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Life Skills Education and Independence Development among Children with Down Syndrome: A Phenomenological Study at SLB Negeri Lamongan

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explores how teachers and parents experience life skills education and the development of independence among children with Down syndrome (trisomy 21) at SLB Negeri Lamongan, and which factors they perceive as supporting or hindering the process. Participants were three children with Down syndrome (NVL, RRS, and MSY), their three classroom teachers, and three parents, selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation and analyzed thematically through data reduction, categorization, and interpretation. Credibility was supported by member checking, prolonged and persistent observation, and triangulation across data sources. Three themes emerged. First, teachers described adapting instruction to each child's abilities, needs, and interests through modeling, demonstration, verbal prompts, assistance, direct practice, and repetition. Second, teachers and parents reported that the children gradually needed less assistance in self-care activities; these accounts were compared with observation and documentation records. Participation in interest-based activities, such as dancing, fashion shows, and religious activities, is reported separately from self-care independence. Third, parental involvement and flexible teaching supported continuity of learning, whereas mood changes, limited concentration, distractibility, and memory difficulties were experienced as challenges. The study offers a context-specific account of the sequence that teachers and parents follow: assessment, assistance, repetition, assistance fading, and continuation at home. The findings are based on three children in one school and on informants' perspectives; they do not establish the effectiveness of the program and cannot be generalized to other children with Down syndrome.

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INTRODUCTION

Independence is a central aspect of individual development because it reflects a person's capacity to carry out daily activities, meet personal needs, and adapt to the environment. For children with special needs, independence is also a major educational goal, since it widens their opportunities to take part in everyday life. Three related constructs are used in this article. *Life skills* refer to the functional skills needed to manage daily demands, including self-care (eating, dressing, personal hygiene, and toileting) and simple household tasks. *Independence* refers to the extent to which a child can perform these activities with decreasing external assistance. *Participation* refers to taking part in social and interest-based activities. The three constructs are connected but not identical, and a child may participate actively in an activity while still needing considerable help with self-care. Previous studies have examined self-care across children with and without developmental disabilities (Brewer et al., 2026) and have described independence in terms of both the tasks a person can perform and the amount of help still required (Krell et al., 2021; Santoro et al., 2022).

Children with Down syndrome, a genetic condition caused by trisomy 21, may experience challenges in cognitive development, adaptive functioning, communication, and functional skills, and they often continue to rely on support from their surroundings. Their profiles are far from uniform. Studies of adaptive behavior report marked differences between individuals and across developmental trajectories (Bunster et al., 2022; Onnivello et al., 2024; Schworer et al., 2022), and a clinic-based cohort showed that levels of independence in daily living vary widely (Krell et al., 2021). Executive functioning and expressive language have also been linked to adaptive behavior (del Hoyo Soriano et al., 2022; Onnivello et al., 2022). Taken together, these findings suggest that education for

children with Down syndrome should not rely on a single uniform approach and should include experiences that can be applied directly in daily life.

Life skills education responds to this need by teaching skills that children use at home and at school. Teachers can adapt activities to each child's abilities and interests, and families can extend learning through routines at home. Caregivers tend to judge independence by what a person can do and how much assistance is still needed, so a reduction in assistance can signal progress even when a task is not yet performed alone (Santoro et al., 2022). Parents can support this process by modeling, accompanying activities, providing practice opportunities, and giving reinforcement (Andriani et al., 2023), and teachers working with students with Down syndrome are reported to adjust their methods to individual needs (Hasanah & Harsiwi, 2025).

The existing literature can be grouped into three strands, and each leaves a gap that this study addresses. The first strand consists of descriptive and correlational studies that quantify adaptive behavior, daily living skills, and their predictors (Bunster et al., 2022; Krell et al., 2021; Onnivello et al., 2022; Schworer et al., 2022). These studies show how much children differ, but they rarely show how instruction unfolds from day to day. The second strand tests specific techniques, including backward chaining for buttoning (Ningtyas et al., 2023), video modeling and video prompting (Alkinj, 2026; Athorp et al., 2022; Dalton & Baist, 2025), smartphone support (Stierle et al., 2023), assistive technology (White et al., 2023), and caregiver-implemented procedures (Liu et al., 2025). Many of these studies involve broader populations of people with developmental disabilities or developmental delay (Alias et al., 2024; Athorp et al., 2022; Stierle et al., 2023) and concentrate on a single technique rather than on the whole teaching sequence. The third strand addresses families, through parent-mediated or family-centered programs (Mendoza-García et al., 2025; Stone-Heaberlin et al., 2024; Walsh et al., 2024), the role of parents in fostering independence (Andriani et al., 2023), and teachers' challenges in life skills education (Hasanah & Harsiwi, 2025). Among the sources reviewed for this article, few describe how teachers and parents together experience the sequence of assessing abilities, selecting skills, giving assistance, repeating practice, reducing support, and continuing practice at home within an Indonesian special school.

