Development of a Transition Service Model for Autistic Students from Inclusive Primary to Secondary Schools: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a study that explored stakeholders' perspectives on transition services for autistic students moving from primary to secondary school in Thailand and proposes a suitable transition model for use in inclusive schools. Qualitative methods were used to conduct in-depth group interviews with 20 participants, including autistic students, parents of autistic students, school administrators, teachers, and multidisciplinary professionals. A thematic analysis revealed four main themes with eight sub-themes highlighting positive and negative aspects of current transition services. Key areas addressed included student development regarding individualized education program and individualized transition plan preparation, academic and social skill development, family involvement regarding training and participation in meetings and support activities, external school support regarding facilities, teacher cooperation, and interagency collaboration. The findings also address the challenges of implementing effective transition services, which are governed by various laws and policies. Successful transitions require collaboration among all stakeholders, ensuring ongoing support for autistic students' education. This study's results provide valuable insights for improving transition services for autistic students in Thailand and in similar contexts and, ultimately, for enhancing the quality of life for these individuals by implementing the proposed transition services model for autistic students that was developed based on key findings and critical discussion.

Keywords: *Autistic student, transition service, inclusive education, parents, and school-age children, qualitative research*

Introduction

An educational system can have a significant impact on the quality of life of autistic students by preparing them for transitioning into an inclusive society, whether self-help in daily life or employment (Ali et al., 2021). Autistic students often find adapting to new environments challenging, which can hinder their integration into school (Hasson et al., 2022; Vidal-Esteve & Kossyvaki, 2023). Factors such as dropping out, a student's inability to continue their

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education due to emotional and behavioral adjustment, a lack of parents' continued participation, and a lack of information and aid from peers have led to a decline in the number of autistic students in schools (Mazon et al., 2022; Olsson & Nilholm, 2023). Administrators, multidisciplinary professionals, teachers, and parents all play crucial roles in educating autistic students. Thus, they need to understand the nature of the relationship between autistic students and their peers in the classroom and school (Cullen et al., 2024; Odom et al., 2022). Collaboration between parents and teachers is essential for the success of autistic students during transitions (Bird et al., 2022). Moreover, strengthening homeschool synergies and developing a curriculum tailored to meet children's needs are crucial to ensure their academic success (Fitri, 2022).

The Importance of Participation Among Stakeholders for Autistic Students

Comprehensive support that focuses on student development, family involvement, and school and external support factors is crucial for enhancing the quality of life for autistic students (Chezan et al., 2022; Jeanette, 2023). Cooperation between families and stakeholders is essential to tailor educational programming to meet each student's needs, ensuring their success in both transitioning from primary to secondary school and their long-term transition into adulthood (Arnell et al., 2022). For example, secondary school students must have close relationships with their teachers, who can act as mentors and offer valuable advice (Snell-Rood et al., 2020). Indeed, strong teacher–student relationships and holistic mentorship are vital during the secondary school years (Khatun & Yeasmin, 2023; Snell-Rood et al., 2020). Students' relationships with their teachers and peers, along with their study habits, can significantly impact their academic success (Khatun & Yeasmin, 2023). Likewise, providing students with proper care, support, and access to special education teachers and psychologists can help improve their academic performance (Jose et al., 2020; Simón et al., 2023). Education management for people with disabilities is based on the belief that every child with a disability can learn and develop (Russell et al., 2023; Zappalà & Aiello, 2023). Establishing an inclusive education philosophy is a crucial step toward educational reform in Thailand, as more children with disabilities are being integrated into the regular school system (Agbenyega et al., 2022; Martinez & Fabella, 2023; Wongvisate, 2022).

The Importance of Transition Services for Autistic Students

Transition planning is a key step in preparing autistic students for what happens when they leave high school. Their transition to adult life should be planned for as early as possible. Successful transitions require early planning and the active involvement of students and their families

(Rompho & Pattamaroj, 2023). Although family is the most important element in the continuous and sustainable development and participation of autistic children in activities, a need still exists for ongoing cooperation among those involved to achieve sustainable success (Klibthong & Agbenyega, 2022). Essential to transition planning is considering the activity base that emphasizes the development of environmental strategies to support students' transition, starting from their strengths. It focuses on improving communication, behavior, competence, independence, and social support during each life transition (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2022; O'Rourke et al., 2023).

