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Lived Experiences of Teachers and Parents in Implementing the CHORES Curriculum for Learners with Special Educational Needs

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ABSTRACT

The development of functional life skills is essential in supporting the independence and quality of life of learners with special educational needs (LSEN's). This study explored the lived experiences of teachers and parents in implementing the CHORES Curriculum (Constructive and Hands-on Opportunities and Responsibilities for Exceptional Students), a functional life skills learning guide designed to promote independence through task-oriented activities. A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed, involving five teachers and five parents selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and analyzed through thematic analysis. Findings revealed four major themes: perceived benefits of the curriculum, strategies for implementation, challenges encountered, and collaborative dynamics between home and school. Results indicated that the CHORES Curriculum enhanced learners' independence, functional skills, and self-confidence. Teachers and parents utilized structured and adaptive strategies such as task breakdown, reinforcement, and consistent routines. However, challenges including time constraints, learner variability, limited resources, and inconsistencies in implementation were identified. Collaboration between teachers and parents emerged as a critical factor in reinforcing learning across settings. The study highlights the importance of contextualized instruction and strong home-school partnerships in supporting functional life skills development. Findings provide insights for improving curriculum implementation and strengthening inclusive educational practices for learners with SEN.

INTRODUCTION

The development of functional life skills is a central objective in the education of learners with special educational needs (LSEN's), as these skills are essential for promoting independence, self-determination, and improved quality of life (Long *et al.*, 2025). Functional life skills instruction extends beyond academic learning to include daily living, social, and adaptive behaviors that enable learners to function effectively across home, school, and community settings (Hendricks, 2013; deRecat, 2019). Thus, providing targeted, developmentally appropriate instruction in functional life skills is critical for preparing learners with SEN to navigate real-world situations successfully.

In response to this need, life skills-oriented curricula have been developed to provide structured and meaningful learning experiences (Paparati, Sharma & Sharma, 2017). The CHORES Curriculum (Constructive and Hands-on Opportunities and Responsibilities for Exceptional Students) is one such initiative designed to facilitate the development of functional independence through developmentally appropriate, task-oriented activities. Grounded in experiential and applied learning principles, the curriculum integrates household responsibilities into both school and home contexts, thereby promoting consistency and reinforcement of skills across environments. This aligns with ecological and functional curriculum models, which advocate for teaching skills within natural settings to enhance relevance and retention (Thompson *et al.*, 2013).

The effective implementation of such curricula, however, is largely dependent on the collaborative roles of teachers and parents (Schnepel, 2025; Jorveit & Kovac, 2022; Kostatinova, 2012). Home-school partnerships are widely recognized as critical in supporting learners with SEN, particularly in reinforcing functional skills and ensuring consistency of instruction (Hepburn *et al.*, 2025; Houser & Fontenot, 2015). Teachers provide structured instruction and adaptation strategies, while parents offer opportunities for practice and generalization in authentic home environments. Despite these complementary roles, both groups often encounter challenges related to time constraints, resource availability, learner variability, and instructional demands (Chisala & Sememba, 2025; Butler, Rogers & Modaff, 2019).

Given these complexities, there is a need to explore the lived experiences of those directly involved in implementing functional life skills curricula. Understanding how teachers and parents perceive, adapt, and engage with the CHORES Curriculum can provide valuable insights into its practicality, effectiveness, and areas for improvement. Although previous research has highlighted the role of household chores in fostering autonomy (Tepper, Howell, & Bennett, 2022) and developing essential life skills (Mohd Kamil *et al.*, 2023) among students with special educational needs, little is known about how teachers and parents experience and navigate the curriculum in practice. This gap underscores the need for an in-depth exploration of their perspectives, strategies, and challenges.

