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Beyond Individual Deficits: Teachers' Perspectives on the Post-School Transition of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Abstract

Background

The transition from school to adulthood represents a critical developmental period for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). During this process, individuals with ASD often encounter challenges related to independent living, social participation, employment, and access to support services. Although previous studies have examined post-school outcomes from the perspectives of families, individuals with ASD, and service providers, relatively little is known about how teachers conceptualize post-school transition processes, particularly within the Turkish context. Understanding teachers' perspectives is important because educators play a central role in preparing students with ASD for adult life and facilitating transition-related supports.

Methods

This study employed a basic qualitative research design. Participants consisted of 42 teachers and educational professionals working with individuals with ASD in the Southeastern Anatolia Region of Türkiye. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Trustworthiness was enhanced through peer debriefing, researcher reflexivity, audit trails, and independent coding procedures.

Results

The findings revealed that teachers perceived post-school transition as a multidimensional process involving challenges related to social participation, independent living, employment, family support, and institutional services. Participants emphasized that transition difficulties were not limited to individual skill deficits but were also associated with broader contextual factors, including societal acceptance, service accessibility, family involvement, and coordination among support systems. Teachers further highlighted the importance of independent living skills, vocational opportunities, social participation, family guidance, and sustainable support mechanisms in facilitating successful post-school transitions. In addition, participants reported a need for enhanced transition planning, professional development opportunities, and stronger school–family–community collaboration.

Conclusions

The findings suggest that teachers conceptualize post-school transition as an ecological and multidimensional process shaped by interactions among individual, familial, social, educational, and institutional factors. One of the study's key contributions is demonstrating that teachers view transition challenges not merely as individual deficits but also as issues related to the continuity and coordination

of support systems beyond school. Although the study does not test or develop a new theoretical model, the findings indicate that Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides a useful framework for interpreting post-school transition experiences. The study contributes teacher-based evidence from Türkiye to the international literature and offers implications for transition planning, professional development, and support services for individuals with ASD.

Introduction

The transition from school to adulthood represents one of the most critical turning points in the lives of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), making teachers' evaluations of this process particularly important. ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction, as well as restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). Individuals with ASD often experience difficulties in interpreting social cues, engaging in reciprocal communication, adapting to daily routines, making decisions, and utilizing executive functioning skills (Demetriou et al., 2021; van den Bergh et al., 2014). These challenges may create significant barriers during the transition to adulthood, particularly in relation to independent living, employment, and community participation. Difficulties in maintaining employment, achieving economic independence, managing daily living activities, establishing social relationships, and participating in community life have frequently been reported among adults with ASD (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009; Howlin et al., 2004; Shattuck et al., 2012; Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). Existing research further indicates that support needs related to community participation, independent living, and employment often persist into adulthood and that available support systems frequently fall short of addressing these needs effectively (Karabulut, 2024; Sarri & Syriopoulou-Delli, 2021; Sosnowy et al., 2018; Wehman et al., 2014).

Transitions between educational stages (e.g., from primary to secondary school) have been widely investigated in the international literature on ASD, and the pedagogical and environmental barriers associated with such transitions have been clearly documented (Stack, Symonds, & Kinsella, 2021). In contrast, the transition from formal schooling to adulthood has received comparatively less attention despite representing a critical life stage during which individuals leave school-based support systems and begin to navigate new social, occupational, and institutional environments. Successful participation in adult life for individuals with ASD is closely associated with access to individualized educational services, opportunities to develop independent living skills, pathways to economic independence, and meaningful employment opportunities. Research has demonstrated that individuals with ASD who receive life-skills instruction show greater success in employment-related transitions and that independent living skills contribute directly to employment outcomes (Zatz & Harrison, 2024).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the multidimensional nature of post-school transition processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Çelik, 2018). According to this perspective, successful adaptation to adult life cannot be explained solely by individual characteristics. Rather, post-school transition is shaped by interactions among multiple

interconnected systems, including the individual, family, school, teachers, community, and broader institutional structures. Consequently, transition outcomes should be understood within a broader ecological context that encompasses both personal and environmental factors.

