



**Postsecondary education preparation for
female students with learning disabilities
in Saudi Arabia: A qualitative inquiry ^(*)**

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*) Received: 23/11/2025

Accepted: 7/1/2026

*) Journal Website:

<http://hesj.org/ojs/index.php/hesj/index>



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Abstract

This qualitative case study investigates special education teachers' practices in preparing female students with learning disabilities for transition to postsecondary education within the Saudi context. The study examines the implementation of key components of transition planning, including assessment practices, instructional practices supporting postsecondary readiness, transition services, family involvement, and interagency collaboration within Individualized Transition Plans (ITPs). Data were collected using content analysis of twelve ITPs and semi-structured interviews with eight special education teachers to gain deeper insights into their perceptions and reported practices regarding the preparation of students for university transition. Five main themes emerged including transition planning, postsecondary education preparation, family involvement, interagency collaboration, and challenges. Results indicate that although transition-related practices were commonly reported, their implementation was often limited and inconsistent. Family involvement was framed mainly as general communication rather than active participation in transition planning. Findings revealed challenges SETs encounter that impact effective implementation of transition services including lack of standardized transition assessment tools and materials, insufficient supervisory support and guidance, restraining administrative regulations, limited collaboration with universities, weak academic rigor in general education curriculum, and social and cultural factors that impact students' readiness for postsecondary education. As a result, transition efforts were primarily driven by individual teacher initiatives rather than structured, institutionalized programs. The study highlights a clear gap between teachers' conceptual understanding of transition services and their comprehensive implementation in practice. It emphasizes the need for targeted professional development, standardized assessment frameworks, and stronger policy and institutional support to ensure effective and sustainable transition preparation for students with learning disabilities pursuing postsecondary education.

Keywords: students with LD, Special Education Teachers (SETs), Kohler's Taxonomy for transition programming transition planning, postsecondary education.

Introduction:

The transition from secondary school to university is a significant milestone in the academic and personal growth of individuals with learning disabilities (LD). First-year students with LD are especially exposed to various educational, social, and emotional challenges as they adjust to new settings in learning, manage academic demands, and cope with different social settings (Al-Sulami & Al-Sharif, 2022). Transition services provided to students with LD are crucial components of special education. These services have garnered significant attention from professionals working specifically with students who have LD. The transition of these students from educational settings to postsecondary education presents considerable challenges and obstacles related to curricula, access to services, educational programs, and various other difficulties (Farhadian & Esabat Tabari, 2023).

Transition services play a vital role for these students, as they shape their future behaviors and facilitate their academic and professional lives post-school. These services assist students in fulfilling their social roles within the communities in which they live (Vlachos, 2025). They serve as the cornerstone of curricula for students with LD, enabling them to transition from school life to community living and employment, regardless of their ability levels. Transition services also form the foundation for developing other essential skills needed for the future, such as decision-making, expressing opinions, choosing friends, and exercising freedom of choice in employment that aligns with their interests and abilities. Ultimately, this fosters successful integration into daily and professional life (Lowrey et al., 2023; Chhogyel & Tshering, 2023).

Furthermore, transition services are designed to assist students in achieving a satisfactory level of social, psychological, emotional, and vocational maturity. Transition services support students in adapting effectively to secondary school and post-school environments, as adaptation is fundamental to students' development. They also help maximize human potential, thereby improving both economic and social conditions for individuals and the community (Ali, 2023).

Providing transition services to this population is similar to investing in a significant part of society, adapting these services to their abilities and potential for optimal advantage, as they constitute a sizable demographic within Saudi society (Ben Ammar, 2025). Supports provided to SWDs in Saudi public schools are governed by the Regulations of Special Education Programs and Institutes (RSEPI). The ultimate goal of the RSEPI is to prepare SWDs to be productive citizens in their communities and ensure their social interaction and self-sufficiency (Al-Mosa, 1999). It defines transition services

as “a set of coordinated activities designed to prepare SWDs to move from one environment to another, from school life to public activities, and to be independent after God Almighty” (MoE, 2016). To improve transition services in schools, the Ministry of Education (MoE) developed a practitioner manual to support the implementation of transition services in secondary LD programs, including research on best practices to prepare youth for postsecondary transition (MoE, 2020). The manual includes guidelines and practical strategies to help special education teachers (SETs) implement transition services. Specifically, the manual offers practices in transition assessments, transition planning, instructional practices to prepare students with LD for postsecondary education, and interagency collaboration strategies. The RSEPI reflects key principles derived from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Alquraini, 2011). The IDEA requires that individualized education plans include transition planning and services for students with disabilities (SWDs) by age 14 or earlier (Kohler et al., 2017). Kohler et al. (2016) developed a taxonomy for transition planning to assure effective results based on their literature review. This paradigm emphasizes a comprehensive transition process based on five major components: student-focused planning, student growth, agency collaboration, family participation, and program structures. Kohler's taxonomy is used to develop, administer, and evaluate secondary transition programs throughout the United States.



Figure (1): Kohler taxonomy of transition programming (Kohler et al., 2017).

Statement of the Problem:

Recent population statistics in Saudi Arabia indicate a notable increase in the enrollment of young adults with learning disabilities (LD) in postsecondary educational settings (AlNaeem, 2024). In 2021, the total number of SWDs reached 175,391, reflecting a growing presence of students with LD within the education system, including higher education. Despite this increase, limited attention has been given to how students with LD are being systematically prepared for postsecondary education during their secondary schooling years.

Special education teachers play a central role in supporting students with LD in developing the academic, functional, and social skills necessary for successful transition to postsecondary education. However, there remains a lack of in-depth understanding of teachers' actual preparation practices within LD programs in Saudi schools. Building on findings from prior quantitative research (Alabdulwahab, 2024), which highlighted patterns and gaps in transition-related practices and raised the need for deeper exploration, the present qualitative study seeks to address this gap by exploring how special education teachers prepare female students with LD for postsecondary education.

College students with LD often face academic hurdles affecting their adjustment. They may struggle with time management, course selection, assignments, and adapting to teaching styles. Skill limitations hinder learning, impacting performance and potentially leading to class withdrawal (Lipka et al., 2020). Howard-Gosse et al., (2023) showed students with LD need more time to finish assignments and feel their efforts don't match expectations. Essay writing and organization are difficult due to issues with structuring thoughts and connecting ideas. Heavy workloads and poor writing skills create barriers. Reading in subjects like history and philosophy can be hard due to difficulties organizing concepts and comprehending information (Aulia & Rizal, 2025). Furthermore, specific reading challenges include confusing similar words, phonics issues, problems with multi-syllable words, slow reading, and comprehension difficulties. Writing issues involve sentence structure, grammar, spelling errors, and copying problems. Critical thinking, especially synthesizing information, also poses a barrier (Barazanja & Ameen, 2022).

Students with LD may also struggle with critical thinking. According to Connor (2015), critical thinking was a hurdle for students with LD, particularly when creating "large bodies of information" or synthesizing many sources of information to develop original ideas, as opposed to writing a "descriptive paper". Furthermore, Students may encounter difficulties in

communicating with faculty members or adjusting to new teaching methodologies. According to Fayeze et al. (2017). Hazan-Liran & Walter (2024) highlighted that students with LD encountered difficulties in adapting to their professors' teaching methodologies.