Transition service plans are typically part of individualized education plans (IEPs). They are designed to help students enhance their academic progress, educational outcomes, and daily life skills as they transition from primary to secondary school. Providing transition services to all primary and secondary students is a crucial goal. In Thailand, the transition plan is considered an individualized education plan for special needs students, which is required in accordance with the Education Provision for Persons with Disabilities Act, B.E. (2008). This critical law requires all students with special needs in school to have. This plan, developed by an IEP team, lays the foundation for how the student will continue their studies, live independently, or obtain employment after graduation (Kohler et al., 2016). The plan must focus on the study curriculum and the student's preparation (Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2020; Roux et al., 2023). Furthermore, to achieve true success, the plan for transitioning from primary to secondary school should be individualized, focus on the student's development, and include collaboration between those involved (Autism Consortium, 2014; Chun et al., 2023). Additionally, the preferences and interests of learners should be taken into consideration (Hughes et al., 2023). This approach aligns with Kohler's model to suit the characteristics and nature of autistic students (Kohler, 1998; Zablotsky et al., 2020) and guides transitional management from primary to secondary school until higher education (Knudson, 2023). Transition planning should provide students with an individualized transition plan for each level and be reviewed and revised annually.

Transition programs have been found to increase the potential of autistic students during this period (Hughes et al., 2023). The transition from primary to secondary school is a period of great personal change and development. It represents the transition from adolescence into adulthood and increases the level of independence expected of students, enabling them to help themselves as much as possible (Goodall, 2018; Jones, 2023).

For autistic students, the transition to secondary school should be provided at age 13 or, as soon as appropriate, a joint plan should be established in the early stages. Therefore, the transition process from primary to secondary school for autistic students should take place earlier, which is crucial for changes in social structure and education (Kanit, 2018; Moonpanane et al., 2021; Weeramol, 2019). This process serves as a foundation for growth and prepares students for social outreach (Root et al., 2022).

Post-school outcomes for students with disabilities improve when educators, families, students, community members, and organizations collaborate to implement a comprehensive approach to transition planning, more accurately referred to as transition-focused education. This concept portrays transition planning as a fundamental aspect of education in which educational programs for students with disabilities include strategies to keep them in school rather than providing "add-on" activities for them when they turn 13 or 15. The impact of transition-focused education is greatly enhanced when service systems and programs connect and support the implementation and application of such learning (Kohler, 2016).

This transition model has been found to be appropriate for the context of Thailand because of the influence of the cultural context and the Thai education system's philosophy on providing transition support services. Educational policies in which educators at all levels are policy recipients in implementation, the family relationships are close, and they take good care of each other in every aspect. Thai society's attitude toward disabilities (i.e., individuals with disabilities are still viewed as strange and as burdens to society who should be kept separate from the general population) has an impact on IEPs, individualized transition plans (ITPs), and the student transition process, which is not as complete as it should be. All parties must continuously develop it to achieve tangible and sustainable success (Weeramol, 2019). In addition, Thai culture is influenced by parents' experiences coping with the stigma and stress of having an autistic child. Likewise, cultural values associated with Buddhism influence attitudes toward persons with disabilities and how parents of autistic children experience and cope with stigma and stress (Westby et al., 2024), which is very delicate. This model is suitable for integration with almost every aspect of the Thai context.

Challenges of Inclusive Education and Transition Services for Autistic Students in Thailand

The Thai government is committed to providing quality education for all citizens through the reforms outlined in its national education plan. The Ministry of Education has established five

learner goals: accessibility, equity, quality, efficiency, and relevance (Agbenyega et al., 2021; Education Council Secretariat, Ministry of Education, 2017). However, a study on autistic students in inclusive schools found a decline in primary students transitioning to secondary school from 2017 to 2020 due to insufficient abilities and a lack of special education personnel in secondary institutions (Office of Special Education Bureau of the National Basic Education Commission, Ministry of Education, 2013). Policy and resource limitations also pose challenges. Gathering perspectives from stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, parents, and children with autism, is crucial for enhancing transition programs.