Both international and national studies have identified teachers as key stakeholders in post-school transition planning. Their roles extend beyond academic instruction to include supporting independent living, facilitating community participation, collaborating with families, and contributing to transition service planning (Tohum Autism Foundation, 2025). Teachers' knowledge, competencies, and practical experiences related to transition planning have been shown to influence students' preparation for adulthood. International research suggests that clearly defining teachers' transition-related responsibilities, strengthening their practice-based skills, and promoting interdisciplinary collaboration can enhance post-school outcomes for students with ASD (Hagner et al., 2014; Morningstar et al., 2018; Test et al., 2009). Therefore, teachers are increasingly recognized as important contributors to students' preparation for independent living, social adaptation, and post-school goals.

Recent transition research has increasingly adopted holistic approaches that consider not only individual characteristics but also the broader social and institutional contexts surrounding individuals with disabilities. Studies conducted in Türkiye similarly indicate that teacher competencies, professional awareness, and the quality of educational practices are closely associated with educational outcomes for individuals with special needs (Başkonuş, 2024; Ocak et al., 2023). At the same time, teachers working in special education settings frequently encounter professional and structural challenges that may affect the delivery of educational services (Gönen, Kılıç, & Koçak, 2024). These findings suggest that teachers' experiences and perceptions constitute an important source of information for understanding post-school transition processes.

Increasing educators' knowledge and awareness regarding transition planning may facilitate the development of individualized transition plans and support more active family involvement in the process (Test et al., 2009). The literature indicates that strengthening teachers' theoretical knowledge and practical competencies related to transition planning contributes both to the quality of planning processes and to the systematic consideration of factors that facilitate successful adaptation to adult life. Accordingly, incorporating transition-related theoretical foundations, applied learning opportunities, and interagency collaboration into teacher education programs has been recommended as a means of improving preparation for adult life among individuals with ASD (Morningstar et al., 2018).

Importantly, educators involved in transition planning do not constitute a homogeneous professional group. Differences in educational background, professional training, institutional responsibilities, and professional perspectives may influence how transition-related needs and risks are perceived and prioritized. For example, special education teachers, school counselors, and other educational professionals may focus on different dimensions of the transition process. Examining these professional differences may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of teacher competencies and perspectives regarding post-school transition.

A review of the existing literature indicates that post-school transition has been examined primarily through parent reports (Bahçalı & Odluyurt, 2020; Canikli, 2022; Durhan, 2023; Oti-Boadi et al., 2020), student outcomes, or structural characteristics of service systems. Comparatively few studies have explored teachers' experiences and perceptions of post-school transition in a comprehensive manner. Furthermore, unlike many countries where transition planning is formally embedded within educational legislation, Türkiye lacks specific legal requirements regarding transition services and Individualized Transition Plans (ITPs). As a result, transition practices are often implemented through informal arrangements and the individual efforts of stakeholders rather than through systematic and legally mandated procedures. These structural limitations highlight the need for further research examining the experiences and perspectives of teachers who play a central role in supporting students during the transition from school to adulthood. Therefore, the present study aims to contribute to the literature by exploring teachers' perspectives on the post-school transition experiences of individuals with ASD.

Literature Review and Conceptual Background

The post-school transition of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has increasingly attracted attention from researchers, practitioners, and policymakers due to its implications for independent living, employment, social participation, and quality of life. Understanding this transition process requires consideration of both individual characteristics and the broader social, educational, familial, and institutional contexts in which individuals with ASD live. Accordingly, this section reviews the literature on post-school transition experiences, the role of teachers in transition planning and support, and the relevance of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory as a conceptual framework for understanding transition processes. The section concludes by identifying key gaps in the existing literature and outlining the purpose of the present study.

Post-School Transition of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

The transition from school to adulthood represents one of the most critical developmental periods in the lives of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). While educational services often provide structured support during childhood and adolescence, many of these supports become limited or unavailable once individuals leave formal schooling. As a result, the post-school period requires individuals with ASD to navigate increasingly complex social, occupational, and community environments while assuming greater levels of independence and responsibility (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009; Shattuck et al., 2012).

Post-school transition generally refers to the process through which individuals move from secondary education into adult roles, including employment, postsecondary education, independent living, and community participation (Test et al., 2009). Successful transition outcomes are commonly associated with meaningful employment, social inclusion, self-determination, independent living skills, and access to ongoing support services (Taylor & DaWalt, 2017; Wehman et al., 2014). For individuals with ASD,

however, achieving these outcomes may be particularly challenging due to persistent difficulties in social communication, adaptive functioning, and executive functioning skills (Demetriou et al., 2021; van den Bergh et al., 2014).