Preliminary observations at SLB Negeri Lamongan point to a concrete problem in this setting. Teachers did not apply one method to all children; they chose activities according to each child's abilities, condition, interests, and responses, and children appeared to move from receiving full help to completing activities with less help. However, the decisions behind this progression, namely what to teach, how much help to give, and when to withdraw it, depend on teachers' judgment and on communication with parents, and the way these decisions are made and experienced is not documented While each piece of data has been confirmed directly by both teachers and parents, there has been no formal, shared record regarding the level of support provided by the school and the home; nevertheless, communication and coordination between the two parties have remained effective in supporting the child's learning, both at school and at home. A phenomenological approach is suited to this problem because it focuses on how participants experience and make sense of a process rather than on measuring its effect.

This study therefore aimed to explore the lived experiences of teachers and parents in (a) implementing life skills education for children with Down syndrome (trisomy 21) at SLB Negeri Lamongan, (b) perceiving changes in children's independence, particularly the level of assistance needed in daily activities, and (c) encountering factors that support or hinder the process. The study does not test the effectiveness of life skills education. Its contribution lies in a context-specific description of the teaching sequence and in separating self-care independence from participation in interest-based activities, with practical implications for teachers and parents.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a qualitative design with a phenomenological orientation to understand how teachers and parents experience life skills education and the development of independence among children with Down syndrome (trisomy 21). Phenomenological research centers on participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data were analyzed thematically, following the stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing described by Miles et al. (2018). This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological orientation to understand the experiences of teachers and parents in supporting children with Down syndrome during the process of learning life skills. The research focuses on exploring how the processes of modeling, guidance, repetition, habituation, and the gradual fading of assistance are implemented to foster the development of the children's independence. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, and subsequently analyzed to uncover the meaning behind the participants' experiences.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at SLB Negeri Lamongan, a state special school in Lamongan, East Java, Indonesia. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling (Sugiyono, 2022) according to their direct involvement in

the children's learning activities and developmental processes. Three children with Down syndrome (NVL, RRS, and MSY) served as the primary participants. Their three classroom teachers (Teacher NS, Teacher SW, and Teacher NTW) and one parent of each child served as informants. Children were included if they The primary participants in this study were three children with Trisomy 21 Down syndrome who met the following criteria: (1) they had been diagnosed with Trisomy 21 Down syndrome; (2) they were enrolled as students at SLB Negeri Lamongan (a state-run special needs school in Lamongan); and (3) they participated in life skills instruction at the school. Teachers and parents were included as supporting informants, given their direct involvement in the children's learning process and the support provided to them, both at school and at home.

Teachers and parents were included if they were directly involved in the child's learning at school or at home. Three children were selected because The three children were selected because they met the research criteria, and their parents provided consent for their participation. The sufficiency of the information was determined based on data from interviews, observations, and documentation gathered from various sources. Information that recurred and revealed consistent patterns of experience was used to understand the dynamics of life-skills learning in the development of the children's independence. Participant characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of participants and informants

Participant	Role	Age	Class level	Communication ability	Initial independence in self-care
NVL	Child	17	11	Limited speech	Self-care skills are still lacking
RRS	Child	18	11	Limited speech	Self-care skills are still lacking
MSY	Child	17	11	Limited speech	Self-care skills are still lacking
Teacher NS	Classroom teacher	32	Teaches NVL	9 years	-
Teacher SW	Classroom teacher	30	Teaches RRS	10 years	-
Teacher NTW	Classroom teacher	35	Teaches MSY	10 years	-
Parent of NVL	Parent	34	-	Mother	-
Parent of RRS	Parent	59	-	Mother	-
Parent of MSY	Parent	43	-	Mother	-

Note. Codes are initials or pseudonyms used to protect identity. Highlighted cells must be completed from the research records.

