Life Skills Assessment: The Context of Grade 12 Students in a Philippine Catholic School

ABSTRACT

Aims: This study assessed the life skills level of Grade 12 students in a Catholic school in Central Philippines during 2023–2024 in terms of self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relations, creative thinking, critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, coping with emotions, and coping with stress when they were taken as a whole and also grouped according to biological sex, academic strand, family structure, and family monthly income. Likewise, demographics were correlated with their life skills level.
Study design: Quantitative research design, particularly the descriptive-correlational approach.
Place and Duration of Study: Catholic school in Central Philippines during 2023–2024.
Methodology: The respondents were 210 Grade 12 students. In assessing the study, the 100-item standardized life skills assessment questionnaire by Subasree et al. [1] was employed. It was validated and yielded 89% concurrence using face and content validity. The fitness of the items to the Filipino context was checked by Pahilanga et al. [11], yielding a reliable Cronbach's alpha score of 0.92. This was responded to using the scale from very high to very low. In data analysis, descriptive and correlational analyses were utilized. The descriptive analysis was employed to determine the students' level of life skills using mean and standard deviation. Meanwhile, the correlational analysis correlated the demographics and their life skills.
Results: Generally, their life skills level (M=3.29, SD=0.22) was rated average. Meanwhile, the areas that need improvement are coping with stress (M=2.44, SD=0.50) with a low-level rating and average levels for coping with emotions (M=2.88, SD=0.44), effective communication (M=3.21, SD=0.40), interpersonal relationships (M=3.11, SD=0.43), and decision making (M=3.38, SD=0.35). In the demographics, their sex, strand, family structure, and family income were rated average. The Point biserial correlation shows no relationship between the students' life skills and the following variables: biological sex [r(275)=-0.075, p=0.277], family structure [r(275)=0.041, p=0.550], and family income [r(275)=0.093, p=0.178]. Hence, the null hypotheses are accepted. Meanwhile, the eta correlation showed no relationship between their life skills and their strands [η=0.080, p=0.723]. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted.
Conclusion: Given the findings of the study, continuous improvement of the student's life skills acquisition is necessary. Deepening life skills development in the Catholic school's curriculum and instruction is recommended. Incorporating it into curricular and non-curricular programs and activities may also help. Additionally, their exposure to various tasks and responsibilities that establish their sense of independence is also vital to help them develop these skills and apply what they have learned in real-life situations.

Keywords: Life skills, descriptive-correlational, senior high school, Philippine Catholic school

1. INTRODUCTION

Life skills are essential elements for students in countering various challenges and life circumstances [1]. These skills are necessary to ensure their well-being and competence in facing the diverse conditions of life [2]. Additionally, according to the framework for 21st-century learning, these skills are vital in crafting decisions to encourage them to engage in personal, social, and other aspects of life [3,4]. Hence, to help them live their lives to the fullest. Loaded with the necessary knowledge, abilities, and attitude, these life skills should be introduced to them and incorporated into the curriculum and instruction [5].

In Asia, life skills are perceived as vehicles of empowerment [6]. In Cambodia, the promotion of these skills is critical in evaluating the schools' interventions to reduce factors for suicide among students [7]. In Thailand, life skills training as a school-based intervention has been proven to be effective in countering drug abuse [8]. In Turkey, these skills are perceived as essential among high school students who participate in sport [9]. In Iran, these skills are vital in the students' development of self-esteem, psychological structure, and social-educational functioning [10]. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd, 2019) implemented the K–12 curriculum to develop the learners' 21st-century skills, part of which are life skills. These skills are perceived to be essential among Filipino students for dealing with the challenges of this century [3]. Also, these skills, when acquired, can empower young people to make informed decisions and encourage them to contribute to social transformation. That is why basic educational institutions strive to incorporate these skills into the curriculum, hoping their learners will apply them to real life [11].