A growing body of research indicates that many adults with ASD experience lower rates of employment, reduced community participation, limited independent living opportunities, and ongoing dependence on family support compared with their neurotypical peers (Shattuck et al., 2012; Taylor & Seltzer, 2011; Wei et al., 2018). Studies have further demonstrated that difficulties encountered during the transition to adulthood are not limited to individual characteristics. Rather, transition outcomes are shaped by a complex interaction of personal, familial, educational, social, and institutional factors (Myers et al., 2022; Taylor & DaWalt, 2017). Access to transition planning, family involvement, community resources, vocational preparation, and support services have all been identified as important determinants of successful adult outcomes.

Although the transition experiences of individuals with ASD have received increasing attention in recent years, much of the existing literature has focused on educational outcomes, parental perspectives, service provision, or structural characteristics of support systems (Canikli, 2022; Oti-Boadi et al., 2020; Taylor & DaWalt, 2017). Consequently, there remains a need for research that examines how different stakeholders perceive and interpret transition-related challenges and support needs. Understanding these perspectives may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing post-school transition and inform efforts to improve transition planning and support services.

Teachers as Key Stakeholders in the Post-School Transition Process

Teachers are widely recognized as key stakeholders in supporting the transition of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) from school to adult life. Their role extends beyond academic instruction and includes preparing students for independent living, facilitating social participation, supporting vocational development, collaborating with families, and contributing to transition planning processes (Morningstar et al., 2018; Test et al., 2009). Because teachers interact with students throughout their educational experiences, they are often among the professionals most familiar with students' strengths, needs, and developmental progress. Consequently, they occupy a unique position in identifying potential barriers and supports related to post-school transition.

Research suggests that teachers' knowledge, competencies, and experiences significantly influence the quality of transition planning and the effectiveness of transition-related supports (Hagner et al., 2014; Morningstar et al., 2018). Educators who possess a clear understanding of transition services, vocational preparation, independent living skills, and family collaboration are generally better equipped to support students in preparing for adult life. Furthermore, studies have emphasized that interdisciplinary collaboration among teachers, families, counselors, service providers, and community agencies contributes to more successful transition outcomes (Test et al., 2009).

The literature also highlights the importance of teacher preparation and professional development in relation to transition services. Increasing educators' knowledge and awareness regarding post-school transition can facilitate the development of individualized transition plans, strengthen family involvement, and improve coordination among stakeholders (Morningstar et al., 2018). Accordingly, researchers have argued that teacher education programs should provide greater attention to transition planning, community-based instruction, interagency collaboration, and employment preparation for individuals with disabilities.

Importantly, educators involved in transition processes do not constitute a homogeneous professional group. Differences in professional training, institutional responsibilities, and daily practice may shape how transition-related needs and challenges are perceived. For example, special education teachers may focus more strongly on independent living skills, vocational readiness, and educational adaptations, whereas school counselors and psychologists may place greater emphasis on family adjustment, psychosocial well-being, and long-term life planning. These professional differences suggest that educators may interpret transition-related experiences through distinct yet complementary perspectives.

Despite the central role of teachers in transition planning and implementation, relatively limited research has examined how educators conceptualize post-school transition challenges and support needs, particularly in contexts where transition services are not systematically embedded within educational policies and practices. Exploring teachers' perspectives may therefore provide valuable insights into how transition processes are understood, experienced, and supported within specific educational and socio-cultural contexts.

Ecological Systems Theory and Post-School Transition

Understanding the post-school transition experiences of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) requires consideration of the multiple contexts in which individuals live and develop. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides a useful framework for examining how individual development is shaped through interactions between individuals and the social environments surrounding them (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). According to this perspective, developmental outcomes are influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by relationships, institutions, communities, and broader societal structures that operate at multiple ecological levels.

The theory conceptualizes human development through interconnected systems. The microsystem includes the immediate environments in which individuals directly interact, such as family members, teachers, peers, and school settings. The mesosystem refers to the relationships among these immediate environments, including interactions between families and schools. The exosystem encompasses settings that indirectly influence individuals, such as support services, employment opportunities, healthcare systems, and community resources. Finally, the macrosystem includes broader cultural values, social norms, policies, and legal frameworks that shape opportunities and constraints for individuals with disabilities (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

From an ecological perspective, post-school transition cannot be understood solely in terms of individual abilities or deficits. Rather, transition outcomes emerge through interactions among personal competencies, family support, educational experiences, community participation opportunities, institutional services, and broader societal conditions. Previous research has demonstrated that employment opportunities, access to transition services, family involvement, community inclusion, and policy support all contribute to the quality of post-school outcomes for individuals with ASD (Taylor & DaWalt, 2017; Wei et al., 2018; White et al., 2024). These findings suggest that successful transitions depend not only on individual preparation but also on the availability and coordination of support systems across multiple ecological levels.