Students with LD face more social and emotional obstacles during their scholastic journey than their peers without LD (Sarid, 2024). Students with LD face social obstacles in college, such as social atmosphere, friendships, and communication with peers and faculty members (Williams et al., 2024). Lightfoot et al. (2018) found that students with LD struggled with effective communication and had challenges in group sessions. According to Kreider et al. (2024), they may struggle with facial expressions, sarcasm, spatial orientation, and telling time. These issues hinder communication, impacting social interaction and academic performance, leading to isolation. For example, misinterpreting nonverbal cues can cause issues in group work. A lack of support, like specialized resources, worsens these issues (Alsolami, 2024), creating a cycle of underachievement and low self-esteem affecting future prospects. According to McGregor et al. (2016), students with LD have additional challenges due to non-academic duties and skill levels. Students with self-reported LD perceived more bias toward people with disabilities on campus and were less satisfied with their overall experience.

Significance of Study:

Given the increasing number of enrolled students with LD in universities and the need to prepare them for universities' demands, this underscores the significance of the current study. To the researcher's knowledge, no research has explored qualitatively the postsecondary education preparation of students with LD in the Saudi Arabian context. Studies that examined transition services for SWDs have primarily relied on quantitative approaches to document trends and levels of practice with minimal focus on students with LD and postsecondary education. This qualitative inquiry provides in-depth insights into how SETs conceptualize and prepare female students with LD for postsecondary education.

The current study extends prior research by moving beyond identifying practices and attitudes to explore the meanings, rationales, and contextual factors shaping teachers' instructional and transition-related decisions. By capturing SETs' perspectives and experiences, the findings offer a nuanced understanding of how postsecondary preparation is implemented in LD programs and where gaps between policy expectations and classroom practice may exist. Additionally, study results may guide practical and policy implications for improving transition planning and postsecondary readiness supports for students with LD. The study may identify specific areas in

professional development initiatives for SETs and support policymakers in developing more structured and contextually responsive frameworks for postsecondary education preparation in Saudi schools.

Questions of the study:

The following research questions set as the study objectives:

1. How SETs prepare their students with LD for postsecondary education?
2. How comprehensive are ITPs in addressing essential components to prepare students with LD for postsecondary education?
3. What are the perspectives of SETs regarding preparing students with LD for postsecondary education?

Previous studies:

It is imperative to note that the field of transition services in Saudi Arabia is in its early stages. Most studies investigating secondary transition for SWDs in Saudi Arabia explored how transition services are provided in a holistic approach (e.g. Alrusaiys, 2014; Almutairi, 2018; Almalki, 2020; Alnahdi, 2014). Other studies investigated specifically employment for students with intellectual disabilities (e.g. Alnahdi, 2013; Alnahdi, 2016; Almalki, 2015; Almalki, 2018). In a systematic review conducted by Binmahfooz (2022) to examine the landscape of secondary transition literature in Saudi Arabia, she examined 198 studies and found that 62% of the studies explored perceptions and attitudes of teachers towards implementing transition services other studies (13.79%) evaluated and explored obstacles, 10.3% explored factors and components in transition services, while less than 10% of the studies addressed best practices review, transition services outcomes, and professional training needs. It is crucial to note that most studies that explored interagency collaboration in Saudi Arabia were mostly geared toward facilitating transition for employment (Almalky & Alqahtani, 2022; Almalky et al., 2020). Aligning with these findings, few studies were found that investigate the actual practices implemented to prepare high school SWDs for postsecondary education and students with LD in particular.

Almalki (2021) notes a deficiency in transition programs tailored for SWDs, the study findings concluded that four main issues must be addressed to advance Saudi transition services: (1) special education teacher preparation programs, (2) transition services' policies and regulations, (3) Individualized Transition Plans, and (4) collaborative practice while Alquraini et al., (2023) identifies shortcomings in three key areas: the evaluative processes for determining eligibility, the formulation and enactment of transition plans, and the assessment of their effectiveness. Furthermore, they emphasize the need to integrate transition service courses into the curricula of Saudi universities

to enhance students' understanding and competencies in delivering effective transition services.

The importance of formulating transition policies and services to support SWDs is underscored by Alquraini et al. (2023). Additionally, Almalki (2021) identifies key factors critical to the successful transition of these students, including the provision of educational models and strategies, and the collaboration between agencies and vocational organizations. These elements are essential for facilitating a smooth transition into postsecondary education or toward achieving independence (Alfawzan & Almulhim, 2024).

Alqahtani & Alqahtani (2024) highlight that, despite student consensus on the importance of transition services for skill development and future success. Schools still struggle to provide these services. Key challenges include: 1) a lack of awareness among educational staff about the importance of transition services, 2) insufficient teacher training in supporting students with LD, and 3) the absence of clear laws, regulations, and plans regarding the implementation of transition service programs.

Alkhateeb & Alotaibi (2024) explored the knowledge of 74 LD SETs of transition services for provided for their students. They examined SETs' knowledge across different domains (social, academic, independence, and vocational preparation) and found that SETs' knowledge levels in all domains were moderate. The lowest level of knowledge was in academic services and vocational preparation. Researchers attribute this to SETs' lack of prior training in implementing transition services and providing adequate academic support for their students. Further, they found that SETs lack resources dedicated to cognitive learning, such as appropriate assessment tools and suitable educational programs, and have limited awareness of available learning resources.

Alzarhrani and Alaseeri (2022) found that academic transition services for students with LD are limited and inadequately implemented. SETs do not provide students with essential information about available college options or admission requirements, and existing services primarily focus on teaching academic subjects rather than preparing students for postsecondary pathways. Researchers noted that efforts to inform students about future opportunities are minimal, unplanned, and ineffective in supporting successful transitions. They emphasize that the academic transition services offered do not adequately support female students' transition to postsecondary education. Moreover, the services offered, such as instructional support, help with assignments, testing accommodations, and remediation, are inconsistent and vary significantly across schools.

Alabdulwahab (2024) investigated SETs' practices in transition programs to prepare SWDs for postsecondary education institutions. Using an instrument that reflects best practices of the transition program in three main domains: transition assessment, transition planning, and supportive practices for students with disabilities. The study found that SETs implement on a larger scale all practices related to transition assessment, transition planning, and supportive practices for students with disabilities. On the other hand, results revealed that SETs moderately used formal and informal assessments to assess students' self-determination skills, developed a summary of performance, embedded study plans and instructional/testing accommodations within students' individualized transition plans, and coordinated with disability support service representatives from postsecondary institutions. Across the three domains, SETs rated higher in implementing instructional practices to prepare their students for universities.

Aldossary and AlQahtani (2023) investigated the level of collaboration between special education programs and higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia in supporting the transition of SWDs to university education. Using a descriptive survey design, the study found that supervisors, school leaders, and university disability support staff perceived the overall level of collaboration as high. However, the findings also highlighted key factors influencing effective collaboration, including clarity of transition services, availability of supportive regulations, qualified personnel, financial resources, and positive stakeholder attitudes. Despite the reported high level of collaboration, the study underscores the need for clearer policies and more systematic, sustainable transition frameworks to strengthen practice beyond individual or informal efforts.