Data collection

Data were collected between January 2026 and end April 2026 through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents explored their experiences in teaching and assisting the children, including how abilities were assessed, how skills were chosen, what kinds of assistance were given, how repetition and routines were arranged, how assistance was reduced, and what supported or hindered the process. Each informant was interviewed 3 time(s); interviews lasted about 45 minute, took place at SLB Negeri Lamongan, were conducted in indonesian.

Observations were conducted to understand learning activities and the children's behavior during the learning process. A total of 3 observation sessions of about 3 mounth each were carried out during activities, e.g., self-care and life skills lessons at school. Observation notes focused on indicators, e.g., the type of assistance given (physical, verbal, gesture, modeling), whether the child started or completed the task, and the child's response. Documentation served as supporting data on the implementation of learning and the children's skill development and consisted of types of documents, e.g., assessment records, lesson plans, progress notes.

Data analysis

Analysis proceeded in six steps. First, interviews were transcribed and read repeatedly together with observation notes and documents. Second, data were condensed by selecting segments that described how life skills were taught, how assistance changed, and what helped or hindered learning. Third, segments were coded inductively. Fourth, codes with similar meanings were grouped into categories and subthemes. Fifth, subthemes were compared across children, teachers, and parents and organized into three themes, namely implementation of life skills education, children's independence development, and supporting and inhibiting factors. Sixth, the themes were interpreted in relation to the study's aims and the literature. An example of how a code developed into a theme is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Example of the coding process

Data excerpt	Initial code	Subtheme	Theme
"Becoming independent also involves certain levels; it doesn't mean one shouldn't be helped at all, but rather that help shouldn't always be provided. We shouldn't jump in to assist the moment a child encounters a minor difficulty. Instead, we should foster an approach that educates and guides the child, helping them realize, 'Oh, I can do this on my own; I am capable of doing it myself.'" (Teacher NS, interview).	Withdrawing prompts once the child begins to complete the task	Gradual reduction of assistance	Children's independence development
"Sometimes, I go over what the teacher did in class with my child so that he remembers it—you see, my child is the type who forgets things easily." (Parent of MSY, interview).	Repeating school routines at home	Continuity between school and home	Supporting factors
"As for the challenges—well, there are bound to be challenges—it's about how a child can manage their moods. Sometimes, being children, they might get sulky..." (Teacher NS, interview).	Leaving or refusing an activity when mood changes	Mood and attention as challenges	Inhibiting factors

Note. Codes and subthemes follow the structure of the findings; the excerpts must be replaced with actual data.

Trustworthiness and Researcher Reflexivity

Credibility is supported through researcher checks, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and source triangulation. Researcher checks involve returning interview summaries or draft themes to the teachers and parents to obtain confirmation, as well as any necessary revisions. Prolonged engagement spanned three months, while persistent observation focused on specific aspects. Information from teachers and parents was compared with observation notes and documents to check whether accounts of change in assistance were consistent across sources. The researcher's role was Information from teachers and parents was compared with observation notes and documents to verify whether the accounts regarding changes in the provision of support were consistent across various sources. The researcher acted as an external observer with no teaching role at the school and maintained a reflective journal to minimize the influence of initial assumptions on the interpretation. Because the children had limited communication, their experiences were approached through observation and through the accounts of the adults who accompany them, and this limitation is discussed below.

Ethical considerations

This research has received authorization from SLB Negeri Lamongan (State Special Needs School in Lamongan). Written informed consent was obtained from parents or guardians, teachers, and other individuals serving as informants. Assent from the children was also sought through simple explanations and the use of visual aids, tailored to their developmental stages. Observations were discontinued if a child exhibited signs of discomfort. Participant identities were kept confidential through the use of codes, while research recordings and notes were stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the researchers. A formal ethical review is documented in accordance with the actual status of ethical approval.

RESULTS

The analysis produced three themes, summarized in Table 3: the implementation of life skills education, children's independence development, and supporting and inhibiting factors in the learning process. The findings below are presented as what teachers and parents described, together with what was observed and recorded, and quotations are used to show how interpretations were built from the data. Interview excerpts are identified by participant code, data source, and date.