In the context of the present study, Ecological Systems Theory is not employed as a theory to be tested or extended. Rather, it serves as a conceptual lens for interpreting how teachers understand the challenges and support needs associated with post-school transition. Given that teachers frequently interact with students, families, schools, and community stakeholders, their perspectives may provide valuable insights into how different ecological systems influence transition experiences. Accordingly, the theory offers a useful framework for organizing and interpreting teachers' evaluations of the factors that facilitate or hinder successful post-school transitions among individuals with ASD.

Research Gap and Purpose of the Study

Although the post-school transition experiences of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have received increasing attention in recent years, the existing literature has predominantly focused on parental perspectives, student outcomes, service provision, and the structural characteristics of support systems (Bahçalı & Odluyurt, 2020; Canikli, 2022; Durhan, 2023; Oti-Boadi et al., 2020). While these studies have provided valuable insights into transition-related challenges, comparatively less attention has been devoted to understanding how teachers perceive and interpret post-school transition processes. Given their central role in preparing students for adult life, teachers represent an important yet relatively underexplored stakeholder group despite their central role in preparing students for adult life and supporting transition-related planning and services.

This limitation is particularly evident in the Turkish context. Unlike several countries where transition planning and Individualized Transition Plans (ITPs) are formally embedded within educational legislation and service delivery systems (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004), Türkiye does not currently have comprehensive legal requirements specifically regulating post-school transition services for individuals with disabilities (Aktaş, Kot, & Yıkmış, 2020; Sönmez & Sazak, 2019). Consequently, transition-related practices are often implemented through local initiatives, informal collaborations, and the individual efforts of educators and families rather than through systematic and legally mandated procedures (Öztürk, 2023; Sönmez & Sazak, 2019). Despite the important role teachers play within this process, relatively little is known about how they evaluate transition readiness, identify barriers, and perceive support needs during the transition from school to adulthood. This situation may contribute to

considerable variability in transition planning practices, support services, and post-school experiences across educational settings.

Furthermore, previous research has frequently examined transition challenges through individual, familial, or institutional dimensions separately, often focusing on narrow factors related to a single organizational level rather than evaluating the complex, interwoven systems at play (Snell-Rood et al., 2020). Comparatively fewer studies have explored how educators understand the interactions among these different systems when evaluating post-school transition experiences (Elias et al., 2017). Examining teachers' perspectives may therefore contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how individual, familial, educational, social, and institutional factors are perceived to influence transition outcomes within a multidimensional ecological framework (Alverson et al., 2015). In this respect, the study contributes to the literature by exploring transition processes beyond an exclusive focus on individual deficits and behavior change, instead considering the broader social and physical environments and support systems surrounding individuals with ASD (Anderson et al., 2018). Accordingly, the present study seeks to illuminate how teachers conceptualize transition challenges not merely as individual difficulties but as outcomes shaped by interactions among multiple ecological systems.

Although the findings are grounded in the Turkish context, the issues addressed in this study—such as independent living, employment, social participation, family involvement, and access to support services—reflect challenges that are widely discussed in the international transition literature (Nuske et al., 2019; Roux et al., 2013; Shattuck et al., 2012; Sosnowy et al., 2018)

. Therefore, the study seeks not only to provide context-specific evidence but also to contribute to broader international discussions concerning post-school transition and support systems for individuals with ASD, addressing the pressing global need for research that informs comprehensive and collaborative transition practices (Hedley et al., 2017; Wehman et al., 2014)

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perspectives on the post-school transition experiences of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Specifically, the study aims to examine teachers' evaluations regarding transition readiness, challenges encountered during post-school life, the role of family and community support, perceived support needs, and recommendations for improving transition outcomes.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach and adopted a basic qualitative research design. Basic qualitative research seeks to explore how individuals interpret, understand, and assign meaning to a particular phenomenon through their experiences, perceptions, and reflections. Unlike phenomenological studies that focus on the essence of lived experiences or grounded theory studies

that aim to develop theory, basic qualitative research is concerned with understanding how participants make sense of a phenomenon within their own contexts (Tisdell & Merriam, 2016).