However, in Catholic schools in the Central Philippines, the students' skill acquisition is compromised by the various factors that negatively affect their attitude and disposition to acquire these skills. In fact, it is observed that most students nowadays are influenced by the depreciation of values brought by their modernistic, secularistic, and materialistic mindsets, which impedes them from acquiring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes [12,13]. Additionally, Fernandez and Magallanes [14] observed that most students in these Catholic schools are affected by excessive social media use, which compromises their academic performance and their inclination to learn essential life skills, not to mention the ill effects of the two-year pandemic modality, which put into question the reliability of the delivery of the content, strategies, and assessments, which has compromised the students' skill acquisition [15,16,17,18,19]. Aside from these, one crucial factor that affects the continuity of the learners' skills acquisition is the continuous exodus of qualified teachers to public schools, which compromises the sustainability of learning [13,20].

Studies have been conducted in the Philippines relative to life skills. Gonzales [21] dealt with life skills as 21st-century skills, along with innovation, media literacy, and career skills. Specifically, this talked about the need to incorporate life skills into the Philippine education curriculum. Honeyman et al. [22] conducted a study on the importance of life skills among higher education institutions. Alda et al. [23] studied integrating life skills into tertiary instruction. Given these available studies, they did not deal with life skills as a general construct. In Central Philippines, there were studies conducted on pertinent life skills among emerging adults [11] and adolescents [3]. Both studies by Pahilanga et al. [11] and Vergara and Tajonera [3] recommended further life skills assessments in various locales. With these available studies, there is a dearth of literature on life skills, especially among senior high school students in Catholic schools. This is the gap that this study would like to address.

Thus, this study assessed the life skills level of Grade 12 students in a Catholic school in Central Philippines during 2023–2024 in terms of self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relations, creative thinking, critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, coping with emotions, and coping with stress when they were taken as a whole and grouped according to sex, strand, family structure, and family monthly income. Likewise, it correlated the demographics with their life skills level. Lastly, the

findings served as an empirical basis for the formulation of a proposed life skills training program to continuously improve the student's life skills in a Catholic school in the Central Philippines.

This paper theorized that their biological sex, academic strands, family structure, and family monthly income influence their level of life skills. Life skills are 21st-century skills; this assumption was anchored on the Partnership for 21st-century Skills [24] and the P21 Framework of 21st-century Learning [25]. On one hand, the Partnership for 21st-century Skills [24] argues that students should devote themselves academically to acquiring and developing the learning competencies to demonstrate 21st-century skills and meet the global demands for knowledge and employment. On the other hand, the P21 Framework for 21st-century learning [25] believes that when students are provided with the necessary learning and are immersed in 21st-century education, they become knowledgeable, skilled, and values-oriented as they prepare for life ahead. Meanwhile, both frameworks perceive that the learners' orientations, backgrounds, and formations influence their 21st-century skills, such as life skills. In this study, these frameworks have something to do with the learners' practice of life skills. Their demographics influence their demonstration of life skills.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a quantitative research design, particularly the descriptive-correlational approach. The descriptive approach determined the students' level of life skills. Meanwhile, the correlational approach investigated the relationship between the demographics and their life skills. The respondents were 210 Grade 12 students in a Catholic school in the central Philippines during 2023–2024. They were determined using stratified random sampling and the fishbowl technique.

Table 1. *Demographic Profile of the Respondents*

Variable	f	%
Sex		
Male	84	40.0
Female	126	60.0
Strand		
ABM	39	18.6
HUMSS	38	18.1
STEM	129	61.4
GAS Hums	4	1.9
Family Structure		
Intact	153	72.9
Non-intact	57	27.1
Family Income		
Low Income	111	52.9
High Income	99	47.1
Total	***210***	***100.0***

In assessing the study, the 100-item standardized life skills assessment questionnaire by Subasree et al. [1] was employed. This consists of 10 areas: self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relations, creative thinking, critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, coping with emotions, and coping with stress. It was validated and yielded 89% concurrence using face and content validity. The fitness of the items to the Filipino context was checked by Pahilanga et al. [11], yielding a

reliable Cronbach's alpha score of 0.92. This was responded to using the scale from very high to very low.