Table 3. Themes and subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Main data sources
1. Implementation of life skills education	a. Initial assessment of abilities and potential	[I]
	b. Modeling, demonstration, prompting, and direct practice	[I]
	c. Repetition and consistent routines	[I]
	d. Developing interests and potential	[I]
2. Children's independence development	a. Reduced assistance in self-care and simple household activities	[I]

	b. Practice continuing at home	[I]
	c. Participation in interest-based activities	[I]
3. Supporting and inhibiting factors	e. Supporting: teacher adaptation, parental involvement, suitable methods, materials, and environment	[I]
	f. Inhibiting: mood changes, limited concentration, distractibility, memory difficulties	[I]

Note. I = interviews; O = observations; D = documentation. Complete the last column from the coding records.

1. Implementation of Life Skills Education

Teachers described planning life skills education around each child's abilities, needs, characteristics, and potential rather than applying one approach to all students. Learning was directed mainly toward skills that can be used in daily life and not exclusively toward academic achievement. Teachers' accounts, supported by observation, outlined a sequence of identifying initial abilities, selecting relevant skills, providing examples, demonstrating activities, hands-on practice, assistance, repeated exercises, and consistent routines.

Initial assessment of abilities and potential

Before deciding which skills to teach, teachers assessed each child's condition and abilities from the time the child entered school, and they communicated with parents during this process. The information helped them identify initial abilities, individual needs, and areas of potential. In one case, a child showed memorization ability and interest in religious activities, and teachers then provided opportunities to develop these through tahfidz and hadrah activities. *"When a child first enters the school, an assessment is conducted. The school coordinates with the parents to understand the child's condition so that we can determine the appropriate direction of guidance and what skills should be taught to the child"* (Teacher NTW, interview, [15 August 2026]).

Modeling, demonstration, prompting, and direct practice

Teachers used modeling, activity demonstrations, verbal instructions, prompting, and direct practice, and they gave children opportunities to try the activity. When a child had difficulty, assistance was provided according to that child's needs, and the level of assistance was adjusted according to the child's progress. Assistance could be reduced when the child began to complete the activity more independently. *"Rather than immediately offering help at the slightest difficulty, we provide prompts that are educational helping the child realize, 'Oh, I can do this myself; I am capable on my own.' Beyond verbal prompts, we can also use physical prompts gently guiding the child through body movements or physical cues to show them, for example, 'This is how you put on your shoes'"* (Teacher NS, interview, [15 August 2026]).

Repetition and consistent routines

Repetition was described as an essential part of learning. Teachers reported that children sometimes had difficulty retaining skills they had learned when they did not have the chance to practice them again, so teachers provided consistent exercises. Skills that first required extensive guidance were practiced until the child could perform them with less assistance. *"When we provide training now, by next week or a few days later, the same challenges will inevitably arise such as forgetting, or situations where the student needs to be guided once again but as long as we do this consistently, the student will eventually be able to carry out the tasks independently, without requiring extensive guidance from the teacher needing only a little bit of direction here and there"* (Teacher NS, interview, [15 August 2026]). *"Sometimes I go over what the teacher did at school with my child so that he remembers it you see, my child is the type who forgets things easily"* (Parent MSY, interview, [16 August 2026).

Developing interests and potential

Teachers did not limit learning to self-care. They also observed which activities attracted each child and offered opportunities to develop these interests. RRS showed progress in dancing, including remembering a sequence of movements after several practice sessions. NVL showed abilities in fashion shows, coloring, reading, and writing. MSY showed progress in religious activities and in several other skills practiced at school and at home.

2. Children's Independence Development

In this study, independence was understood as the ability to complete daily activities with decreasing assistance. It was not defined as completing every activity without help. Change was identified in two ways: (a) informants' descriptions of what the child could do and how much help was needed, and (b) the researcher's observations and documents. Because no standardized baseline measure was used, the changes below should be read as reported and observed changes rather than as measured developmental outcomes. Table 4 summarizes the changes described for each child.