The present study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions, observations, professional evaluations, and interpretations regarding the post-school transition experiences of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Specifically, the study focused on how teachers conceptualize post-school transition, how they evaluate challenges encountered during this process, and what types of support needs they perceive as important for successful transition outcomes. The findings therefore reflect participants' professional experiences, observations, and interpretations rather than direct observations of actual post-school outcomes.

A basic qualitative research design was considered appropriate because the purpose of the study was to understand and interpret participants' perspectives regarding a specific educational phenomenon rather than to develop a new theory, test an existing theoretical model, or describe the essence of a lived experience. Furthermore, the design enabled the examination of teachers' interpretations of post-school transition processes within the context of their professional roles and educational settings (Baltacı, 2019; Tisdell & Merriam, 2016; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

Participants

The participants consisted of 42 teachers and educational professionals (24 female and 18 male) employed in public schools located in different provinces and districts of the Southeastern Anatolia Region of Türkiye. All participants had experience working directly with students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and were actively involved in educational settings serving individuals with special educational needs. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of the participants.

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Age	23–27	21	50.0
	28–32	13	31.0
	33–37	1	2.4
	38–43	7	16.6
Gender	Female	24	57.1
	Male	18	42.9
Educational Level	Bachelor's Degree	39	92.8
	Master's Degree	2	4.8
	Doctoral Degree	1	2.4
Professional Experience	1–5 years	31	73.8
	6–10 years	7	16.6
	11–15 years	1	2.4
	16 years and above	3	7.2
Professional Background	Special Education Teacher	13	30.9
	Preschool Teacher	9	21.5
	Primary School Teacher	7	16.6
	School Counselor	6	14.3
	Child Development Specialist	3	7.2
	Other	4	9.5

Note. N = 42. Percentages may not total exactly 100 due to rounding.

Purposeful sampling was employed in the study, specifically maximum variation sampling. Purposeful sampling enables researchers to obtain in-depth information from participants who are knowledgeable and experienced regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Büyüköztürk et al., 2024). Maximum variation sampling aims to capture diverse perspectives by including participants with different demographic and professional characteristics (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). In line with this approach, participants were selected to represent a broad range of ages, educational backgrounds, professional experiences, and teaching specializations. This strategy was intended to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of post-school transition processes from multiple professional perspectives.

The study included not only special education teachers but also preschool teachers, primary school teachers, school counselors, and professionals working in the field of child development. The common characteristic shared by all participants was their direct involvement in the educational processes of students with ASD and their experience observing students' developmental, social, and educational needs. The purpose of including participants from different professional backgrounds was not to compare occupational groups but rather to explore the multidimensional nature of post-school transition through diverse professional perspectives. Additionally, 28 participants (66.7%) reported having previously received training related to special education, whereas 14 participants (33.3%) reported no formal training in this area.

Participants were required to meet two inclusion criteria: (1) graduation from a four-year teacher education program in special education or another teaching field and (2) having experience working with individuals with ASD or currently working in this area. Individuals who did not meet these criteria were excluded from the study.

Many of the teachers and specialists participating in this study had opportunities to maintain contact with former students, families, and support networks beyond the formal school years. As a result, participants' perspectives were informed not only by their experiences within educational settings but also by their professional observations and evaluations regarding factors that may influence students' transition to adult life after graduation. Nevertheless, participants were not selected based on direct post-graduation follow-up experience, and the findings should therefore be interpreted as professional perceptions and informed judgments regarding post-school transition rather than direct evidence of actual post-school outcomes.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which are widely used in qualitative research to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and professional interpretations in depth while allowing flexibility during the interview process (Baltacı, 2019; Karahan et al., 2022). Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Necmettin Erbakan University (Decision No. 29825, dated 20 February 2026). All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality procedures, and the use of audio recording. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews commenced.