In data analysis, descriptive and correlational analyses were utilized. The descriptive analysis was employed to determine the students' level of life skills using mean and standard deviation. Meanwhile, the correlational analysis correlated the demographics and their life skills. Meanwhile, Kolmogorov-Smirnov determined the normality of the variable. It revealed that their life skills level [KS=0.051, p=0.200] is normally distributed, hence the use of Point biserial correlation and eta correlation as parametric statistical tools. Lastly, the researcher adhered to general principles of respect for person, justice, and beneficence to fully guarantee the ethical soundness of the study in line with the guidelines established by the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB). Specifically, it addressed the privacy, confidentiality, and vulnerability of the participants.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of Life Skills of Grade 12 Students in a Catholic School

Life skills refer to one's ability to respond to the diverse circumstances and conditions of life with adaptability and flexibility [1]. Table 2 presents the life skills level of Grade 12 students in a Catholic school. Generally, their level of life skills (M=3.29, SD=0.22) was rated average. Meanwhile, the areas that need improvement are coping with stress (M=2.44, SD=0.50) with a low-level rating and average levels for coping with emotions (M=2.88, SD=0.44), effective communication (M=3.21, SD=0.40), interpersonal relationship (M=3.11, SD=0.43), and decision making (M=3.38, SD=0.35). In terms of the demographics, their sex, strand, family structure, and family income were rated average.

Generally, the average level rating indicates that these students have not fully acquired and demonstrated life skills. In other words, they are not completely adaptable when they are confronted with various life challenges. By not meeting the very high level, there is a need for the Catholic school to continuously improve the incorporation of life skills in its curricular and non-curricular activities, perhaps focusing on all low and averagely-rated domains. The result could be attributed to the fact that the life skills integration in the curriculum and instruction is mostly unsupervised, unmonitored, and not evaluated. This could also be ascribed to the instructional delivery that is mostly limited to the cognitive level, which impedes the students' life skills acquisition and development, as supported by Pahilanga et al. [11], not to mention the ill effects of the two-year pandemic which negatively affected the learners' values and disposition towards the learning of the most essential competencies and skills [15].

In support, Foo and Foo [26] and Govindasamy [27] advocate that life skills should be incorporated into the school's instruction and non-curricular activities, transcending from mind-level learning. When these are effectively integrated, the learners acquire not only the most essential competencies but also the skills necessary for their integral formation [10]. However, one factor that impedes the life skills acquisition found in Prajapati et al. [5] is the failure to supervise the integration. The continuity of learning life skills can only be achieved when it is sustainably monitored [11]. Hence, the findings imply the essentials of life skills integration in the schools' programs and supervising it.

The low level of coping with stress indicates these students were having difficulty in countering their stress experiences. Also, this signifies the need for rigorous attention of the school towards their Grade 12 students. The poor rating could be attributed to their stressful academic level, complex academic tasks, and responsibilities. In this grade level, they are confronted with many requirements like research, term papers, and specialized subjects [28]. Undeniably, these academic performances would require much of their time and staying up late to accomplish these tasks, as supported by Ortillano and Pascual [29] and Wheaton et al. [30]. Additionally, Leepo [28] and Ortillano and Pascual [29] agree that

Grade 12 is indeed the toughest grade level in high school since it requires the students the rigorous accomplish academic tasks. Hence, the findings imply the importance of providing programs for students to help them cope with their stress as a life skill amid their academic responsibilities.

Meanwhile, the average level of coping with emotions manifests also the students' fair ability in handling the emotional aspect of their lives. Also, this indicates the need for this school to pay attention to this domain. Undeniably, this has something to do with their poor coping with stress due to the complex academic tasks they have to accomplish at this grade level. Zhang and Zheng [31] argue the connection between one's stress and emotions. The more they are stressed, the more their emotions are affected. Pahilanga et al. [11] believe that the students' ability to cope with emotions is one of the essential skills in ensuring their well-being. As observed, one factor contributing to the domain's average rating is due to the limited interventions of the school's guidance office. This stems from a lack of orientation about the office's functions and a lack of programs that elicit the students' emotional check-ups.

It is observed that the guidance office usually limits itself to the admission function and fails to conduct regular monitoring and checking of the students' emotional status, which could largely influence the average result. In support, Ribadu [32] and Bahr et al. [33] claim the essentials of the school's guidance counselor in monitoring and assessing the students' emotional disposition. When the guidance functions and consultations are in place, the learners' emotional stability, skills to cope, and disposition towards life are ensured. Hence, the findings imply the importance of operationalizing the school's guidance office to ensure the students' coping with emotional skills.