Stakeholder Collaboration in Inclusive Transition Planning

Successful transition planning for autistic children requires collaboration among administrators, special educators, general education teachers, parents, the students' peers, and community stakeholders (Cullen et al., 2024; Odom et al., 2022). In Thailand, however, families are often excluded from IEP and ITP processes, and professionals may lack the training needed to support the unique needs of autistic youth (Bird et al., 2022; Im-Bolter & Roche, 2023). Although inclusive education is a national priority, it often falls short in secondary schools due to cultural barriers and the stigma surrounding disabilities (Weeramol, 2019; Westby et al., 2024).

Curriculum and Support Infrastructure for Transition

Curricula are needed that integrate functional life skills and personalized academic goals, particularly during transition periods (Fitri, 2022; Jeanette, 2023). Transition-focused education should be a core aspect of student programming rather than a supplemental activity (Kohler, 1998; Root et al., 2022). While Thailand mandates transition services through the Education Provision for Persons with Disabilities Act (2008), these plans are often underutilized or inconsistently implemented (Kanit, 2018; Moonpanane et al., 2021).

Purposes of the Study

Several gaps exist in the literature in the global and Thai contexts related to the following: 1) inconsistent implementation of ITPs and IEPs in Thailand, particularly during primary-to-secondary transitions; 2) insufficient collaboration among stakeholders, including families and professionals; 3) lack of teacher preparedness and inclusive training in secondary schools; and 4) fragmented support between schools and external agencies. This study explored stakeholders' perspectives on transition services for autistic students and proposed a suitable model for such services. The following questions guided the study: "What are stakeholders' perspectives on

transition services?" and "What should an appropriate transition service model for autistic students be, according to these perspectives?"

Method

Qualitative research is a naturalistic, interpretive approach that seeks to understand meanings and processes within real-life contexts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The approach emphasizes purposeful sampling, flexible design, and reflexive analysis to generate context-rich insights (Patton, 2015). Attention to discourse and cultural interaction further deepens interpretation, particularly in educational settings (Erickson, 1986).

Participants

In exploring the perspectives of key stakeholders, 20 participants were purposively selected, including four school directors (A.1–A.4), four schoolteachers (T.1–T.4), four parents of autistic students (P.1–P.4), four multidisciplinary professionals (M.1–M.4), and four autistic students (S.1–S.4). All participants except the autistic students were 18 years old or older, had worked with or for autistic students for at least 10 years, and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study (see Table 1).

Table 1
Characteristics of participants

Sectors of participants (Number)	Code	Positions/ Characteristics	Age	Gender
School administrators (4)	A.1	School director at an inclusive primary school	58	Male
	A.2	The school's special expertise director is at an inclusive primary school. It is the last year of work, and then I will retire.	60	Male
	A.3	School director at an inclusive secondary school	53	Female
	A.4	School director at an inclusive secondary school	48	Female
School teachers (4)	T.1	Teachers of English subjects taught at an inclusive primary school	46	Female
	T.2	Teacher of the Social subject taught at an inclusive secondary school	43	Female

	T.3	Teacher of Science subject taught at an inclusive primary school	36	Female
	T.4	Teacher of Physical Education taught at an inclusive primary school	32	Female
Parents of autistic students (4)	P.1	Mother of a student with ASD, grade 11	51	Female
	P.2	Mother of a student with ASD, grade 7	54	Female
	P.3	Mother of a student with ASD, grade 5	47	Female
	P.4	Mother of a student with ASD, grade 6	43	Female
Multidisciplinary professionals (4)	M.1	Speech-Language Pathologist	39	Female
	M.2	Clinical psychologist	32	Female
	M.3	Occupational therapist	36	Female
	M.4	Physical therapist	38	Male
Autistic students (4)	S.1	Student with ASD in grade 11	18	Male
	S.2	Student with ASD in grade 7	14	Female
	S.3	Student with ASD in grade 5	11	Male
	S.4	Student with ASD in grade 6	12	Male

Data Collection

The perspectives of the 20 participants were collected through 40–45 minutes of in-depth group interviews; guideline questions were based on related theoretical concepts (Kohler, 1998; Zablotsky et al., 2020) regarding 1) student development, 2) family involvement, and 3) school and external support factors. The data collection process has prepared information on its reliability and validity, including data collection tools such as an interview guide and scheduling the time, place, and roles of each person in the interviews. Moreover, the interviewees were prepared and informed in advance.