Other studies illuminate challenges associated with transition services in Saudi Arabia that include limited collaboration with families and other external stakeholders, inadequate competencies that would allow SETs to sufficiently implement transition practices, and a lack of needed resources in schools (Almalki, 2021, Allagani & Aldakhil, 2019). In a study that explored transition practices that were specifically geared toward preparing SWDs for college before high school graduation by analyzing students' IEPs, Fisk (2018) used an instrument that incorporated best practices stemming from Kohler's taxonomy (1996) and Landmark's (2009) extensive review of the literature. Practices included family participation, inclusion in general education, interagency collaboration, participation in job opportunities, social skills training, independent living skills training, and self-determination skills. Fisk found that most IEPs incorporated general education inclusion; results also showed that students received social skills and independent living

training skills. More than half of the IEPs showed that SETs provided self-determination skills training (e.g. asking for help, engaging in college and career search process). On the other hand, findings indicated that only half of the reviewed IEPs indicated any type of family engagement in transition planning. Less than half of the students were actively engaged in any paid or unpaid work experience or attending any vocational training programs. Limited interagency collaboration practices were found.

In a study that critiqued transition programs across all disability categories, Almalki (2025) conducted a current state assessment of transition services, identified existing gaps, and analyzed the challenges hindering effective implementation. Almalky (2025) elaborated on the obstacles affecting the quality of transition programming, noting that eight critical components are missing from current practices. These included: the absence of a clear philosophy and vision guiding the transition services model; the lack of a specific law addressing transition programs and the weak conceptualization of their purpose; and significant delays in implementing transition services. The researcher also highlighted that existing transition programs focus predominantly on vocational training while failing to address other essential domains, such as preparation for postsecondary education, resulting in a substantial gap in college readiness for students with disabilities. Furthermore, insufficient coordination and partnerships with external sectors beyond the school setting, along with weak family engagement, were identified as major barriers to achieving effective and comprehensive transition services.

Methodology:

To comprehensively examine the practices of SETs in secondary schools in preparing their students with LD for university, a qualitative case study approach was employed. The data collection process employed content analysis and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The use of content analysis provides a lens for evaluating how SETs develop their ITPs comprehensively, the quality of the ITPs, and whether the ITPs address students' transition goals, needs, and activities. It offers a means of systematically analyzing educational documents and identifying patterns. Moreover, it "provides a systematic and objective means to make valid inferences from verbal, visual, or written data in order to describe and quantify specific phenomena" (Krippendorf, 2018). Content analysis enables examination of both explicit content (e.g., clearly stated transition services) and latent content (e.g., underlying quality indicators).

To promote the depth, validity, results triangulation, and comprehensiveness of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted.

While content analysis captures what is formally documented in ITPs, semi-structured interviews delve into how and why teachers develop these plans, offering contextual insights that cannot be captured through documents alone. It also enabled exploration of the decision-making processes, challenges, and reasoning that influence how teachers develop comprehensive transition plans.

Data collection tools:

The main objective of the content analysis was to examine whether ITPs, reflected best practices for postsecondary transition for students with LD. An instrument was developed to guide the content analysis of ITPs. The instrument functioned as a guide, including key components essential to ITPs. These components were identified based on evidence-based practices in secondary transition and the Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 (Kohler et al., 2016). Further, the guide aligned with the manual of transition planning for SETs of students with LD, which was disseminated by MoE. The manual reflects best practices in transition planning. These components include appropriate postsecondary education goals, measurable annual goals and objectives, and a description of age-appropriate transition assessment results

that assess students' academic, vocational, self-determination, social, and study skills. Additionally, ITPs should include a description of transition services geared toward the university, including a minimum of two career-interest exploration activities and a course of study supporting students' enrollment. Accommodations support students' access to general education instruction and assessment, and interagency collaboration, specifically universities' disability support centers (DSC). The ITPs content analysis guide shown in Tabel 1 below.

Table (1)
ITPs content analysis guide

Component	Description
1.Date of preparing the transition plan	The transition plan was initiated once the student reached secondary school.
2. A transition goal targeting the skills necessary for success in higher education	A measurable transition goal.
3. Annual goals	The plan includes annual goals that support the student in achieving the transition goals related to higher education.
4.Short-term objectives	The plan includes short-term objectives derived from and aligned with the annual

	goals, supporting the student in achieving the transition goals for higher education.
5. Results of the transition assessment	Results of the transition assessment section, including academic skills (reading, writing, mathematics, technical skills), career interests, self-determination skills, social skills, and study skills. Assessment methods must be age-appropriate. The section indicates that information was obtained from at least two documented sources (one of which included student participation).
6. Transition services (related to higher education): Exploring Career Preferences	Description of services included a coordinated set of activities that support the student in achieving the transition to higher education. The plan must mention at least two activities. The plan includes activities that support implementing vocational education to help students identify their career orientations (with at least two activities supporting vocational education).
7. Course of Study	The plan includes a plan of study with courses that support the student's admission to higher education
8. General Education Classroom accommodations	Inclusion of necessary educational practices and academic accommodations tailored to the needs of secondary school students, supporting their access to the general curriculum and performance on assessments.
9. Involvement of external entities	Involvement of representatives from university disability support centers, explicitly indicated in the transition plan.

Semi-structured Interviews. Following the content analysis of ITPs, semi-structured interviews were conducted online with eight SETs. The interview questions were designed to explore how SETs prepare students with LD for postsecondary education, focusing on their understanding of transition planning, key services, family and university involvement, and the challenges they face. The protocol comprised open-ended six main questions, supplemented by probes to elicit clarification and detail. To ensure that the interview questions align sufficiently with study objectives, appropriateness, and the comprehensiveness of the interview protocol, it was reviewed by expert faculty members in secondary transition for SWDs

Procedures and Participants

Upon the receipt of the Institutional Review Board (Number 23-0566), participants' recruitment followed specific steps. First, the deanship of scientific research to which the researcher is affiliated contacted the MoE research officials formally to distribute the study recruitment letter. The letter included the study objectives, data collection methods, voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality measures. After I received the contact information of the education offices in Riyadh, I contacted two special education supervisors to support the data collection process. Twelve ITPs were received to help in the content analysis part of the study. After analyzing the ITPs, a recruitment link was created to recruit potential SETs from these education offices to participate in the interviews. Eight SETs were recruited and interviewed; their demographic information is shown in Table (2).

Table (2)

Participants' demographic characteristics in semi-structured interviews.

Name	Years of Experience
Nadia	6 years
Rawan	12 years
Farah	6 years
Shatha	5 years
Basmah	5 years
Alhanoof	9 years
Khothar	9 years
Sarah	6 years

Data Analysis:

Both inductive and deductive approaches were employed to address the research questions and guide coding and theme development. Initially, a deductive approach was applied, identifying preliminary themes from the interview questions. Subsequently, an inductive analysis was undertaken to allow additional themes to emerge naturally from the data, capturing meaningful, recurrent ideas and statements evident in the interview transcripts. For the thematic analysis, a six-phase framework, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to guide the data analysis process. This method is particularly effective for examining SETs perspectives about their own practices in preparing their students to transition to universities. To facilitate the data analysis process, all interviews were audio-recorded, and subsequently transcribed verbatim, and field notes were used.

First, I immersed myself in the data by reading and rereading transcripts, audio records, and notes to familiarize myself with the data and identify initial ideas and recurring meanings. Second, labeling and highlighting recurring

codes were identified in the dataset in relevance to the research questions. After identifying codes, they were grouped into broader themes, which were then reviewed to ensure their representation in the dataset. Then, each theme was refined and labeled to capture its essence and later detailed in the results section. Finally, a comprehensive evaluation was carried out to examine the narrative structure of each theme and its relationship to the overarching narrative of the dataset. This process ensured that the thematic narratives collectively addressed the study's research questions, after which the final analytical report was produced.