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This study, therefore, investigates the lived experiences of teachers and parents in implementing the CHORES Curriculum for learners with special educational needs. It focuses on their insights, the strategies they employ, and the obstacles they encounter in supporting learners' functional life skills development. The findings aim to inform curriculum improvement, enhance instructional practices, and strengthen home-school collaboration to promote inclusive education.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers experience the implementation of the CHORES Curriculum in developing functional life skills among learners with special educational needs?
2. What are the perceptions and experiences of parents in supporting and reinforcing the CHORES Curriculum at home?
3. What challenges and strategies do teachers and parents encounter in collaboratively implementing the CHORES Curriculum for learners with special educational needs?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Functional Life Skills in Special Education

The development of functional life skills is a fundamental goal in the education of learners with special educational needs (SEN), as it promotes independence, self-determination, and improved quality of life (Long *et al.*, 2025). Functional life skills encompass daily living, social, and adaptive behaviors that enable learners to function effectively across various environments, including home, school, and the community (Hendricks, 2013; deRecat, 2019). Research has emphasized that structured and meaningful instruction in these skills is essential for preparing learners with SEN to navigate real-life situations successfully (Mohd Kamil *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, integrating real-life tasks such as household chores has been found to enhance autonomy and cognitive development among learners (Tepper, Howell & Bennett, 2022).

Functional and Contextualized Curriculum Approaches

To address the need for life skills development, functional and contextualized curricula have been widely advocated. These curricula emphasize teaching skills within natural and meaningful contexts to improve relevance, retention, and generalization (Thompson *et al.*, 2013). Life skills-oriented programs are designed to provide structured, task-based learning experiences that align with learners' developmental needs (Prajapati, Sharma & Sharma, 2017). Embedded learning opportunities within everyday routines have also been shown to increase engagement and skill acquisition among learners with disabilities (Rakap & Balikci, 2025). Furthermore, personalized and differentiated instruction plays a critical role in addressing diverse learner needs in inclusive settings (Lindner &

Schwab, 2025; Gunawardena, Bishop, & Aviruppola, 2023).

Role of Teachers and Parents in Curriculum Implementation

The successful implementation of functional curricula largely depends on the collaborative efforts of teachers and parents. Teachers are responsible for delivering structured instruction, adapting strategies, and monitoring learner progress, while parents provide opportunities for reinforcement and generalization in home environments (Kostadinova, 2012; Jortveit & Kovač, 2022). Home-school collaboration has been identified as a key factor in enhancing learning outcomes and ensuring consistency of instruction across settings (Accardo, Xin & Shuff, 2020; Hepburn *et al.*, 2025). Studies have shown that strong partnerships between teachers and parents contribute to improved communication, shared responsibility, and better support for learners with SEN (Houser & Fontenot, 2015; Slot *et al.*, 2025).

Strategies for Teaching Functional Life Skills

Effective teaching of functional life skills involves the use of structured and evidence-based instructional strategies. These include task analysis, modeling, reinforcement, repetition, and consistent routines, which support skill acquisition and retention (Simmons, 2024). Research also highlights the importance of systematic instruction and performance feedback in enhancing teachers' instructional practices (Walker *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, individualized and adaptive approaches are necessary to address the diverse needs and abilities of learners with SEN (Lindner & Schwab, 2025). Such strategies align with functional curriculum principles that emphasize flexibility, responsiveness, and learner-centered instruction.

Challenges in Implementation

Despite the benefits of functional life skills curricula, several challenges hinder effective implementation. Common barriers include time constraints, limited resources, and the diverse needs of learners, which require continuous adaptation of instructional strategies (Chisala & Sememba, 2025). Teachers often face increased workload and insufficient materials, while parents may struggle with maintaining consistency due to competing responsibilities (Butler *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, communication gaps between teachers and parents can lead to inconsistencies in implementation and reduced effectiveness of interventions (Bashir *et al.*, 2023; Bakir & Elmali, 2025). These challenges highlight the need for support systems and practical, context-sensitive approaches to curriculum implementation.

Importance of Home-School Collaboration

Home-school collaboration plays a crucial role in reinforcing functional skills and ensuring their generalization across settings. Effective collaboration involves regular communication, shared responsibility, and

mutual support between teachers and parents (Accardo, Xin & Shuff, 2020). Research indicates that when parents are actively involved in their child's education, learners demonstrate improved behavioral, social, and academic outcomes (Hepburn *et al.*, 2025). Collaborative practices also empower parents by increasing their confidence in supporting their children's learning at home (Houser & Fontenot, 2015). Thus, strengthening home-school partnerships is essential for the successful implementation of functional life skills curricula.