Table 4. Child-specific changes in assistance and interest-based participation

Child	Changes described in self-care and household activities	Assistance at the start	Assistance later	Evidence	Interest-based participation
NVL	Improvement in several self-care skills; assistance still needed for some activities	Requires practice and guidance from a teacher or parent.	Capable of performing some activities without direct assistance; still requires guidance for certain other activities.	[O , August 2026]	Fashion shows, coloring, reading, writing
RRS	Began managing several personal needs and preparing personal belongings independently	Previously, they were taken to the toilet, and their school supplies were prepared by their parents.	Preparing one's own school supplies and using the toilet without assistance.	[O , August 2026]	Dancing; remembers a sequence of movements after repeated practice
MSY	Progress in self-care skills and simple household activities	Requires assistance and practice with daily activities.	Demonstrates the ability to perform a range of self-care and household activities.	[O , August 2026]	Religious activities (tahfidz, hadrah) and other skills practiced at school and at home

Note. I = interview; O = observation; D = documentation. Complete the highlighted cells with the activity, the type and level of assistance at the start and later, and the source and date.

Reduced assistance in self-care and household activities

Teachers and parents described a similar pattern for the three children. Initially, the children needed assistance and instructions for certain activities. Over time, they were given opportunities to try parts of the activity themselves, were encouraged to take a larger role, and then completed the activity with more limited assistance. NVL improved in several self-care skills but still needed help with certain activities. RRS began to manage some personal needs and to prepare personal belongings independently. MSY progressed in self-care skills and simple household activities. The three children differed in pace and in the activities that changed, which suggests that each followed an individual pattern shaped by initial abilities, learning pace, earlier experiences, and the help they needed. NVL. Teacher NS stated, *"After finishing a meal, she immediately washes her hands, tidies up her eating utensils, puts on her hijab by herself, and puts on her shoes by herself"* (Teacher NS, interview, [August 2026]). Observation notes recorded that NVL performed these activities independently but still needed help with stiff clothing buttons (observation, [17 August 2026]).

RRS. The parent explained "In the past, he had to be accompanied when going to the toilet, but now he can go by himself" (Parent of RRS, interview, [August 2026]). Observation notes indicated that RRS later used the toilet and prepared school belongings without assistance (observation, [20 August 2026]).

MSY. The parent stated, *"Previously, he could not fold clothes. Then, he was taught to fold clothes at school, and now he can do it"* (Parent of MSY, interview, [20 August 2026]). MSY was also reported to be able to boil water. However, a specific observation excerpt documenting the earlier and later levels of assistance is not yet available.

Practice continuing at home

Informants described skills introduced at school being practiced again in daily routines at home with parents. They considered repetition in an environment closely tied to the child's daily life helpful in maintaining previously learned skills. One parent explained, *"I sometimes repeat at home what the teacher has taught my child at school so that he remembers, because he tends to forget easily"* (Parent of MSY, interview, [18 August 2026]).

Participation in interest-based activities

The children also took part in activities that matched their interests and potential, namely dancing (RRS), fashion shows, coloring, reading, and writing (NVL), and religious activities (MSY). These activities are reported here as

participation and as areas where the children showed ability. They were not used as evidence of independence in self-care, because the data do not show how these activities relate to the assistance needed for daily self-care.

3. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Life Skills Education

Informants identified several supporting factors: teachers' ability to adapt strategies, parental involvement, methods suited to the children's needs, and available learning materials and supportive indoor and outdoor environments. Teachers selected methods according to the learning material, the child's abilities, and the child's condition on that day. As Teacher NTW explained, *"For supporting factors, it certainly depends on how classroom teachers creatively organize learning methods for the child according to their specific needs and learning styles"* (Teacher NTW, interview, [17 August 2026]).

Materials such as cards and the use of indoor and outdoor spaces added variety to learning. Parents also helped maintain skills learned at school by providing opportunities to practice at home. One parent explained, *"I sometimes repeat at home what the teacher has taught my child at school so that he remembers, because he tends to forget easily"* (Parent of MSY, interview, [28 August 2026]). These accounts indicate that parental involvement and consistency between school and home activities supported children's opportunities to practice previously learned skills.