Since this study was conducted on a year-by-month basis during the COVID-19 pandemic (February 10–15, 2022), all data were collected via Zoom instead of face-to-face for health and safety reasons, particularly to prevent the spread of the virus. Furthermore, to ensure that the research is of high quality, conducted responsibly, based on ethics, does not violate the law or social ethics, is suitable for publication, and is accepted by both the research community and the public, both domestically and internationally. The study was approved by the Committee for Research Ethics (Social Sciences) Review Board of the authors' affiliate university.

Data Analysis

The themes and key findings from the in-depth interviews were examined using analytic induction (Erickson, 1986). The study involved school administrators, teachers, multidisciplinary

professionals, parents of autistic students, and autistic students. An initial coding structure developed by the first author was refined through team consensus to enhance inter-coder reliability (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). To strengthen trustworthiness, methodological triangulation was employed through the collection of data from multiple participant groups, thereby facilitating the cross-verification of information (Patton, 2015). Peer debriefing sessions were held to discuss emerging patterns and address potential biases, enhancing credibility. Member checking involved assigning selected participants to review interpretations to ensure accuracy and resonance with their experiences, thus increasing confirmability. An audit trail of decision documents and theme refinement was kept, supporting dependability. Through diverse data sources, collaborative analysis, participant validation, and meticulous documentation, the study employed a rigorous qualitative approach, thereby reinforcing the validity and reliability of its findings.

Findings

The data gathered for this study reflect the participants' perspectives on transition services from primary to secondary school for autistic students in inclusive schools in Thailand. Both the positive and negative aspects of the current services were identified, and methods for addressing weaknesses were proposed. The findings are organized into four main themes—student development, family involvement, school and external support, and other challenges of transition services—and eight subthemes, each supported by participant quotations (see Table 2 in the Appendix).

Student Development

Promotion and Preparation of Individualized Education Programs and Individualized Transition Plans and the Development of Academic Skills in Autistic Students.

Educational stakeholders promote and prepare for developing autistic students' academic skills of autistic students through systematic collaboration. For example, schools work closely with special education centers to provide tailored facilities and resources that support inclusive learning environments. Early preparation is emphasized through meetings with parents to develop Individualized Transition Plans (ITPs) and coordination with receiving schools to ensure a smooth transition for students. Specialists assess students' sensory integration needs, advising parents on intervention strategies and arranging follow-up appointments to monitor developmental progress.

Students are aware of and appreciate the collaborative efforts of teachers, parents, and other adults involved in creating personalized study plans to support their academic success. These initiatives reflect a comprehensive approach to fostering the educational and developmental readiness of autistic students within inclusive settings.

Promotion and Development of Communication, Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Interpersonal Skills in Autistic Students

Teachers can encourage the development of communication, social, emotional, and behavioral skills, as well as promote interpersonal development, for both autistic students and students without disabilities by having them engage in activities such as short story development, role-playing, presenting their work in front of the class, and collaborating with peers or engaging in teamwork. Another practical approach to developing these skills involves play activities that focus on speech development and fine motor skills, which multidisciplinary professionals can facilitate. These activities are crucial in preparing autistic students to develop their communication, social, emotional, behavioral, and interpersonal skills, thereby facilitating a smooth transition to an inclusive classroom.

Family Involvement

Cooperation and Participation in Family Activities in Preparation for Further Education and Transition Planning for Autistic Students

Parents and professionals emphasized the vital role of family involvement in preparing autistic students for transition planning and ongoing education. Understanding students' preferences, such as for cooking or sports, and engaging them in activities that promote social skills and academic development is essential. One parent shared their experience of co-planning their child's university studies, which included visits to relevant faculties. A multidisciplinary professional noted the need to train parents in behavior modification techniques to support learning at home. The results indicated that collaboration among families, teachers, and professionals is vital for the success of autistic students. Moreover, training programs for parents can enhance autistic students' development and adaptability to society, but families often face pressure, particularly those with financial challenges or complicated dynamics.

Empowering Families to Support Life Skills and Behavioral Development

The success of transition services for autistic students extends far beyond the classroom—it greatly relies on the involvement and empowerment of families. Parents and guardians play a crucial role

in shaping the educational journey and holistic development of autistic students. The reflections in this subtheme reveal that when families are empowered and actively involved, they become co-creators of their child's success. Through targeted training and active participation in daily developmental activities, families can create a safe and encouraging environment that fosters the development of essential life skills beyond those required for academic achievement in autistic students. Ultimately, this partnership lays the groundwork for smooth transitions and fulfilling futures.

