority (35.19%) of families earned PHP 10,000 or less per month. Additionally, the next largest group (24.07%) earned PHP 10,001-15,000 monthly. Smaller proportions (9.26%) fell in higher income brackets. A few factors could have contributed to these results. The data were collected in areas with generally lower incomes at the time. The cost of living was also continually rising in the Philippines. Many jobs in this region may not pay enough to exceed PHP 10,000 per month, even with two incomes.

The findings imply that most learners came from low-income households, which past studies have shown face challenges such as limited educational resources at home. Furthermore, their academic performance could have been impacted by financial constraints. Understanding learner home incomes provided context for their environments and experiences. Several studies noted that the lack of educational resources, which lower-income families often experience, was linked to poorer academic performance (Beharie et al., 2024; Chiramba & Ndofirepi, 2023; Ikegbusi et al., 2025).

4.2 Extent of Manifestation of Behavioral Disorders

Table 5 presents the extent to which behavioral disorders are manifested among learners, as perceived by the parent-respondents, using specific indicators of their children's behavior, emotions, and academic functioning at home and in school.

The data in Table 5 indicate that the overall extent of behavioral disorder manifestation among learners is "Manifested," with an aggregate weighted mean of 2.64. This suggests that behavioral concerns are generally present but not severe. Among the indicators, "my child likes playing" had the highest weighted mean of 3.39 and was rated "Highly Manifested," indicating that learners strongly exhibit play-oriented behavior, which is typical for their developmental stage. Likewise, the tendency to play with peers (WM = 3.20) and to answer questions (WM = 3.00) are also manifested, indicating that learners are socially engaged and responsive in learning situations.

Table 5
Extent of Manifestation of Behavioral Disorders of the Learners
n=54

S/N	Indicators	WM	Verbal Description
1	My child likes playing.	3.39	Highly Manifested
2	My child likes to play with peers.	3.20	Manifested
3	My child struggles to stay focused in class or may be hyperactive.	2.41	Less Manifested

4	My child demonstrates inappropriate emotions, such as excessive laughing or crying.	2.28	Less Manifested
5	My child may fail to complete assignments correctly or at all.	2.57	Manifested
6	My child likes answering questions.	3.00	Manifested
7	My child becomes emotionally disturbed.	2.61	Manifested
8	I do not have the strategy to teach my child at home.	2.11	Less Manifested
9	My child academically performs below grade level.	2.52	Manifested
10	My child's academic progress is low.	2.28	Less Manifested
Aggregate Weighted Mean		2.64	Manifested

Legend: 3.25-4.00-Highly Manifested; 2.50- 3.24- Manifested ;1.75 – 2.49-Less Manifested ; 1.00 – 1.74- Not Manifested

However, several indicators show comparatively lower levels of manifestation. Difficulties related to attention and behavior regulation, such as struggling to stay focused or being hyperactive (WM = 2.41), and inappropriate emotional expressions (WM = 2.28), are “Less Manifested,” suggesting that these behavioral challenges are not highly pronounced among the learners in this group. Similarly, low academic progress (WM = 2.28) and lack of teaching strategies at home (WM = 2.11) are also less manifested, implying that these are not dominant concerns in the current context. Meanwhile, behaviors such as failing to complete assignments (WM = 2.57), emotional disturbance (WM = 2.61), and performing below grade level (WM = 2.52) are “Manifested,” indicating moderate presence of academic and emotional difficulties.

The results imply that while behavioral disorders are present among learners, they are generally at a manageable level. This calls for continued implementation of supportive classroom strategies that reinforce positive behavior, maintain learner engagement, and address emerging academic difficulties. Teachers may focus on strengthening attention and task completion through structured routines, while also integrating emotional regulation activities to support learners’ well-being. At home, parents may benefit from guidance on reinforcing learning routines and behavior management strategies.

A study by Hayes and Hofmann (2021) has found that the symptoms of behavioral disorders differ between individuals. Comprehensive assessments, including observations, interviews, and standardized tools, aided diagnosis (Schneider et al., 2022). Additionally, earlier identification and treatment significantly improved outcomes for children (Weisenmuller & Hilton, 2021).

4.3 Level of Manifestation of Social Skills

Table 6 presents the level of social skills among learners, based on specific indicators of their ability to interact, communicate, and engage with others in various social situations.