To address the risk of social desirability bias due to the self-report nature of the semi-structured interviews, several strategies were utilized based on (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). These included open-ended non-evaluative interview questions, reassurance of identity and data confidentiality, and rapport building. Further, credibility and transferability of the study were ensured through member check, thick description and triangulation. Interviews transcriptions were sent back to participants to ensure accurate capture of their statements. Additionally, thick description was used by providing direct quotes, using participants exact words, and detailed description of the study context and participants. Utilizing thick description would help in making connections and data transferability (Creswell, 2013).

Results:

Two primary qualitative data collection methods were used to answer research questions. First, twelve ITPs were analyzed using a guide I developed based on the transition-IEP planning literature and the transition taxonomy. Consecutively, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted to triangulate data derived from transition-IEP analysis. Results of both data collection methods are elaborated in the sections below.

Content Analysis. The ITPs were selected from one school district that had similar supervision and guidelines. However, discrepancies were noticed during the analysis process; these discrepancies were in how detailed and comprehensive their ITPs were. The major difference was the template that SETs used to document their students' ITPs, which guides them on what type of information they need to collect and therefore document. Most of the ITPs lacked the exact date in which transition planning started, only half of the reviewed ITPs included the data the SETs started to plan for their students' transition. However, these six ITPs were not consistent in the students' age in which the SETs started transition planning; the students' age ranged from 16 to 19 years old. In reviewing whether SETs addressed a transition goal targeting the skills necessary for success in universities, only two out of 12 failed to document this goal. For the 10 ITPs that addressed this pivotal aspect

they even varied; IEP-3 to IEP-6 (shown in Table (3)) had generic transition goal that clearly addressed the students' goal to enroll in college, however, they were the same goal for the six students. Goals were written with no clear tailor to each student's needs. On the other hand, the transition goal in IEP-7 to IEP-12 noticeably developed the transition goal based on each student's needs and desires. For example, one transition goal was (After graduating from high school, Reemas will study one of the humanities majors at a public university). In contrast, another transition goal was (After graduating from high school, Reemas will major in digital design at a public university). The first transition goal lacked specification of the major that the student intended to enroll in, whereas the second transition goal specifically mentioned the major the student desired.

As shown in Table (3), annual goals were documented in only half of the ITPs where the other half did not include annual goals. In IEP-7 to IEP-12, the annual goals were mainly similar which no specification to the students' needs. All ITPs failed to document short-term objectives. The analysis aimed to portray whether transition ITPs include results of the transition assessment; specifically, I looked at whether SETs reported results of students' academic skills (reading, writing, mathematics, technical skills), career interests, self-determination skills, social skills, and study skills. Also, if their assessment tools were age-appropriate. A minimum of two documented sources (one of which included student participation) was required. The results showed that all ITPs lacked assessment results based on this component description shown in the guide Table (1). For IEP-3 to IEP-6, the SETs described the students' current level of performance in academic and social domains and identified students' skills without linking it to assessment results. For IEP-7 to IEP-12, SETs reported that they conducted formal and informal assessments, however, they failed to report the results and interpretation of these assessments. They reported the students' current level of performance in four distinct domains (skills, academic, social, and psychological). In these domains a list of the students' specific levels of performance was documented (e.g. interests in technology and digital design, low academic level in reading and writing, low communication skills, and fluctuating student motivation).

Furthermore, the analysis looked at type of transition services that specifically geared towards transition to universities. Results revealed that ten ITPs included a section of transition services provided for students with LD. These services included teaching students study skills through strategic learning, training on universities' acceptance requirements (e.g. the General Aptitude Test and the Standard Achievement Admission Test), university preparation (orientation to differences in educational environments and

accommodations in school and university), and choosing the appropriate major. None of the ITPs reported any course of study. Results showed that 11 ITPs included an accommodation section in general education classrooms for their students; only one IEP lacked this information. These accommodations included accommodations in assessments (e.g., reading test questions, utilizing technology in performing assignments) and instructional accommodations (e.g., peer buddy, segmenting content). The results also revealed that none of the ITPs included external entities involved in the transition plans.

Table (3)
Results of ITPs Analysis

Component	ITP-1	ITP-2	ITP-3	ITP-4	ITP-5	ITP-6	ITP-7	ITP-8	ITP-9	ITP-10	ITP-11	ITP-12
Date of preparing the transition plan	X	X	X	X	X	X	√	√	√	√	√	√
A transition goal targeting the skills necessary for success in higher education	X	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Annual goals	X	X	X	X	X	X	√	√	√	√	√	√
Short-term objectives	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Results of the transition assessment	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Transition services related to higher education	X	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Course of Study	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
General Education Classroom accommodations	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Involvement of external entities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Semi-structured Interviews. Eight SETs engaged in semi-structured interviews that followed the ITPs analysis process. The interviews aimed to delve into SETs' experiences and practices in preparing their students with LD for university. Moreover, I explored SETs' perceptions around transition planning and practices implementing transition services to prepare their students. Five main themes emerged from the data: transition planning

(subtheme Assessment), postsecondary education preparation, family involvement, interagency collaboration, and challenges.

Theme (1): transition planning

It is important to note that interviewed SETs differed in their experiences with transition planning, reflecting their work with high school students with LD, as shown in Table (1). Therefore, their perceptions varied in depth and knowledge of transition planning. All SETs reported joining high schools after working for several years at elementary schools without prior professional training, secondary students with LD or transition planning. Therefore, they shared that they lacked essential support and guidance to aid them in developing transition plans. Nadia explained, "Honestly, when it comes to transition plans, we had no idea about them. We used to see them mentioned in our plans, but they were never actually implemented. You know? Until last year, the supervisor met with us and told us that we must start preparing transition plans. We held just one meeting,... Of course, none of us had actually implemented a transition plan after that meeting. The [supervisor] just said, 'I advise you to start making them.' So we said, okay, but how? Who's going to teach us? Honestly, our work is all about self-learning... you know? Just personal efforts so far. No one has really trained us on what a transition plan is — how to teach it, or how to create it. Farah also echoed Nadia when she shared her frustration on how to develop transition plans, "So we were told to prepare transition plans but how? [the supervisor] said she'd send us some templates. So now, that's how we're working on our transition plans. I have two or three templates that [the supervisor] sent us, and we're using those as a reference". Rawan explained that she relies mainly on templates distributed by her supervisor to develop ITPs, "I take a student, ask her a few questions, basically the same points listed in the ready-made plans we have, and I try to replicate them. This year, as I told you, I worked with my third-year high school students; we looked at the existing transition plans and tried to ask the students the same questions and make a similar plan. There isn't any official form or standard set of questions, you know? It's just individual efforts, we look at sample transition plans and try to follow the same pattern". SETs' reflection underscores that the institutional shift toward transition planning has not yet been matched with adequate professional development, leaving them to rely on borrowed templates or personal judgment.

Furthermore, SETs' narratives reveal that, while official directives now call for the development of transition plans, their implementation remains uneven, often dependent on individual teacher initiative and creativity rather than on systematic institutional support. Most SETs indicated that they were

not required to develop transition plans until last year. Multiple SETs reported that, in the previous academic year, there was a heightened institutional emphasis on developing transition plans following the issuance of a new regulation exempting students with LD from the national aptitude and achievement tests. They explained that this policy change prompted schools to prioritize and implement transition planning more systematically. Moreover, SETs indicated that before that, they were only required to develop ITPs with no attention to the students' postsecondary goals. As Basmah stated, "Before that, no one cared about it. They'd just tell you to develop ITPs, close the student's file, and hand it to her. If she wanted to apply to a university, she'd only take her IEP with her, but now, no, they say you must ensure she has a transition plan. You create it for her, upload it to the Noor system, and also give her a copy to take when she applies to other schools, so she goes with her transition plan".