School and External Support Factors

Providing Equipment, Media, Facilities, and an Environment Suitable for Autistic Students' Learning

School and external support factors are integral to supporting autistic students. These factors relate to providing the appropriate equipment, media, and facilities, as well as an environment conducive to learning. According to one school administrator, efforts have been made to ensure all students have access to these resources. However, one parent pointed out that limited budgets and space constraints can make environmental management challenging. As a result, schools may need to focus on sharing resources between students; however, the benefits and limitations of such a management strategy for all students must be considered. Another administrator reported that parents can obtain education coupons and access various service facilities from the special education center, which can be used to benefit the education of autistic children.

Encouraging School Staff and Students Without Disabilities in the Classroom to Know, Understand, and Develop Positive Attitudes Toward Autistic Students

The school directors and teachers described having implemented strategies to promote positive attitudes toward autistic students among staff and students without disabilities. Such inclusive policies respect individual differences and prohibit discrimination. These participants described having organized activities to foster understanding and empathy for autistic students. The parents suggested that bullying incidents be monitored, responded to quickly, and documented, and that bullying prevention guidelines be provided. They emphasized the importance of creating safe classrooms and encouraging peer support and close friendships. Teachers also facilitated activities to enhance the understanding of autistic students for those involved in the school, such

as friends of autistic students and schoolmates.. Parents appreciated these efforts, as their children enjoy sharing their experiences, which motivates them to learn together.

Coordinate with Experts in Relevant Organizations or Departments to Successfully Implement Individualized Transition Plans

Coordinating with experts in relevant organizations or departments is crucial to ensuring the successful implementation of an ITP. This sentiment was echoed by various individuals involved in the education system. A school administrator emphasized the importance of involvement in transition education and coordinating with the school to maintain continuity. A teacher emphasized that coordinating with the department's prominent leaders was convenient and cost-effective. A parent underlined the importance of collaborating with experts from related organizations or agencies, especially for families without resources outside those connected to the school. Additionally, a student shared their enthusiasm for pursuing higher education and recounted a visit to a university's faculty of fine arts, expressing a desire to study diligently to achieve their academic goals.

Some Challenges of Transition Services for Autistic Students Still Exist

Limited Student and Family Involvement

Despite the progress that has been made in transition services for autistic students, challenges remain. A significant issue is the lack of student and family involvement in ITP meetings; some students report never attending, and parents often lack the opportunity to participate. This absence of participation can lead to inadequate planning for transition services or planning that is misaligned with a student's needs. Additionally, the professionals noted challenges in including families in the process, despite evaluating the sensory integration system for support. Future ITP planning must prioritize family involvement for better outcomes for autistic students.

Discrimination Among Classmates of Autistic Students

The quotes from autistic students and their parents reveal a troubling issue in many schools: discrimination against autistic students by their peers. For instance, Student 1 described being excluded from activities by some classmates, limiting Student 1's social interactions and opportunities for growth. Parent 3 emphasized how friends aid their child with autism in remembering activities, but raised concerns about the reluctance of some classmates to befriend their child. Such exclusion can seriously affect the mental health and well-being of autistic

students. Educational institutions must foster an inclusive environment in which all students are valued, regardless of differences. Many students without disabilities lack an understanding of autism and may even find amusement in bullying or embarrassing their autistic peers. As an experienced teacher in this field, I recommend that schools implement peer-to-peer activities to promote understanding and acceptance of autism among all students, recognizing that this process may take time.

Discussion

The key findings of this study, organized by the four main themes, can be summarized as follows: 1) Student development: Schools, special education centers, and families collaborate to create IEPs and ITPs, supporting autistic students' success; activities like role-playing and teamwork enhance communication, social, and behavioral skills. 2) Family involvement: Family engagement in planning and activities is vital for student development; empowered families foster supportive environments that help students adapt and thrive. 3) School and external support: Schools provide essential learning materials, often supplemented by special education centers, and promote understanding, prevent bullying, and encourage peer support; additionally, collaborating with external experts enhances ITP implementation and supports higher education goals. 4) Challenges: Some families are not involved in transition planning, which weakens transition outcomes; ongoing efforts are necessary to avoid exclusion and foster an inclusive culture. These findings are critically and comprehensively discussed in relation to relevant studies in the following sections.