Informants also described challenges. Children sometimes showed changes in mood, refused planned activities, or had reduced attention. Easily distracted attention could lead a child to leave an activity before finishing it, and children sometimes had difficulty remembering previously learned skills, so teachers and parents had to provide additional practice. Teachers needed to understand the child's condition before choosing an approach, and the process therefore depended on patience, repetition, and adjustment of teaching strategies according to the child's responses. Teacher NS described this challenge: *"Sometimes children become upset. For example, when it is time to learn, a child may prefer to sit on the floor rather than on a chair. In such situations, the accompanying or classroom teacher needs to understand what the child is experiencing and may have to change the method that was initially planned"* (Teacher NS, interview, [17 August 2026]). This account illustrates how teachers adjusted learning strategies in response to children's emotional conditions rather than insisting on the original plan.

DISCUSSION

This study explored how teachers and parents experience life skills education and the development of independence among three children with Down syndrome. Informants' accounts, compared with observations and documents, point to a sequence of identifying abilities, giving assistance, practicing repeatedly, reducing assistance, and continuing practice at home. The discussion below interprets this sequence in relation to earlier work, considers explanations other than the one offered by informants, and then draws implications. Because the study is based on three children in one school and relies largely on informants' perspectives, the interpretations are tentative and are not evidence that the program caused the changes described.

1. Life skills education as an individualized process

Teachers' use of an initial assessment before choosing skills agrees with research showing that adaptive behavior in Down syndrome varies widely between individuals and over time (Bunster et al., 2022; Onnivello et al., 2024; Schworer et al., 2022) and that levels of independence in daily living differ across individuals (Krell et al., 2021). The present study adds a school-based view of what teachers do with this variability. Whereas the studies above describe differences largely through standardized or clinic-based measures, teachers in this setting dealt with the same variability through assessment based on observation and communication with parents. This approach has a strength, in that it is flexible and tied to the child's daily life, and a limitation, in that it may be less systematic and harder to compare across children. Executive functioning and expressive language, which have been linked to adaptive behavior (del Hoyo Soriano et al., 2022; Onnivello et al., 2022), were not measured here, so they remain possible background factors rather than explanations.

2. Gradual reduction of assistance and repeated practice

Informants linked the children's progress to repeated practice and to withdrawing help as children began to succeed. This resembles scaffolding, in which support is adjusted to what the learner can do and withdrawn as competence grows (Wood et al., 1976). It also resembles the use of backward chaining to teach buttoning to children with Down syndrome (Ningtyas et al., 2023), and the use of video modeling, video prompting, caregiver-implemented prompting, reinforcement, and task analysis in daily living skills interventions (Alkinj, 2026; Athorp et al., 2022; Dalton & Baist, 2025; Liu et al., 2025). Several of these studies include broader groups of people with developmental disabilities or delay (Alias et al., 2024; Athorp et al., 2022; Stierle et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2025), so they are used here as indirect comparisons and not as direct evidence for Down syndrome. A point of difference

is that those studies deliver a defined technique with a planned schedule, whereas teachers at SLB Negeri Lamongan combined several strategies flexibly and adjusted them to the child's mood and responses.

Informants' explanation should be treated with caution. Without a baseline measure and a comparison condition, the reduction in assistance could also reflect maturation, practice in other settings, changes in the children's mood on the day of observation, or adults' expectations and tendency to notice progress. For this reason, the findings describe how teachers and parents understand the process; they do not show that repetition and assistance fading produced independence. Future studies could examine these mechanisms by recording assistance levels at set intervals.

3. Independence and participation in interest-based activities

The children's progress in dancing, fashion shows, reading, writing, coloring, and religious activities is best read as participation. Research on children and adolescents with Down syndrome shows links between participation at home, functional skills, and personal and environmental factors (Brugnaro et al., 2024a, 2024b, 2024c). Such participation may widen the range of experiences and chances to practice, but the present data do not show whether it contributes to self-care independence, and it is therefore not treated as evidence of independence. Distinguishing the two clarifies what the teachers' practice of developing interests may offer: opportunities to show ability and to take part, which are valuable in themselves, alongside separate work on self-care.