To dig even deeper into SETs' own understanding of transition planning, data revealed that almost all SETs, except one, view transition plans as a bridge document that helps their students transition to the second level. Findings showed that SETs are aware that the transition plan is prepared solely for the student's transition, meaning it is not developed until the end of high school and provided to the student to use it in her next stage after graduation. The plans were intended as evidence that the student has received LD services, and also include personal information about the student, such as her strengths and weaknesses, and the teachers' recommendations. As Rawan explained, "I'm not sure what your perception of transition plans is, but for us, it's just a single sheet of paper that we fill out and hand to the student in her final year of high school. At the end of Grade 12, we complete it so that when she goes to a university or elsewhere, she has this document with her. It provides an overview of the student from all aspects, academic, social, and psychological".

Only two SETs, who worked together at the same school, had a more precise understanding of transition planning and its services than other SETs in the study. They used detailed ITPs and shared, helped, and consulted each other when working with their students. Shatha and Alhanoof adopted a holistic approach that addresses all transition goals (postsecondary education, employment, and independent living) and integrates them into their students' individualized transition plans. Shatha, for instance, explained how she deliberately divided her students' programs into interconnected domains: "We designate the first semester for university, the second for vocational, and the third for independence... the three: independence, university, and vocational are interconnected." They further explained that their focus in providing

academic services for students with LD was primarily functional rather than textbook-driven. Shatha further noted that she prioritized essential skills, such as spelling, rather than following the *My Language* textbook as some colleagues do. She questioned the educational value of such instructional practices, emphasizing instead the importance of preparing students for real-life transitions. Upon graduation, students may pursue employment, higher education, or family life; therefore, the instructional focus should align with these potential pathways. On the other hand, SETs did not overlook the importance of developing their students' literacy skills, as Alhanoof stated, "spelling skills are important, so I include them in the academic transition goals. For independence, how can the student become self-reliant? By being able to read and write, by going to the supermarket and knowing how to get what she needs. Right? So, what we do is take all the elements from the old ITPs and reframe them within the structure of the transition services plan.

Subtheme: transition assessment. One subtheme emerged from the main theme (transition planning), as all SETs were solicited to elaborate on how they identify their students' desires to pursue postsecondary education. Most SETs reported lacking clear guidance and instruction for developing transition plans and instead relying on their own judgment and understanding. However, when asked to identify assessment tools used to help them identify their students' transition goals, all SETs indicated that they do not follow any official, formal, or informal assessment when developing transition plans. Instead, the process is based mainly on their own efforts and professional judgment. Teachers rely on existing sample transition plans as informal references and similarly model their own plans, adapting them to their understanding and available resources. When they were asked to specifically explain how they identify students' desires, preferences, and interests, they clearly emphasized that it all starts with the students themselves. Nadia stated, "Honestly, I don't have one, it's just a personal interview. I talk with the student informally and get to know her that way. I also meet her mother to obtain her perspective. And, as I mentioned before, we look at the older transition plans and try to work from them — we basically follow the same points that are already there. But as for structured questions and such, I really wish there were something official in place; honestly, that would make things much easier for us." While most SETs shared general statements, others were more specific, such as Rawan, "...I always start by asking her questions like: What do you enjoy? What are your interests? Which subjects do you like or dislike? When you have free time at home, what do you usually do, besides checking your phone or watching TV?By the end of the first year of high school, I always have a clear sense of each student's interests and future

direction based on our discussions. It's almost impossible for a school year to end without me knowing that". On the other hand, most SETs stated that few students could clearly identify their future directions, making it difficult for them to lay a foundation for their students' transition plans.

As SETs shared their approaches and tools they used to know their students' interests, desires, and preferences, others saw themselves not only as planners but also as facilitators of students' agency in shaping their educational futures. Alhanoof, for example, stressed the importance of centering the student's voice in the process. She ensured that her role was to guide students based on their own aspirations rather than imposing goals upon them: "I don't direct her because she already knows what she wants... one of my students came with a clear goal to study graphic design, so I supported her on that path." Others shared that their roles were to position their students to succeed in multiple pathways after high school. Rawan emphasized tailoring the plans to each student's developmental stage and personal aspirations, recognizing that goals are dynamic: "Every year the plan might change. The student matures, gains experiences, and expands her horizons."

Theme (2): Postsecondary education preparation.

SETs framed postsecondary preparation as an active process of equipping students with both academic strategies and realistic expectations about postsecondary education. Their accounts reveal a dual focus: on one hand, building the practical skills students would need to navigate university study, and on the other, guiding them toward informed decisions about future specializations and careers. This theme illustrates how SETs draw on both formal resources and their own professional judgment to prepare students with LD for the academic, social, and structural demands of university life.

Several SETs described efforts to integrate explicit training in study skills, time management, and strategic learning into the high school curriculum, recognizing these as essential for success in university. Alhanoof and Shatha highlighted their deliberate emphasis on transferable skills, noting: "We took the most important things that will help in university, such as concept maps, test-taking skills, developing study schedules, note-taking, and time management. These are not theoretical; they are practical, and they will really benefit them in university." These statements underscore how SETs consciously adapted their instructional focus from high school-level remediation toward forward-looking competencies that would ease students' transition to postsecondary education.

Preparing students also meant demystifying the university environment and its expectations. SETs often contrast the supports available in high school with the greater independence required at university. As Shatha explained,

“Here in school we give them extra time, summaries; maybe in university they won’t. We show them how assignments are presented, how exams are taken, so they know what to expect”. Further, many SETs shared their experiences with the high expectations some of their students have. Rawan, for example, described her approach to engaging students in conversations about their preferred academic specialization. She explained that she guides these discussions by referencing students’ performance in specific subjects, such as mathematics and English, and explains to them that they received accommodations that helped them navigate the demands of these courses, which may not be available at the college level. She stressed that these practices help students make informed choices. Other SETs shared that they use school activities as training opportunities to strengthen students’ skills. As Alhanoof stated, “I encourage students to take on tasks in areas where they perceive themselves as talented. For instance, during events such as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and other similar occasions, I assign tasks that align with each student’s interests. For example, I have a student who is socially engaged and enjoys interacting with others—I believe she would be well-suited for fields such as public relations or positions that require social interaction. She likes to move around, distribute materials, communicate with other girls, and coordinate activities, so I try to assign her tasks that fit those strengths...I consider each student’s tendencies and do my best to support and nurture their individual interests”.

Moreover, Nadia described preparing students psychologically by encouraging self-reliance early on: “From second or third secondary, I tell her: you have to depend on yourself... in university you might not find anyone to help you, not your mother, not your teacher. You will have to look for the professor, for your assignments, for everything.” Other SETs reported that their work with their students goes beyond skill development, but also about shifting students’ sense of responsibility for their own learning. Career guidance was another central element of SETs’ preparation efforts. Teachers invested considerable time helping students match their aspirations with realistic opportunities, taking into account both admission requirements and personal strengths. Alhanoof described these conversations as highly individualized: “A student may say she wants to study medicine, but I look at her English and math grades. If they don’t align, we discuss alternatives. If I see she’s strong in tourism and events, I guide her there.” In this way, teachers positioned themselves as mediators between students’ ambitions and the structural realities of higher education, balancing encouragement with honest assessment.