Student Development

Transition services for autistic students in inclusive schools in Thailand take a student-development approach with some strengths in collaboration with special education centers. Teachers assess students' progress, plan effective teaching strategies, and develop Individualized Transition Plans (ITPs) to enhance students' communication, social, emotional, and interpersonal skills (Rock, 2023; Tawankanjanachot et al., 2024). Using alternative assessment tools can improve the educational experience for students with special needs beyond academics (Avdiul & Ahmedi, 2024). Involving students in planning ITP and recognizing their contributions is crucial for their autonomy and self-determination (Andrews et al., 2024). However, there is currently limited student involvement in ITP planning; moreover, many students continue to be excluded

from the development of their IEP and from the decision-making regarding their educational goals, which must be addressed (Borrelli, 2022; Kohler, 2017).

Family Involvement

The findings of this study revealed that families were engaged in co-planning and skill-building activities. Some parents received training in behavior modification and participated in educational planning. Family involvement is essential for transition planning and for preparing autistic students for further education. Parents must communicate effectively with their children, participate in activities with them, and receive training in behavior modification. The teachers, professionals, administrators, and parents in this study agreed that family participation in training courses can significantly enhance the learning and development of autistic students. Despite inconsistent participation in ITP meetings due to time, awareness, or resource issues, it has remained. This lack of student and family involvement in ITP meetings is a significant limitation, resulting in inadequate planning and implementation of transition services (Im-Bolter & Roche, 2023; Morris et al., 2021; Roitsch, 2024). Families facing financial or relational challenges often experience increased pressure in supporting transitions. This finding is consistent with previous studies, which suggest that early implementation and the involvement of students and families at every stage of the transition process are essential for a successful transition. Similarly, longitudinal observational studies conducted by Johanna (2023) and Boşnak and Calleja (2023) indicate that working with parents and encouraging parent–teacher groups during a student's final year of primary school is crucial for success. Parents' mental state of better acceptance of various changes (Hodges et al., 2020; Rios & Buren, 2024) also supports the importance of parental involvement. Additionally, Gedik and Urkmez (2023) found that parents remain anxious about changing their children's school settings, underscoring the need for ongoing support and communication between parents and educators.

School and External Support Factors

Schools offer inclusive facilities, resources, and learning environments. Efforts have been made to promote the acceptance of autistic students by non-disabled students through empathy-building activities. The study also found that coordination with external experts and agencies enhances the transition planning process. However, challenges remain: Budget and space limitations hinder the

availability of resources, and peer discrimination, along with a lack of understanding of autism, continues to impact social integration.

Creating a supportive school environment for autistic students requires the provision of appropriate resources and facilities despite budget and space limitations. It is also essential to share resources and apply the universal design for instruction to a flexible curriculum that enhances learning. Emphasis on students' holistic welfare in education is increasing (Al Jabery & Arabiat, 2024; Bahrawi, 2023; Tarconish et al., 2023).

To promote positive attitudes toward autistic students, schools in Thailand have adopted inclusive policies, empathy-building activities, and initiatives that foster friendships. However, peer discrimination remains a significant issue affecting the mental health and well-being of autistic students. Educational institutions must cultivate an environment where all students feel valued. For example, sports competitions can encourage participation and inclusion (Aubé et al., 2021; Yokota & Tanaka, 2024).

Establishing bullying prevention strategies is crucial; such strategies could include training staff to recognize bullying, providing counseling, and implementing programs that promote positive behavior. Effective mechanisms for reporting bullying incidents are also essential (Chisala et al., 2023; Robinson et al., 2023; Westby et al., 2024).

Collaboration with experts and stakeholders is vital for successfully implementing ITPs and facilitating students' transitions to advanced levels of education, encompassing primary to secondary transitions. A strong network with parents and communities members are necessary to support inclusive education and ensure it aligns with national standards (Azad et al., 2021; Gartland & Strosnider, 2023; Quick et al., 2023; Vincent et al., 2023). Although there are clear laws and policies related to the development of quality of life for people with disabilities, coordination between schools and the relevant agencies remains complicated because they do not fully understand the importance of these measures. However, we still expect the best joint action to achieve the goal as much as possible.