Synthesis and Research Gap

Existing literature highlights the importance of functional life skills instruction, contextualized curriculum approaches, and strong collaboration between teachers and parents in supporting learners with SEN. While studies have examined the benefits of life skills programs and the role of home-school partnerships, there is limited research exploring the lived experiences of both teachers and parents in implementing specific curricula such as the CHORES Curriculum. Understanding these experiences is essential to identify practical strategies, challenges, and areas for improvement. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by examining the lived experiences of teachers and parents in implementing the CHORES Curriculum, providing insights to enhance its effectiveness and support inclusive educational practices.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of teachers and parents in implementing the CHORES Curriculum for learners with special educational needs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants included five teachers and five parents who were actively involved in the implementation of implementing the curriculum and were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diverse and meaningful perspectives. Ethical considerations were observed, with participants provided detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature, and informed consent obtained prior to participation. Confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms and secure storage of all data. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to describe their experiences in their own words while enabling the researcher to probe for clarification and elaboration. The interview protocol was guided by the study's research questions, addressing participants' perceptions of the CHORES Curriculum, strategies used to promote functional life skills, challenges encountered, and perceived outcomes. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and generate meaningful themes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study explored the lived experiences of teachers and parents in implementing the CHORES Curriculum for

learners with special educational needs (SEN). Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed four major themes: (1) perceived benefits of the curriculum, (2) strategies for implementation, (3) challenges encountered, and (4) collaborative dynamics between home and school. Each theme is discussed in relation to the research questions and supported by participants' narratives using pseudonyms.

Perceived Benefits of the Curriculum

The findings revealed that both teachers and parents recognized the positive impact of the CHORES Curriculum on learners' functional life skills, independence, and self-confidence. Teachers observed that learners became more engaged in performing structured tasks and demonstrated increased responsibility in daily routines.

Teacher Rose shared, "My learners are now more independent. They can follow simple routines like cleaning their area and organizing materials." Similarly, Teacher Lily noted that "the curriculum helps learners become more responsible and confident in doing tasks on their own."

From the parents' perspective, similar improvements were evident at home. Parent Ana expressed, "My child is now helping with simple chores at home, and I can see that he feels proud of what he does." Parent Marco also highlighted that "even small tasks make a big difference in building confidence."

These findings suggest that the CHORES Curriculum effectively promotes functional independence and self-determination among learners with SEN. This supports existing literature emphasizing that functional life skills instruction enhances autonomy and quality of life (Erbaş, 2025; Long *et al.*, 2025; Ahammed & Sarkar, 2025). Furthermore, the integration of real-life tasks in both home and school environments facilitates skill generalization and meaningful learning (Rakap & Balıkcı, 2025).

Strategies for Implementation

Participants identified several strategies that facilitated the successful implementation of the CHORES Curriculum. Teachers emphasized the importance of structured instruction, including task modeling, step-by-step guidance, and consistent routines. Consistent with these findings, Walker *et al.* (2023) highlighted that special education teachers perceive systematic instruction as most effectively learned through modeling and performance feedback in both classroom and field-based training settings.

Teacher Jasmine explained, "I break down each task into smaller steps so the learners can follow easily." Teacher Orchid added, "Repetition and routine are very important because learners learn better when tasks are consistent." Parents also applied similar strategies at home. Parent Liza shared, "I follow what the teacher does in school, and I guide my child step by step." Parent Carlos noted that "praising my child after completing tasks motivates him to do more."

Table 1: Dominant Codes, Categories and Themes on the Implementation of CHORES Curriculum