The narratives also revealed how SETs sought to prepare students for the broader social and institutional culture of the university. All SETs shared their frustration about restricting some majors for SWDs at the university level. They explained that these restrictions on their students limit their work and the support provided to students with LD. To account for this limitation, they emphasized the importance of flexibility in career planning, encouraging students to keep multiple options open: Khothar shared, “I intentionally avoid giving students absolute assurances about admission into specific university programs. Instead, I encourage them to consider multiple options to avoid disappointment if their first choice is unavailable”. She further emphasized the importance of flexibility and explained that students can later pursue complementary courses or certifications to align their careers with their interests, even if their academic major differs. There is a consensus regarding the importance of managing students’ expectations and promoting adaptability in educational and career planning.

Beyond academic skills, Khothar stressed exposing students to the stricter rules and less personalized environment of higher education: “In school, if she says she is sick, we postpone the exam. In university, no—there are rules, deadlines, and she has to commit.” These practices aimed to recalibrate students’ expectations from the flexibility of high school to the rigid systems of universities.

Theme (3): Family Involvement.

This theme covers SET’s statement regarding how families engage in the transition planning process for their daughters. Due to cultural aspects, families here mainly refer to mothers. Findings reveal varied perspectives of SETs regarding families’ involvement in their daughter’s transition planning in general and in pursuing postsecondary education in particular. Some SETs expressed positive views of families’ participation in transition planning, while others did not. However, there is consensus among SETs that families’ influence shapes their daughters’ decisions to attend university or consider it a transition option. Nadia stated, “I have not faced any difficulties in this regard. The parents I work with are extremely cooperative and maintain almost daily communication, whether through WhatsApp, phone calls, or in-person visits. Whenever I request a meeting, they respond promptly and attend without hesitation. I genuinely have not encountered any challenges with parents; they are consistently supportive, frequently visit the school, and often inquire about their daughters’ progress even without being prompted”. This statement was echoed by other SETs, who noted that mothers actively contribute by providing detailed insights about their daughters’ personalities and strengths when completing the parent section of the transition plan. Fahda

described one example of a mother who, despite being a stay-home mother, provided a thoughtful summary of her daughter's traits, reflecting strong parental engagement and collaboration.

On the other hand, some SETs shared their frustration in getting mothers on board; they attribute this to the low socioeconomic status of families, and they face challenges in reaching out to families. Shatha, Rawan, and Alhanoof noted that she usually contacts the parents to discuss transition plans and student's postsecondary goals and how they could support their daughters. They stated that some mothers are responsive and engage in meaningful dialogue, while others do not reply or show limited involvement; it varies from one family to another. They all attribute this to the neighborhood where they work, which has relatively low levels of awareness and educational engagement. Despite this, Alhanoof stated, "it would be unfair to generalize, as there are also many mothers who are remarkably supportive and actively involved in their daughters' education, while others remain largely uninvolved.

Theme (4): Interagency Collaboration.

This theme reflects SETs practices to engage external entities, especially DSC at universities in their students' transition planning. When SETs were asked to share their practices and efforts to engage universities' DSC into students' transition planning, they all stated that partnerships do not exist between them and DSCs. They stated that partnerships between schools and postsecondary institutions are hindered by procedural rigidity and a lack of formal agreements. Universities prioritize ministry-level coordination, excluding teachers and schools from direct engagement. Shatha for example shared her experiences in reaching out to enroll her students to university diploma, "I really tried and worked hard and communicated directly with the people responsible for managing the diploma programs, I have the letters and all the documents. I pushed for the diplomas to be offered for free. I told them, "I have students who cannot afford to pay; their financial situation is very difficult".

SETs identified barriers that prevent them from engaging with DSCs; they agree that bureaucratic obstacles prevent them from forming meaningful partnerships with DSCs. As Alhanoof explained, "There's no [partnerships], and there's nothing at all that authorizes me to do anything. I told you that I really tried. Around three years ago, right after COVID, I contacted a salon near the school... the salon owner was very kind and said she had no problem at all with the girls coming during school hours... and I even offered to use my own car to take them. But of course, it didn't happen, and I don't blame the principal. It's just that the matter required paperwork, approvals, and

official authorization allowing us to go out”. Other SETs express uncertainty about interagency roles, responsibilities, available resources, universities’ regulations, admission requirements, majors, and even the disability accommodations offered to students with disabilities. They also shared that the lack of structured communication channels leads to inconsistent transition support and reliance on assumptions.

On the other hand, some SETs played an intermediary role, leveraging personal networks (e.g., local associations and businesses) to bridge the partnership gap. They shared their efforts to connect with vocational centers and community organizations to support their students’ transitions in various areas, including vocational training.

Theme (5): Challenges.

SETs were asked to describe any challenges they encountered in their work on transition planning and instructional practices to prepare their students for universities. They shared different perspectives that reflected their various experiences. However, they portrayed transition services as a process profoundly shaped by structural, cultural, and pedagogical obstacles. They described these obstacles as not isolated obstacles; they functioned as interconnected pressures that constrained their capacity to prepare students with LD for university life. Their accounts showed how they constantly navigated between what they aimed to teach, what institutions allowed, and the realities of students’ lives.

A prevalent challenge SETs reported throughout the interviews was the lack of formal assessment tools, transition templates, and clear guidance from their supervisors. They repeatedly emphasized that they relied on personal effort rather than standardized procedures. As Rawan explained, “I mean, yes, we really don’t have anything official. We don’t have standardized forms that we can use from the beginning of the school year. For example, before we start the transition plan, we are supposed to assess the student but we don’t have assessments. Sometimes there’s something like a pre-test... but generally, we have nothing... We don’t have any official tools related to the transition plan except for the form we fill out at the end of the year for the student to take with her.. Everything is based on personal effort. You just do your best because you don’t want your students to leave school without direction, you do what you can, but that doesn’t necessarily mean your approach is correct”. Other SETs highlighted a further complication: their supervisors, they felt, lacked the experience and pedagogical grounding necessary to provide meaningful guidance. This gap left teachers navigating transition preparation largely on their own, often second-guessing whether their practices were effective or aligned with appropriate standards.

Shatha expressed her frustration that large-scale policy directives expected SETs to implement transition services without providing practical tools: “.... Give me a curriculum, give me a method, a guide, realistic worksheets so I can actually apply them. You can’t just come from some office at the Ministry or a university and say ‘implement this.’ How am I supposed to implement it? Give me high-quality instructional materials. Give me a rubric. Tell me how to assess a student’s progress. Provide me with a curriculum-based measure. Give me the tools so I can apply this”. Her statement underscores how teachers experience reform: not as a supportive system but as an added burden layered onto already heavy workloads.

A related challenge that emerged was the lack of training and insufficient preparation to teach at the secondary level, particularly amid evolving curricula and expectations. SETs described their work as primarily self-taught. SETs repeatedly reported a lack of formal preparation and standardized resources to support transition planning. They explained that they had not received adequate training during their university studies to teach at the intermediate or secondary levels, and that professional development opportunities specific to transition services were largely absent. As a result, they relied on personal judgment and existing transition plan samples, even though they were unsure whether these practices were correct or aligned with official expectations. SETs expressed a strong need for structured training, clear guidelines, and official tools to implement transition plans consistently and with greater confidence.