Conclusion and Implications

This study examined the current transition services provided to autistic students in Thailand's inclusive schools. These services involve all stakeholders—including administrators, teachers, parents, interdisciplinary professionals, and autistic students themselves — working within a collaborative framework that addresses student development, school environments, external support factors, and family involvement. The Transition Operation Committee meets, evaluates, reviews, and improves the educational experience of autistic students, then transfers them to their new educational institution to jointly promote and develop them holistically. The committee ensures that they are ready to transition to a higher level. The transition from primary to secondary school involves providing continuous support and counseling to autistic students, enabling them to study in educational institutions. Challenges such as limited family involvement, budget constraints, and peer discrimination persist, hindering effective transitions. Based on the key findings of this study, a suitable model for successful transition planning is proposed, as shown in Figure 1.
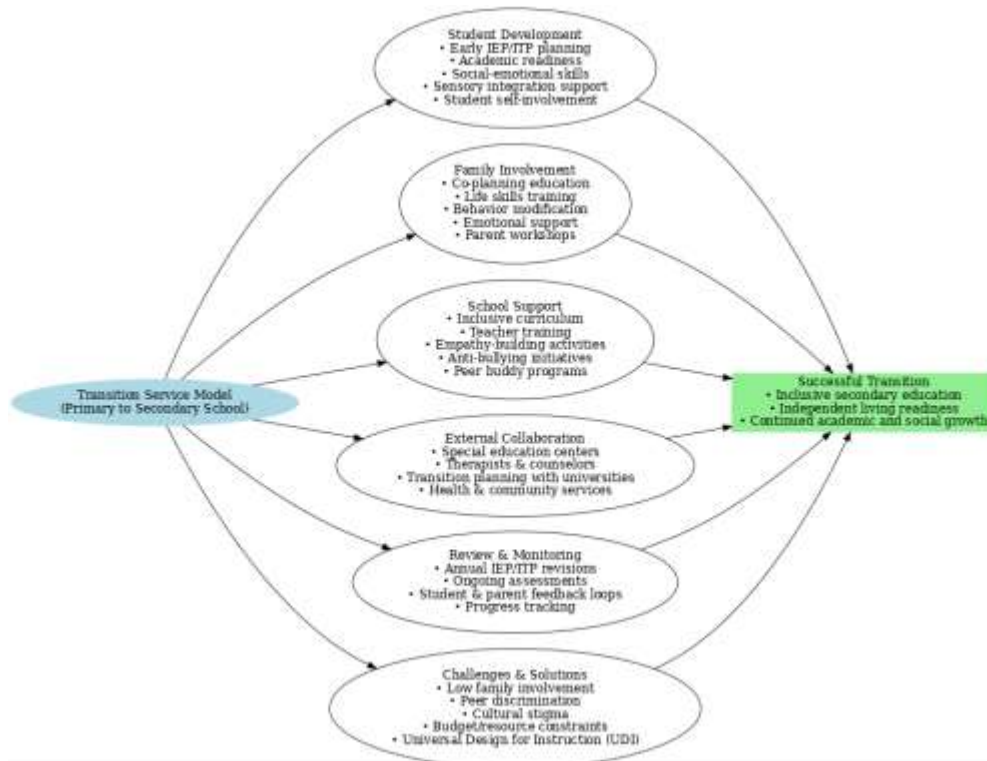
Figure 1

Transition service model from primary to secondary school for autistic students in inclusive
schools

For improved transition planning, the following actions should be considered:

- Enhance participation: Involve students and families in IEP/ITP processes early to empower their decision-making.

- Strengthen inclusion strategies by implementing empathy-building programs and peer education to foster greater acceptance.

- Improve resources: Utilize cost-effective practices, such as universal design for instruction, to enhance accessibility to resources.

- Support family empowerment by providing families with ongoing training and psychological support.

- Foster multisector collaboration by encouraging partnerships among schools, health services, and community organizations to provide holistic support.