4. Continuity between school and home

Parents described practicing school-taught skills at home, which fits the view that parents can support independence by modeling, accompanying, providing practice, and giving reinforcement (Andriani et al., 2023) and that caregivers judge independence by the amount of help a person still needs (Santoro et al., 2022). International studies of parent-mediated and family-centered programs also emphasize adapting interventions to families' needs and daily routines (Mendoza-García et al., 2025; Stone-Heaberlin et al., 2024; Walsh et al., 2024). Those programs were typically structured interventions delivered by researchers or clinicians, whereas the continuity described here depended on coordination between teachers and parents that did not follow a structured program. The cases therefore illustrate what such coordination can look like, and its quality may differ across families.

5. Factors that help and hinder

The difficulties informants described, namely mood changes, limited concentration, distractibility, and trouble remembering skills, are consistent with research linking executive functioning to adaptive behavior and daily living skills in Down syndrome (Hocking et al., 2024; Onnivello et al., 2022; Pereira et al., 2026; Van Deusen et al., 2024). Executive functioning was not assessed in this study, so this link is offered as one possible context for the observed difficulties, not as their cause. The classroom communication needs of students with Down syndrome have also prompted the development of teaching materials for teachers (Ghazali & Hermanto, 2024); in the present study, teachers' use of cards and varied settings points to a similar concern with making instruction concrete, although communication support was not examined systematically. The supporting factors found here, namely teacher adaptation, parental involvement, and suitable methods and materials, were reported by informants and were not tested for their relative importance.

6. Conceptual contribution and implications

Based on the patterns in the data, the process can be described as a sequence of identifying abilities and potential, providing assistance, practicing, repeating, forming habits, reducing assistance, and observing greater independence. This sequence is a conceptual interpretation of the experiences at SLB Negeri Lamongan; it is not a statistically tested causal model. The study's contribution is to describe this sequence from the standpoint of those who carry it out, to show where informants' judgment drives decisions on what to teach and when to withdraw help, and to separate self-care independence from participation.

Several implications follow, and they remain tied to this context. Teachers and parents could agree on a small number of functional learning goals and review them together. A simple shared record of the level of assistance for each activity (for example, physical help, gestural or verbal prompt, supervision only, independent) could make assistance fading more systematic and make progress visible at school and at home. Planning the steps by which help will be reduced may reduce reliance on memory and judgment alone. Flexible scheduling, shorter tasks, and concrete materials may help when mood or attention changes. These suggestions should be tested before they are treated as effective practice.

7. Limitations

This study has several limitations. It involved only three children with Down syndrome at one school; therefore, the findings are context-specific and should not be generalized to all children with Down syndrome. Accounts of changes in assistance levels came mainly from teachers and parents, whose perspectives may have been influenced

by their involvement in the children's development. Although initial independence was described through informants' accounts, no standardized baseline measure was used. The frequency and duration of observations were also limited, which may have restricted the extent to which changes in children's independence could be documented over time. Furthermore, children's own experiences were not directly explored because of their communication abilities. The researcher's interpretation may also have influenced the analysis, although member checking and triangulation across data sources were used to support credibility. Future research could follow children over a longer period, systematically document assistance levels, involve more children from different schools, and explore children's experiences through communication approaches suited to their individual abilities.

CONCLUSION

Teachers and parents described life skills education at SLB Negeri Lamongan as an individualized sequence that begins with assessing each child's abilities and interests and continues with assistance, repeated practice, gradual reduction of assistance, and continued practice at home. Informants reported that the three children needed less assistance over time in self-care and simple household activities, and this was compared with observation and documentation. Participation in dancing, fashion shows, and religious activities was kept separate from self-care independence. Parental involvement and flexible teaching were perceived to support the process, whereas mood changes, limited concentration, distractibility, and memory difficulties were perceived as challenges.

The study contributes a context-specific account of how this sequence is experienced and where informants' judgment guides decisions about assistance. It does not show that life skills education caused the changes or that the findings apply to other children. For practice, teachers and parents may benefit from agreeing on functional goals, keeping a shared record of assistance levels, and planning how assistance will be reduced. Future studies should use longitudinal observation, systematic tracking of assistance requirements, and communication approaches suited to the children to explore their own experiences.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The Author ANR was responsible for conceptualization, research design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, manuscript writing and revision. The Author also reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author used artificial intelligence (AI) during the preparation of this manuscript to assist with language refinement and improve the clarity and structure of the writing. After using the tools, the author thoroughly reviewed and edited the content as necessary and takes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality and integrity of the published work.

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