Table 6
Level of Manifestation of Social Skills of the Learners
n=54

S/N	Indicators	WM	Verbal Description
1	Following Directions	3.13	Manifested
2	Collaborating and cooperating with peers	3.06	Manifested
3	Imitates behavior just seen a few minutes earlier	2.80	Manifested
4	Can give something, but not let it go	2.33	Less Manifested
5	Actively explore their environment and learn	2.93	Manifested
6	Exhibits simple “pretend “play (feeds, puts the doll to sleep)	2.43	Less Manifested
7	He/she can handle social interactions	2.80	Manifested
8	Understand and share the feelings of another	2.72	Manifested
9	Can state what is silly or wrong with pictures (e.g.,Ano ang mali sa larawang ito?)	2.61	Manifested
10	Communicate his/her emotions to others	2.81	Manifested
Aggregate Weighted Mean		2.76	Manifested

Legend: 3.25-4.00-Highly Manifested; 2.50- 3.24- Manifested ;1.75 – 2.49-Less Manifested ; 1.00 – 1.74- Not Manifested

The results in Table 6 show that the learners’ social skills are generally “**Manifested**,” with an overall mean of 2.76. This means that the learners are already able to interact, follow social expectations, and participate in learning and group activities. However, these skills are still developing and not yet fully mature.

In particular, the learners show stronger abilities in following directions (WM = 3.13), cooperating with peers (WM = 3.06), and exploring their environment (WM = 2.93). These suggest that they are attentive to instructions, willing to work with others, and naturally curious qualities that help them stay engaged in classroom activities. They are also able to handle social interactions (WM = 2.80) and express their emotions (WM = 2.81), which shows that they can connect with others and communicate how they feel, at least in simple ways.

On the other hand, some skills are still less developed. Sharing behavior, particularly giving something without difficulty (WM = 2.33), and engaging in pretend or imaginative play (WM = 2.43), are rated lower. These suggest that some learners still struggle with more complex social behaviors that require imagination, flexibility, and deeper interaction with peers. While imitation (WM = 2.80) and understanding others’ feelings (WM = 2.72) are present, they also indicate that empathy and social understanding are still developing rather than fully established.

Research has shown that students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders sometimes lack the knowledge to appropriately apply social skills (Adesokan et al., 2022; Owoniyi, 2022). Additionally, intervention programs addressing both behavior and social competence were associated with better outcomes (Silveira-Zaldivar et al., 2021). Furthermore, reliably assessing social skills in students with behavioral disorders proved complex for educators (Klefbeck, 2024; Stichter et al., 2021).

4.4 Test of Relationship Between the Behavioral Disorders and Social Skills of the Learners

This study hypothesized that there is no significant relationship between behavioral disorders and learners' social skills. Table 7 presents the results.

Table 7
Test of the Relationship between the Behavioral Disorders and Social Skills of the Learners
n=54

Variables	r-value	Strength of Correlation	p - value	Decision	Result
Behavioral Disorders and Social Skills	0.075	Negligible Positive	0.590	Do not reject Ho	Not Significant

*significant at $p < 0.05$

As shown in Table 7, the computed p-value of 0.590, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, indicates that there is no significant relationship between behavioral disorders and learners' social skills. This leads to the decision of accepting the null hypothesis. Moreover, the strength of correlation is negligible and positive.

The lack of a significant relationship between behavioral disorders and social skills among learners may be attributed to several factors. Influences beyond behavioral functioning, including family support, peer relationships, teacher guidance, school environment, communication abilities, and opportunities for social participation shape social skills. For learners with special needs, structured educational programs, social skills interventions, and inclusive learning experiences may help strengthen social competence despite behavioral challenges. Moreover, the manifestation of behavioral disorders and social skills may vary across disability categories, which can weaken the overall association when learners are examined as a single group. The findings further suggest that behavioral difficulties do not necessarily hinder a learner's ability to interact, cooperate, and communicate effectively with others. Likewise, some learners who exhibit few behavioral concerns may still encounter social challenges due to other developmental, environmental, or individual factors.

Some literature emphasized that the relationship between behavioral disorders (e.g., EBD) and social skills is complex, inconsistent, and largely influenced by multiple contextual factors rather than a direct linear association. For instance, De Swart et al.(2023) found that social competence among learners with emotional and behavioral disorders is more strongly associated with classroom climate, peer relationships, and teacher interactions than with behavioral symptoms alone, suggesting that behavioral problems do not reliably predict social functioning in school settings. In the same vein, Wachsmuth et al. (2023) reported that participation in structured school activities, such as extracurricular engagement, is positively linked to social competence among students with or at risk of EBD, highlighting the stronger role of environmental exposure and engagement opportunities compared to behavioral difficulties Likewise, Martinsone et al. (2022) noted that while behavioral issues may affect academic outcomes, their influence on broader developmental domains such as social functioning is not always direct or

consistent, reinforcing the idea that behavioral disorders do not necessarily equate to reduced social skills, particularly when learners receive adequate support.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study shows that learners with special needs in Talisay and Lapu-Lapu City are mostly adolescents aged 13–20, primarily males from families with at least a high school education. Behavioral disorders and social skills are common but not severe; they develop over time. No significant link exists between behavioral issues and social skills, indicating independence. Therefore, targeted interventions are needed to address both areas through a coordinated, matrix-based program involving teachers, support staff, and families to support behavioral regulation, social skills, and family needs.

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Conflict of Interest

The researchers acknowledge no conflict of interest among authors.

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