Meanwhile, in Bual and Madrigal [12], Banusing and Bual [13], and Bual and Madrigal [15], one factor that affects the student's disposition toward effective communication is impacted by modernistic, materialistic, and secularistic mindsets. Nowadays, some students lack social graces, the ability to listen, and a manner of speaking, which is probably attributed to their average effective communication skills, as supported by Zhao [34] and Rafi [35]. Ghee et al. [36] acknowledge the importance of listening in communication because when one listens, one learns the vitality of comprehension. Hence, these imply the essentials of providing the students the opportunities and activities to develop their effective communication skills.

The average interpersonal relationships rating shows the students' fair skill in associating with others. The rating could be ascribed to their strong social media inclination, which compromises their interpersonal association. Nowadays, there are terms like "sofalizing" (socialization while sitting on the sofa) and "nomophobia (no mobile phone phobia) which impede their disposition to associate with others and compromise their interpersonal relationship skills [37]. In fact, in Tosuntaş et al. [38], "sofalizing" has become a phenomenon that limits the person to interact personally. A preference for virtual interactions lessens one's interpersonal relationships, as supported by Vázquez-Cano and Díez-Arcón [39] and Ye and Lin [40]. Hence, there is a need to provide collaborative school activities that elicit the students' development of interpersonal relationship skills.

The average decision-making skill score indicates the importance of improving their ability to make prudent decisions. It is observed that most learners nowadays easily make decisions without analyzing. This might be contributory to the domain's average result. In fact, Stevenson [41] found that students' curiosity influences their failure to make prudent decisions. In terms of academic strands, HUMSS students rated higher in this domain compared to others. Undeniably, these learners are mostly confronted with many social issues that concern their decision-making skills and analysis, as supported by Dawson [42]. Meanwhile, in terms of family income, high-income students have higher decision-making skills. This could be because low-income students consider the financial aspect before they decide, incomparable to high income, where resources are mostly available [43]. In terms of biological sex, male students have higher decision-making skills than females. This is

consistent with Lermer et al. [44] that males are more decisive in making decisions. Hence, the findings imply the importance of developing the student's skills in decision-making regardless of their demographics.

In empathy, female students were more empathic than males. Some studies claim that females have higher emotional intelligence than males, as supported by Meshkat and Nejati [45] and Papoutsi et al. [46]. In terms of strands, the average rating signifies that regardless of academic classifications, all have not fully demonstrated life skills. However, in empathy, Science and Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and General Academic Strand and Humanities (GAS-Hums) students were more empathetic than those in Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) and Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS). This is probably because STEM and GAS-Hums strands are associated with pastoral and environmental activities, which, according to Lara et al. [47] and McCurdy et al. [48], have a large influence on their empathy development.

Lastly, the average rating of family structure indicates that the students from both intact and non-intact families have not fully acquired and demonstrated life skills. Perhaps the rating was largely influenced by the students' independence as they autonomously live on their own. However, despite their independence, it cannot be denied that they were also struggling to demonstrate life skills, as reflected in their average rating. Studies agree that the student's demonstration of life skills is tested when they live on their own that is regardless of whether they come from a complete or incomplete family as supported by Vergara and Tajonera [3].

Table 2a. *Life Skills Level of Grade 12 Students in a Catholic School*

Variables	Domain 1			Domain 2			Domain 3			Domain 4		
	M	**SD**	**Int**	**M**	**SD**	**Int**	**M**	**SD**	**Int**	**M**	**SD**	**Int**
Sex												
Male	3.73	0.47	H	3.31	0.37	A	3.22	0.47	A	3.21	0.45	A
Female	3.70	0.39	H	3.50	0.32	H	3.20	0.36	A	3.04	0.40	A
Strand												
ABM	3.66	0.40	H	3.40	0.32	A	3.19	0.32	A	3.12	0.39	A
HUMSS	3.68	0.52	H	3.36	0.33	A	3.22	0.36	A	3.15	0.45	A
STEM	3.75	0.39	H	3.44	0.36	H	3.22	0.44	A	3.11	0.43	A
GAS Hums	3.50	0.71	H	3.52	0.47	H	2.92	0.43	A	2.75	0.41	A
Family Structure												
Intact	3.72	0.43	H	3.41	0.35	H	3.20	0.39	A	3.09	0.41	A
Non-intact	3.69	0.41	H	3.45	0.35	H	3.22	0.43	A	3.16	0.49	A
Family Income												
Low	3.69	0.43	H	3.44	0.36	H	3.23	0.40	A	3.08	0.41	A
High	3.74	0.41	H	3.40	0.35	A	3.18	0.41	A	3.15	0.45	A
Whole	***3.71***	***0.42***	***H***	***3.42***	***0.35***	***H***	***3.21***	***0.40***	***A***	***3.11***	***0.43***	***A***