The interview protocol was developed following an extensive review of national and international literature on post-school transition, transition services, family involvement, school–community collaboration, and support mechanisms for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Morningstar et al., 2018; Test et al., 2009). Based on this review, an initial interview form consisting of ten open-ended questions was prepared. The draft questions were subsequently evaluated by two academics specializing in special education with regard to relevance, clarity, conceptual consistency,

and alignment with the research objectives. Revisions were made in accordance with expert feedback, resulting in a final interview form designed to elicit detailed accounts of teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding post-school transition. An English-language version of the semi-structured interview protocol developed for this study is provided as Supplementary Material 1.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face by the researcher between 9 March and 9 April 2026 with teachers working in public schools located in different provinces and districts of the Southeastern Anatolia Region of Türkiye. Prior to the interviews, appointments were arranged with participants through school administrators. Interview durations ranged from approximately 30 to 45 minutes, depending on participants' responses and experiences. With participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data.

The interview questions focused on perceived challenges encountered by individuals with ASD during post-school transition, transition readiness, contributions of school-based education, independent living skills, family involvement, community support, service needs, educator competencies, school–community collaboration, and policy recommendations. Following data collection, all interviews were transcribed verbatim prior to analysis. To ensure confidentiality, identifying information was removed from the transcripts, and participants were assigned pseudonyms (e.g., T1, T2, and T3).

Data Analysis

A hybrid thematic analysis approach combining deductive and inductive procedures was employed to analyze the qualitative data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The analysis was guided by the research questions and interview protocol, which provided an initial analytical framework. At the same time, codes, categories, and subthemes were generated inductively from participants' responses. Accordingly, the analysis was not restricted to a fully predetermined classification system; rather, themes emerging from the data were incorporated throughout the analytical process.

The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, an initial thematic framework was established based on the research questions, interview protocol, and relevant literature. Second, the interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and reviewed repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. Meaningful units of text were identified and assigned initial codes. Third, conceptually similar codes were grouped into categories and broader themes through an iterative process of comparison and refinement. Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to the study objectives and supported with direct quotations to preserve participants' perspectives and enhance transparency.

Although Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory informed the interpretation of the findings, it was not used as a predetermined coding framework. Instead, the theory served as a conceptual lens for understanding the relationships among the individual, familial, educational, social, and institutional factors that emerged from participants' accounts.

Frequency counts were reported solely to indicate the relative occurrence of particular views expressed by participants and were not used to imply statistical importance, effect size, or priority among themes. Because participants could express multiple views in response to a single interview question, total frequencies occasionally exceeded the number of participants. Therefore, frequencies should be interpreted only as indicators of the prevalence of specific perspectives within the dataset.

To enhance analytical rigor, two researchers independently coded the interview transcripts. Following independent coding, the researchers compared their coding decisions and discussed discrepancies until consensus was reached. Intercoder reliability was calculated using the formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (2020), resulting in an agreement rate of 87%, indicating an acceptable level of coding consistency. Furthermore, participant statements that diverged from dominant patterns were retained during the analysis to preserve the diversity and complexity of participants' perspectives.

Trustworthiness

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—were considered throughout the research process.

Credibility was strengthened through the use of semi-structured interviews, maximum variation sampling, expert review of the interview protocol, and prolonged engagement with the data. Participants from different professional backgrounds, including special education teachers, preschool teachers, primary school teachers, school counselors, and child development professionals, were included to obtain diverse perspectives on post-school transition processes. Prior to data collection, the interview protocol was reviewed by two experts in special education to ensure the clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the interview questions.

Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, sampling procedures, and data collection process. By providing comprehensive information regarding the participants and the educational settings in which they worked, readers are able to evaluate the applicability of the findings to similar contexts.

Dependability was addressed through a systematic and transparent research process. All stages of the study, including participant selection, data collection, coding procedures, theme development, and interpretation of findings, were documented in detail to establish an audit trail. In addition, two researchers independently coded the interview transcripts and subsequently compared their coding schemes. The initial intercoder agreement was approximately 87%. Coding discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus, thereby enhancing the consistency and dependability of the analysis.

Confirmability was enhanced through researcher reflexivity, peer review, and the use of direct participant quotations. Throughout the study, the researchers continuously reflected on their assumptions, professional backgrounds, and potential biases that could influence data interpretation. Furthermore,

representative quotations were included in the findings section to increase transparency and enable readers to evaluate the relationship between the raw data and the interpretations presented.

Member checking was not conducted in this study. Therefore, participants were not asked to review or verify the themes generated during the analysis process. However, multiple strategies, including expert review, independent coding, intercoder agreement procedures, reflexive practices, and the maintenance of an audit trail, were employed to enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings.

Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted as participants' professional perceptions, observations, and evaluations regarding post-school transition processes rather than as direct evidence of the actual post-school experiences of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Necmettin Erbakan University (Decision No. 29825, dated 20 February 2026) prior to data collection.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, the voluntary nature of participation, their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews were conducted.

To protect participants' privacy, all identifying information was removed from the interview transcripts and pseudonyms (e.g., T1, T2, and T3) were used throughout the reporting of the findings. Audio recordings, transcripts, and related research materials were securely stored and were accessible only to the research team. No personal or institutional identifiers are reported in this study.

Findings

The findings are presented under nine themes derived from the hybrid thematic analysis. These themes reflect teachers' perceptions of the challenges, support needs, and contextual factors influencing the post-school transition experiences of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Representative quotations are included to illustrate participants' perspectives.

Challenges Encountered During the Post-School Transition Process

Teachers were asked, "What are the main challenges that individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) may encounter in their post-school lives?" The responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Challenges Encountered During the Post-School Transition Process

Category	Coded Items	f
Social and community-related challenges	Difficulties in social communication, social interaction, social adaptation, participation in community life, integration into society, coping with environmental demands, functioning in crowded settings, using public transportation, navigating shopping centers and hospitals, and experiencing social exclusion or discrimination	**39**
Structural and systemic challenges	Difficulties achieving economic independence, obtaining employment, and pursuing career development opportunities	**14**
Personal life-related challenges	Difficulties with independent living, self-expression, self-care skills, daily living skills, meeting personal needs, and being alone	**22**
Education- and family-related challenges	Difficulties in academic and educational domains, maintaining previously acquired skills, career development, family formation, dependence on family members, and family communication	**11**
Other challenges	Difficulties living with peers, making friends, exposure to peer bullying, attention and concentration problems, and difficulties establishing eye contact	12

Note. Frequencies (f) indicate the number of times a particular view was expressed by participants. Because participants were able to express multiple views in response to the same question, total frequencies exceed the number of participants. Frequencies are presented solely to indicate the relative occurrence of themes and should not be interpreted as measures of statistical importance, effect size, or priority.

The findings presented in Table 2 suggest that teachers did not attribute post-school transition challenges solely to individual skill deficits. Participants frequently emphasized difficulties encountered in community settings such as public transportation, shopping centers, hospitals, and other public environments. These observations indicate that skills acquired in school settings may not always be easily transferred to real-life contexts. Accordingly, teachers' evaluations of post-school transition challenges appear to extend beyond individual competencies and include environmental and contextual factors. Participants referred to difficulties related to community participation, social integration, public transportation, and employment, highlighting not only individual capabilities but also the conditions and supports available within the surrounding environment. These findings suggest that teachers perceive post-school transition as a process shaped by interactions between individual characteristics and environmental conditions rather than by individual factors alone.

One participant described these challenges as follows:

"Outside the home environment, I think they experience the greatest difficulties in social life, especially in crowded settings. I have witnessed them becoming overwhelmed and having behavioral crises when exposed to multiple stimuli such as colors, sounds, or lights. They often become very anxious when

using public transportation, and I believe they experience considerable difficulties in places such as shopping centers and hospitals." (T1)

Another notable finding was that teachers distinguished between challenges associated with individual skill limitations and those arising from broader structural and systemic conditions. Participants referred not only to difficulties related to self-care and daily living skills but also to barriers associated with employment opportunities, economic independence, and access to support systems. This suggests that teachers linked post-school transition difficulties not only to individual characteristics but also to structural factors such as employment opportunities, service availability, and broader support mechanisms.

One participant stated:

"They may experience difficulties establishing interpersonal communication. I do not think many of them will have opportunities to work in public institutions or the private sector. Therefore, they are likely to face difficulties in achieving economic independence." (T3)

At the same time, teachers emphasized that challenges related to self-care and daily living skills remain important aspects of the transition process and may vary depending on the individual characteristics and support needs of each student.

As one participant explained:

"Because these children have special needs, they may experience difficulties meeting their own needs. For example, they frequently encounter challenges related to daily living skills and self-care skills." (T10)

Finally, some participants suggested that the reduction of educational supports following graduation may make it difficult for individuals with ASD to maintain previously acquired skills.