Moreover, SETs illustrate how they envision transition preparation but are structurally constrained by policy and regulation. They identified issues with administrative restrictions and limited authority that hinder their efforts to expose students to meaningful transition experiences. For instance, opportunities such as campus visits, skill-building workshops, or community partnerships were limited due to regulations or administrative procedures. Alhanoof explained her situation when she aimed to arrange a college visit for her students, “For example, if I had the authority, I could coordinate with someone who works at a university and tell her that I want to bring the girls for a tour. Not necessarily to attend lectures or meet professors, but just to see the campus and experience the environment, so that they don’t arrive on the first day completely lost. They would have a sense of what the university looks like and what to expect...It’s similar to how kindergarten students are taken at the end of the year to see the first-grade classrooms in private schools, so they aren’t surprised by the transition because KG classrooms are different from elementary ones. I wish we had that same kind of authority, so I could take my students to a university, maybe they could attend workshops or

lectures—universities always have lectures aimed at students. If I had that authority, I could coordinate with a specific department, arrange a visit, and take the girls to attend a session so they could experience the atmosphere of a lecture hall. Nadia also explained her frustration to coordinate training opportunities such as, actual skill-based training, “A student with strong computer skills could go twice or three times a week to a computer institute for hands-on training.”

On the other hand, SETs highly stressed the absence of academic rigor and meaningful challenge within classroom practices and how it affected their students’ opportunities to develop needed skills for college success. Some expressed frustration with general education teachers who avoid giving students challenging tasks that elevate their abilities. As Rawan described, “some teachers do not provide students with challenging learning opportunities and instead ask them to complete only the easiest tasks, something SETs firmly oppose”. This, she noted, creates a barrier for students and prevents them from developing the essential skills for success in university education. In my interpretation, this concern speaks to an underlying tension.

Another system-related challenge that some SETs shared was the limited communication channels between schools, university departments, and supervisory bodies. SETs felt disconnected from those who could provide guidance or information about available programs. Most SETs stated that their lack of knowledge about the majors offered to students with LD at universities would limit their college-readiness practices. Furthermore, they portray that this lack of communication makes transition planning less strategic; without clarity about the degree programs open to students with LD, SETs struggled to guide them effectively. As Rawan noted, “I really wish there were communication specifically between special education and the universities—so they could tell us: these are the majors open for students with LD, these specific departments are accessible. That way, from the first year of high school, we would know what options are available. I don’t need a list of every major in the world I just need clarity. ‘You are a student with LD, you qualify for exemption, and here are the specific majors available to you.’ Then I can help the student see where she fits”.

Regarding students, SETs shared their perspectives on how social forces shape students’ aspirations and the value placed on postsecondary education. They explained that some of their students lack essential study skills and motivation to choose university as a secondary option after high school graduation. Further, they stated that cultural expectations around gender, marriage, and disabilities play a critical role in students’ choices. Shatha

shared her disappointment about the current cohort of students, “I’m honestly very frustrated with this high school cohort. I’m embarrassed by their level. I really think some of these students should not be going to university. I’ll be frank with you, some of the girls put in no effort at all. Their absenteeism is high... you talk to them and it’s like nothing registers. You’re in one world and they’re in another”. Nadia tried to explain noting that some families prioritize early marriage over education or even conceal disability status to avoid stigma, “The issue, in my view, comes from their cultural upbringing. For some of them, university simply isn’t a priority. Their goal is to get married—that is the main ambition they’ve been raised with...I even have an excellent student whom I really want to enroll in the exemption program, but her father refuses. He won’t allow her to join the exemption, and he doesn’t want anyone to say that his daughter has a disability.” Other SETs had different explanations about their students’ preference to pursue postsecondary education. They were concerned about students’ home responsibilities and socioeconomic constraints, which teachers felt significantly influenced readiness for postsecondary education. Alhanoof explained that many of her students carry adult-like responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, or caring for siblings, leaving little time or energy to prioritize academic development. As she put it, “their social circumstances add to the challenge. Some girls carry responsibilities that usually fall on mothers responsible for cooking, cleaning, and other household duties. So when she goes home, that’s her reality. For her and her family, schoolwork is not a priority”.

Discussion:

This study aimed to investigate how SETs in secondary special education programs implement transition services to prepare students with LD for universities. Specifically, the study employed a case study qualitative approach, used content analysis to examine 12 ITPs, and conducted semi-structured interviews with eight SETs to explore their perspectives on implementing transition services to prepare their students with LD for university. Five main themes emerged from these interviews, as illustrated in the results section above.

One of the main findings in analyzing transition plans was that most ITPs lacked the exact starting date of implementing the transition plans. This was triangulated and deliberately explained by SETs in the interviews that they develop transition plans for students only in their final year of high school, so that they can be handed to the student when she moves on to university or employment and serves as evidence that the students received the LD program during high school. Obviously, SETs do not use transition plans as a

roadmap in their work. This finding harmonizes and supports Almalki et al. (2021), who found that transition services for SWDs begin in their final year of schooling, Grade 12, when the student is around 18 years old. Further, in an Almalki (2025) study that analyzed the status and challenges of transition programs for SWDs in Saudi schools, he claimed that one of the most significant issues affecting the success of the transition process is the delay in providing transition support. Consequently, depriving SWDs of the opportunity to fully benefit from such services during critical periods of their schooling heightens pressure and confusion for students and their families at a sensitive stage in their lives Almalki (2025). Although this issue was not widely reported in the literature, it is considered pivotal in the Saudi context because it affects how students are supported during high school and raises questions about the sufficiency of transition services provided to students with LD.

Moreover, results show that transition goals were overly generic and not individualized to address the specific needs of students with LD. This finding implies that generic transition goals stem from SETs' limited assessment practices, as reflected in SETs' own statements. This is attributed to the insufficiency of formal and informal assessment tools to address critical skills supporting students' transition and annual goals, as reported in SETs' interviews. Further, it underscores that the institutional shift toward transition planning has not yet been matched by adequate materials and assessment tools, leaving teachers to rely on borrowed templates or personal judgment. This finding aligns substantially with many Saudi studies that found a lack of available formal and informal transition assessment tools in schools (Alnahdi & Alwadei, 2023; Alsalamah, 2023; Alkhateeb & Alotaibi, 2024). Transition assessment tools require further development and guidelines (Alsalamah, 2023). However, other studies (Alabdulwahab, 2024; Almalki & Alqahtani, 2021) found contrasting results. SETs in Alabdulwahab (2024) used age-appropriate formal or informal assessment tools to assess students' academic and social skills. In contrast, SETs in the current study rely on their own personal effort and judgment without structured or standardized procedures. This discrepancy suggests notable variability across SETs in the same district in how transition assessments are implemented. It implies that while some SETs may have access to tools, others continue to operate without adequate resources or support, reflecting the limitations of official guidance.