DOMINANT CODES	CATEGORIES	THEME
“self-reliance” (T1:3; T3:5; P2:4), “task initiation” (T2:4; P1:3), “independence in routines” (T4:6; P3:5), “less assistance needed” (T5:4)	Development of Independence	PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF CHORES
“cleaning and organizing” (T1:6; P4:3), “daily routines” (T3:4; P2:6), “personal care skills” (T2:5), “household tasks” (P5:4)	Functional Life Skills Development	
“confidence” (T4:5; P1:4), “sense of accomplishment” (P3:3; P5:5), “motivation” (T2:6), “pride in tasks” (P2:4)	Enhanced Self-Confidence	
“step-by-step instruction” (T1:7; T3:6), “task modeling” (T2:4; T5:6), “breaking down tasks” (T4:5)	Structured Instruction	STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION
“praise and rewards” (P1:5; T2:6), “positive reinforcement” (T3:4; P3:6), “encouragement” (T5:5)	Reinforcement Strategies	
“routine practice” (T1:6; P2:5), “repetition” (T4:4; P4:3), “habit formation” (P5:4)	Consistent Practice	
“task adaptation” (T3:5; T5:4), “individualized instruction” (T2:6), “scaffolding” (T4:5)	Differentiated Instruction	
“limited time” (T1:4; P3:5), “busy schedule” (P2:4; P5:6), “competing responsibilities” (P1:3)	Time Constraints	CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED
“different learner needs” (T3:6; T5:5), “behavioral concerns” (T2:4), “varying abilities” (T4:6)	Learner Variability	
“lack of materials” (T1:5; T2:6), “insufficient resources” (T4:4), “limited support” (P3:3)	Resource Limitations	
“inconsistent practice” (P2:5; P4:4), “difficulty maintaining routine” (P1:6), “lack of follow-through” (T3:5)	Implementation Gaps	
“communication with parents” (T1:6; T4:5), “updates and feedback” (P3:4; P5:3), “coordination” (T2:5)	Communication	COLLABORATIVE DYNAMICS
“shared responsibility” (T3:4; P2:5), “working together” (P1:3; T5:6), “partnership” (T4:4)	Shared Involvement	
“parental guidance” (P4:5; T2:6), “confidence in supporting child” (P3:4), “teacher support” (P5:5)	Parental Empowerment	
“consistency at home and school” (T1:5; P2:6), “reinforcement across settings” (T3:4; P4:5)	Consistency Across Contexts	

These findings highlight the importance of explicit instruction and reinforcement in teaching learners with SEN. The use of structured and adaptive strategies aligns with established practices in special education (Simmons, 2024). Moreover, the need for individualized and flexible approaches reflects the principles of functional curriculum design (Lindner & Schwab, 2025; Gunawardena, Bishop, & Aviruppola, 2023).

Challenges Encountered

Despite the positive outcomes, participants reported several challenges in implementing the CHORES Curriculum. These challenges included time constraints, learner variability, limited resources, and inconsistencies between home and school practices.

Teacher Daisy shared, “It is difficult because each learner has different needs, and I need to adjust my strategies all the time.” Teacher Tulip added, “Sometimes there are not enough materials to support all the activities.”

From the parents’ perspective, time management emerged as a major concern. Parent John expressed, “Because of work, I cannot always follow the routine at home.” Parent Maria also noted, “It is hard to be consistent every day, especially when there are many responsibilities.”

These findings reflect common challenges in special education, particularly in implementing functional curricula across different contexts. Time constraints, resource limitations, and diverse learner needs have been identified as barriers to effective implementation (Chisala & Sememba, 2025). Additionally, communication gaps between teachers and parents may contribute to inconsistencies in practice (Bashir, Kanwal, & Anwer, 2023; Bakir & Elmali, 2025).

Collaborative Dynamics Between Home and School

Collaboration between teachers and parents emerged as a key factor in the effective implementation of the CHORES Curriculum. Participants emphasized the importance of communication, shared responsibility, and consistent reinforcement of skills across settings.

Teacher Sunflower stated, “When parents support the activities at home, the learners improve faster.” Teacher Camia added, “Communication with parents helps us align what we teach in school and what they do at home.” Parents also acknowledged the value of collaboration. Parent Elena shared, “The teacher guides me on how to help my child, and it really makes a difference.” Parent Rico emphasized, “Working together with the teacher helps my child learn better.”

These findings highlight the significance of strong home–school partnerships in supporting learners with SEN. Effective collaboration enhances consistency in instruction and promotes skill generalization across environments. This supports previous research emphasizing the role of home–school collaboration in improving educational outcomes (Accardo, Xin, & Shuff, 2020; Slot *et al.*, 2025).

CONCLUSIONS

This study showed that the CHORES Curriculum helps learners with special educational needs develop functional life skills, independence, and self-confidence through meaningful activities at home and in school. Teachers and parents used strategies such as step-by-step instruction, reinforcement, and consistent routines to support learning, although they faced challenges like limited time, diverse learner needs, and lack of resources. The findings also highlighted the importance of strong collaboration between home and school, as regular communication and shared responsibility helped reinforce skills and improve learning. The CHORES Curriculum can serve as a practical and effective approach to support learners when teachers and parents work together and are provided with adequate support and resources.

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