The following recommendations are made for future research:

- Investigations should be made into how students' voices in transition planning can be enhanced.
- Long-term studies should be conducted to assess the impact of transition services on post-secondary outcomes.
- Effective family engagement models in underserved communities should be explored.
- Interventions for promoting positive peer relations and reducing discrimination should be examined.
- Transition services across regions and cultures should be compared to inform the development of adaptable policies.

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Appendix

Table 2

Findings from an in-depth interview

Main themes	Sub-themes	Quotations and participants' codes
1. Student development	1.1. Promotion and preparation of an IEP, ITP, and development of academic skills for autistic students.	"We are cooperating with the Special Education Center to provide special educational facilities for students in inclusive schools." (A4)
		"Having a meeting to develop the ITP plan with parents and coordinating with the school where the students are transitioning to prepare students early" (T.2)
		"Evaluate the Sensory Integration system and advise parents on resolving the problem and making follow-up appointments. (M.2)
		"I acknowledge the information that my mother is. Teachers and adults who come to the meeting to study plan for myself and other autistic students" (S.2)
	1.2. Promotion and development of communication, social, emotional, behavioral, and interpersonal skills for autistic students.	"Promote language expression by having autistic students come up with short stories and short biographies and present them at the front of the class." (T.2)
		"Teaching speaking by inserting play activities and doing them to focus on the development of both fine motor skills and speech." (M.2)
		"Representing the group, speaking in front of the social subject class" (S.4)
2. Family involvement	2.1. Cooperation and participation in family activities in preparation for further education and transition planning for autistic students	"It started with regular communication with students about what they wanted to do. Then, try to practice finding preferences and aptitudes, such as making food or snacks, practicing car washing, playing music, running, etc." (P.1)
		"I have jointly planned to study at the university with my school and my family and visited the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts to prepare to study there." (S.2)
		"The family is the most important factor in providing a successful education for autistic students." (T.2)

Table 2

Findings from an in-depth interview (cont.)

Main themes	Sub-themes	Quotations and participant's codes
2. Family Involvement (cont.)	Empowering families to support life skills and behavioral development	"Being a member or attending a training course for families, it is important to develop students and organize training for parents on behavior modification" (M.2)
		"The family has participated in self-help skills, social skills, physical skills, communication, emotional support, and therapy to adaptability." (A.3)
3. School and external support factors	3.1. Encouraging school staff and students without disabilities in the classroom to understand and have more positive attitudes toward autistic students	"The school has a policy to promote that teacher and school personnel provide education based on individual differences and do not discriminate." (A.4) Various activities encourage regular students to understand and empathize with autistic students." (A.2)
		"Classmates are important to foster and develop according to students with ASD's potential, especially close friends who support each other?" (T.2)
		"Teachers organized various activities to make all students happily, study together in the classroom. My son always tells me what activities are going on in the classroom." (P.1)
	3.2. Providing equipment, media, facilities, and an environment suitable for the learning of autistic students	"The school has tried to provide equipment, services, appropriate media, facilities, and an environment to suit all students." (A.1)
		"I understood that with the limited budget and space constraints, environmental management also has limitations, therefore, focusing on sharing between all students." (P.1)
		"Environment management should consider the advantages and limitations for all students and the benefits that will be received." (M.4)

Table 2

Findings from an in-depth interview (cont.)

Main themes	Sub-themes	Quotations and participant's codes
3. School and external support factors (cont.)	3.3. Coordination with experts in relevant organizations or departments are necessary for the successful implementation of an ITP plan	"Coordinating with the school and being involved in the transition of education is essential and inevitable to ensure the work continues." (A.3)
		"Coordinating with experts from related organizations or agencies is very important to us family because we do not have any references except the school and related people." (P.1)
		"I visited the University's Faculty of Fine Arts, were I wanted to study after finishing secondary school and was very excited. I will study hard to be able to go to school." (S.1)
4. Other challenges of transition services for autistic students still exist.	4.1. Limitation of students and family involvement existing	"I never attended the ITP meeting." (S.2)
		"The school has informed me to attend the IEP meeting, but I have never attended the ITP meeting." (P.1)
	4.2. Discrimination among classmates of autistic students still existing needs addressing	"Some of my classmates don't want to be friends with me and don't let me join the working group." (S.1)
		"Friends are most important in reminding me to encourage my son to have activities with his friends, but some of the students in the class didn't want to have friends with my son." (P.3)