Note: Domain 1 (self-awareness), Domain 2 (empathy), Domain 3 (Effective communication), Domain 4 (Interpersonal relationship); Very low (VL), Low (L), Average (A), High (H), Very high (VH)

Table 2b. *Life Skills Level of Grade 12 Students in a Catholic School*

Variables	Domain 5			Domain 6			Domain 7			Domain 8		
	M	**SD**	**Int**	**M**	**SD**	**Int**	**M**	**SD**	**Int**	**M**	**SD**	**Int**
Sex												
Male	3.46	0.49	H	3.47	0.40	H	3.41	0.38	H	3.69	0.49	H
Female	3.57	0.45	H	3.43	0.34	H	3.36	0.32	A	3.62	0.45	H
Strand												
ABM	3.48	0.46	H	3.46	0.36	H	3.34	0.37	A	3.65	0.48	H
HUMSS	3.47	0.45	H	3.43	0.47	H	3.43	0.38	H	3.53	0.54	H
STEM	3.55	0.48	H	3.44	0.34	H	3.37	0.33	A	3.68	0.43	H
GAS	3.59	0.71	H	3.43	0.42	H	3.41	0.44	A	3.69	0.61	H
Hums												
Family Structure												
Intact	3.52	0.46	H	3.43	0.37	H	3.37	0.34	A	3.64	0.44	H
Non-intact	3.55	0.50	H	3.47	0.37	H	3.40	0.36	A	3.68	0.53	H
Family Income												
Low	3.50	0.44	H	3.39	0.37	A	3.34	0.33	A	3.59	0.45	H
High	3.55	0.50	H	3.50	0.35	H	3.42	0.36	H	3.72	0.47	H
Whole	***3.53***	***0.47***	***H***	***3.44***	***0.37***	***H***	***3.38***	***0.35***	***A***	***3.65***	***0.46***	***H***

Note: Domain 5 (creative thinking), Domain 6 (critical thinking), Domain 7 (decision making), Domain 8 (problem-solving); Very low (VL), Low (L), Average (A), High (H), Very high (VH)

Table 2c. *Life Skills Level of Grade 12 Students in a Catholic School*

Variables	Domain 9			Domain 10			Life Skills		
	M	**SD**	**Int**	**M**	**SD**	**Int**	**M**	**SD**	**Int**
Sex									
Male	2.93	0.47	A	2.54	0.52	L	3.31	0.22	A
Female	2.85	0.41	A	2.38	0.48	L	3.28	0.21	A
Strand									
ABM	2.82	0.41	A	2.48	0.52	L	3.27	0.23	A
HUMSS	2.85	0.51	A	2.47	0.63	L	3.27	0.24	A
STEM	2.91	0.42	A	2.42	0.46	L	3.30	0.20	A
GAS Hums	2.93	0.51	A	2.41	0.21	L	3.23	0.24	A
Family Structure									
Intact	2.90	0.43	A	2.44	0.49	L	3.28	0.21	A
Non-intact	2.85	0.45	A	2.45	0.53	L	3.30	0.23	A
Family Income									
Low	2.87	0.46	A	2.45	0.51	L	3.27	0.21	A
High	2.89	0.41	A	2.43	0.50	L	3.31	0.22	A
Whole	***2.88***	***0.44***	***A***	***2.44***	***0.50***	***L***	***3.29***	***0.22***	***A***

Note: Domain 9 (coping with emotions), Domain 10 (coping with stress); Very low (VL), Low (L), Average (A), High (H), Very high (VH)

Relationship between the Demographics and the Students' Life Skills

Table 3 presents the relationship between the demographics and the students' life skills The Point biserial correlation shows no relationship between the students' life skills and the following variables: biological sex [r(275)=-0.075, p=0.277], family structure [r(275)=0.041, p=0.550], and family income [r(275)=0.093, p=0.178]. Hence, the null hypotheses are accepted. Meanwhile, the eta correlation showed no relationship between their life skills and their academic strands [η=0.080, p=0.723]. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted.