A key finding of the study is the instructional practices that SETs implement and document in their students' ITPsto prepare students with LD for postsecondary education. These practices include teaching study skills, test-taking strategies, time-management techniques, and strategic learning

approaches that promote access to the general education curriculum. This finding is consistent with Alabdulwahab (2024), who reported that SETs identified and used accommodations that meet students' needs in the general education classroom, taught students about their expected social skills as college students, and taught compensatory and instructional strategies, self-determination, and advocacy skills. In contrast, this finding is inconsistent with Binshafloot and Albattal (2019), who found that SETs did not provide students with opportunities to engage in courses that support career exploration, résumé development, time management, or examination preparation. Further, they failed to facilitate students' exploration of their own preferences, abilities, and interests, which also diverges from the current study's findings. Notably, SETs' reported practices across studies were diverse, which may be attributable to methodological variation, particularly in sampling procedures, data collection protocols, and evidence sources. Research relying on teachers' self-report often reflects normative or intended practices shaped by professional expectations, while observational and document-based approaches tend to uncover enacted practices embedded within institutional constraints, thereby offering a different and sometimes less idealized representation of SETs' practices. Further, the increase in professional development opportunities for SETs in transition planning and college-readiness instruction might explain the notable disparity. SETs in more recent studies may demonstrate greater awareness and competency than those in earlier research.

Family involvement:

Family involvement and expectations in transition programs have been documented in the literature as predictors of successful postsecondary education (Test et al., 2009; Mazzotti et al., 2016; Zeng et al., 2022). Family involvement is a critical factor impacting successful transition programs, which has been widely investigated by many Saudi researchers (e.g. Ain, 2025; Bagadood, 2022; Alnefaie & Alzahrani, 2024; Almalki et al., 2021) who found limited involvement by families in their children's transition planning. Inconsistently, this study found that families are mainly involved in their daughters' transition planning. However, these results reflect how SETs perceive family involvement; this might explain their different experiences with families. Some SETs encountered challenges in including families in transition planning. These parents were perceived as placing less emphasis on education beyond secondary school, leading to reduced participation in discussions about long-term transition goals. This reflects broader socio-cultural dynamics in Saudi Arabia, where families' educational values and aspirations may vary by economic stability, parental education levels, and

expectations regarding girls' roles in society. Additionally, parents from disadvantaged backgrounds may encounter challenging demands, including financial pressures and limited access to information, which can hinder their ability to engage actively in transition planning.

Interagency collaboration:

One of the key aspects of transition programs is interagency collaboration and the engagement of relevant external entities in transition planning. Across the Saudi literature, studies that examined interagency collaboration in transition services from SETs' perspectives consistently demonstrate that collaboration with external agencies remains an underdeveloped component of transition planning (Abu-Alghayth et al., 2023; Almalky & Alrasheed, 2023; Alzarhrani & Alaseeri, 2022). Study results revealed that not all SETs engage DSC in transition planning, nor do they have any contact to arrange university visits for their students. This aligns with the findings of Alabdulwahab (2024), which reported similar results and claimed that this lack of collaboration may hinder SETs' knowledge of majors offered to SWDs, admission requirements, university rules and structure, and the type of support provided to SWDs. However, it contradicts the findings of Aldossari and Alqahtani (2023), who found high level of collaboration exists between special education schools and higher education institutions. In this study, SETs clarified that despite their outreach efforts, they usually fail to obtain needed support. The implications of this gap are substantial and directly impact the effectiveness of transition efforts. First, the lack of collaboration limits SETs' access to critical information required to support informed postsecondary planning. Most SETs in this study lacked knowledge about university accommodations, available support services, relevant admission procedures, and eligibility requirements for students with LD. Not a single SET interviewed demonstrated complete or accurate awareness of the disability centers' functions or how students could access university support. Second, the absence of structured coordination reduces students' readiness to meet university entry requirements and hinders the continuity of services upon enrollment. Notably, all participating SETs were unaware of ongoing official collaborations between a university in the Central region and the MoE to facilitate school-to-university transitions. Although such initiatives are promising at the policy level, SETs reported that bureaucratic challenges and administrative obstacles within the MoE hinder the effective operationalization of these agreements in practice. Collectively, these findings highlight a persistent implementation gap; while national policies increasingly emphasize collaboration, schools remain disconnected from the postsecondary agencies responsible for delivering continued support, thereby

diminishing students' transition outcomes and restricting SETs' capacity to prepare them for university.

Insufficient training and the need for professional development programs to support SETs work in preparing their students for postsecondary education was a major challenge that SETs reported. This was echoed by other studies (e.g. Alzarhrani & Alaseeri, 2022, Alsalamah, 2023) that claim that SETs lacked the need for prior preparation during their studies and still needed professional training to support their efforts in transition programs.

Recommendations:

Study findings yield several practice and policy level recommendations for improving transition services for students with LD in Saudi high schools. For practice, there is a need to:

1. Develop targeted in-service professional development for SETs to build their capacity to implement high-quality transition services for students with LD in the following areas:
 - Systematic use of formal and informal transition assessment tools.
 - Development of individualized, assessment-based transition goals.
 - Instructional strategies that support access to general education curricula.
 - Self-determination, college awareness, and academic readiness.
 - Strategies to actively engage families in collaborative decision-making processes.
2. Adopt validated tools, issuing clear implementation guidelines, and ensuring sustained professional support for SETs.
3. Develop formal interagency coordination system, including communication and referral approaches between secondary schools and university DSCs, to ensure continuity of services and informed transition planning beyond high school.

Recommendations for policy include:

1. Development a national level framework that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in transition services, including schools, universities, and supervisory bodies.
2. Align policy directives with practical implementation guidelines that support school-level execution of transition services to eliminate bureaucratic barriers.
3. Adopt validated Arabic transition assessment tools and integrate accountability and monitoring procedures to monitor quality implementation and outcomes.

Future Directions:

This study employed qualitative case study approach and purposefully selected SETs and ITPs to gain deep exploration within a specific context.

The study gained its findings from only eight SETs and twelve ITPs, which limits its generalizability to the whole population of all LD programs in Saudi secondary schools. Nevertheless, its context-specific findings could guide future investigation in different contexts across Saudi regions.

Study findings suggest many future paths warrant investigation in transition services for students with LD in Saudi Arabia. First, there is a need for empirical investigations that examine the effectiveness of specific transition practices, particularly those related to college readiness, transition assessment, individualized goal-setting, and instructional strategies that promote self-determination and academic readiness. Longitudinal studies tracking students' postsecondary outcomes would provide valuable insights into how transition planning in high school translates into success in higher education. Second, the absence of structured interagency collaboration calls for urgent examination. Future research should explore models of cross-sector partnerships, including collaboration between schools, universities, and disability support centers, and identify factors that facilitate or impede such partnerships. Third, scholarly work is needed to develop and validate Arabic-language transition assessment tools and evaluate their implementation in diverse educational settings.

Finally, future studies should capture the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, including students, families, university disability specialists, and policymakers, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the transition ecosystem in Saudi Arabia. Such multi-perspective research would help inform national guidelines and strengthen the alignment between policy and school-level practice.

Conclusion:

There is an increasing need to elevate students with LD's readiness for postsecondary education, as it bridges students' pursuit of independence and financial security. College presents a challenge for students with LD, as it is an academically demanding environment that magnifies their learning challenges. Based on study findings, current transition practices require a substantial reconceptualization and system-level reform. A fundamental shift is needed from individualized, isolated efforts toward a coherent, data-driven, and collaborative transition framework grounded in validated assessment tools, structured partnerships, and multi-year planning. Without this paradigm shift, transition programs will continue to fall short of preparing students with LD for successful transition to postsecondary education. Special focus should be placed on improving SETs' capabilities to implement transition programs effectively, providing SETs with unified instructional materials and assessment tools, and developing a meaningful system for school-university

collaboration. Besides, meaningful and effective collaboration between schools and DSC at universities is significant to ensure continuity of services as students move from secondary to postsecondary contexts.

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