The result shows no association between the students' biological sex, strand, family structure, family income, and life skills. This indicates that these demographics do not influence their demonstration of life skills. Several studies support the absence of a correlation between these variables [3,11]. Yet, the results also defy the perception that life skills' development and acquisition are dependent on their chosen academic specializations like STEM, HUMSS, or other strands. Also, the results deny that one's practice of life skills is dependent on the kind of family they come from, as supported by Pahilanga et al. [11].

This signifies that regardless of these demographics, the students can still develop life skills. One factor that contributes to their life skills acquisition is the fact that most of them study in this Catholic school independently. This Catholic school is the mother school of all Catholic educational institutions in the province. It is observed that most of its learners come from different municipalities, reside in boarding houses, and live independently. This shows that their independence could be contributory to their skills development.

Some studies claim that independence has become a potential opportunity for students to acquire and develop life skills [49,50]. In fact, Hjort et al. [51] and Rochmat et al. [49], found independence was found to be a factor in the students' demonstration of skills and their academic success. Additionally, Sipayung and Siswono [52] argue that when students are provided with the opportunities to be independent, they develop a sense of autonomy, which is one significant element in the demonstration of life skills. Also, independence, according to Billett [53], is vital in the application of the theories learned into actual practice.

Meanwhile, the no correlation ratings could also be attributed to the students' exposure to the various academic tasks and responsibilities as graduating students. Undeniably, regardless of strands, they are bombarded with difficult subjects that entail terminal requirements to accomplish like research and other specialized disciplines. In this scenario, their life skills to survive these complex tasks are tested, as supported by Leepo [28] and McCurdy et al. [48]. This explains that strands of the Grade 12 students have no influence on their life skills since all of them experience the difficulty of this grade level. Hence, the findings imply the importance of providing these students the opportunities to develop a sense of independence in fulfilling their personal and academic tasks and responsibilities. Further research to validate these claims is suggested.

Table 3. *Relationship between Life Skills Level and Demographics*

Variable	**r**	**df**	**p**
Sex	-0.075	275	0.277
Family Structure	0.041	275	0.550
Family Income	0.093	275	0.178
Variable	**η**		**p**
Strand	0.080		0.723

Note: *relationship is significant when p≤0.05

This paper theorized that the learners' demographics influence their life skills, and this was anchored on the Partnership for 21st-century Skills [24] and the P21 Framework of 21st-century learning [25]. Both frameworks claim that the learners' orientations,

background, and formations influence their 21st-century skills practice. However, the no correlation result of this study invalidated the veracity of the frameworks. This means that the results disagree with the theoretical assumption, and this defies the common thinking that life skills are influenced by background and academic training. Meanwhile, further studies are encouraged employing these variables to validate the claims of this study.

4. CONCLUSION

Given the average results and findings of the study, continuous improvement of the student's life skills acquisition is necessary to achieve the highest level. These also imply the essentials of sustainably integrating life skills development in the Catholic school's curriculum and instruction. Perhaps, incorporating in the curricular and non-curricular programs and activities can surely elicit their life skills acquisition to help them in their future life preparations. Additionally, their exposure to various tasks and responsibilities that establish their sense of independence is also vital to help them develop these skills and apply what they have learned in real-life situations.

These activities are also vital in making them responsive to the various conditions, demands, and circumstances that may come along their way. Meanwhile, this paper recognizes various limitations. This was conducted in a Catholic school on the four strands employed. Also, this was limited to the demographics used and utilized the quantitative research design. Given these limitations and the invalidation of the frameworks anchored, further studies are encouraged employing similar or other designs, demographics, strands, and frameworks to validate the claims of this study.

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1.

2.

3.

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