One participant noted:

"After leaving school, their social environment will become more limited, their educational opportunities will decrease, and their development may regress. Consequently, there is a high possibility that some of the gains achieved during school years may decline. Families also struggle considerably during this period and often feel inadequate, which increases the burden on them." (T9 and T4)

Taken together, these findings suggest that teachers do not explain post-school transition challenges solely in terms of individual limitations. In addition to personal skills and competencies, participants highlighted the potential influence of social acceptance, employment opportunities, environmental accommodations, family support, and institutional services. Overall, teachers appeared to associate many of the challenges encountered during post-school life with interactions between individuals and their environments rather than with individual characteristics alone. This finding suggests that participants tended to conceptualize post-school transition as a multidimensional process shaped by

interactions among individual, familial, social, and institutional factors rather than merely as an individual adjustment problem

The findings presented in Table 3 suggest that teachers viewed readiness for post-school life as a multidimensional construct rather than as a characteristic determined solely by individual abilities. Participants frequently emphasized that readiness depends on a combination of factors, including the individual's developmental characteristics, the quality of educational experiences, family involvement, educator support, and broader environmental conditions. For many teachers, being prepared for post-school life involved not only possessing specific academic or daily living skills but also being able to apply these skills across real-life contexts, adapt to changing environmental demands, and access adequate social and familial support. These findings suggest that teachers conceptualized readiness as a dynamic process shaped by interactions among individual, familial, educational, and environmental factors.

Perceived Readiness for Post-School Life

Teachers were asked, "To what extent do individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) feel prepared for post-school life?" The responses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Teachers' Perspectives on the Readiness of Individuals with ASD for Post-School Life

Category	**f**
Readiness for post-school life depends on the individual's developmental level, the quality of education received, and support provided by families and educators	19
Individuals with ASD do not feel adequately prepared for post-school life	11
Readiness for post-school life is partially adequate and partially inadequate	7
Limited family knowledge negatively affects readiness for post-school life	5
Individuals with ASD are not adequately prepared for independent living in adulthood	5
Insufficient social acceptance reduces readiness for post-school life	3
Inadequate support for social development negatively affects readiness for post-school life	3
Insufficient planning and transition programs reduce readiness for post-school life	2

Note. Frequencies (f) indicate the number of times a particular view was expressed by participants. Because participants were able to express multiple views in response to the same question, total frequencies exceed the number of participants. Frequencies are presented solely to indicate the relative occurrence of themes and should not be interpreted as measures of statistical importance, effect size, or priority.

The findings presented in Table 3 suggest that teachers viewed readiness for post-school life as a multidimensional construct rather than as a characteristic determined solely by individual abilities. One of the most frequently expressed views was that readiness depends on a combination of factors,

including the individual's developmental characteristics, the quality of educational experiences, and support provided by families and educators. Teachers did not define readiness merely as the possession of academic knowledge or daily living skills. Rather, participants associated readiness with the ability to apply acquired skills in real-life contexts, adapt to changing environmental conditions, and receive adequate support from family members and the broader social environment. These findings suggest that teachers conceptualized readiness as a dynamic process shaped by interactions among individual, familial, educational, and environmental factors.

One participant explained:

"In my opinion, a student's level of preparedness for post-school life is directly related to the quality of education provided at school and the collaboration among teachers, educators, and school administrators." (T15)

Another participant emphasized that readiness is not a uniform characteristic but varies according to individual needs, developmental characteristics, and educational experiences:

"We need to evaluate students individually. Their personal characteristics, needs, educational experiences, and the quality of the education they receive determine how prepared they feel. Some students receive high-quality education and have their individual differences addressed appropriately, which may help them feel more prepared for post-school life. However, if the education they receive is inadequate and their individual needs are not sufficiently addressed, they may not feel prepared." (T17)

At the same time, many teachers reported that individuals with ASD often do not feel adequately prepared for post-school life or that their readiness is only partially sufficient. One participant attributed this lack of preparedness to limitations in educational opportunities and practical skill development:

"Because individuals with ASD do not always receive high-quality education tailored to their specific needs, they may experience difficulties in self-care, daily living, social adaptation, and economic independence. As a result, they may not feel adequately prepared for post-school life." (T2)

Some participants also suggested that school-based programs place greater emphasis on academic achievement than on practical life skills and social development, which may negatively affect readiness for adulthood:

"These children are generally taught through an academically focused approach, which limits opportunities for their social development. Therefore, I do not think they feel sufficiently prepared." (T5)

In addition, teachers identified limited family knowledge, insufficient independent living and social skills, inadequate social acceptance, and weaknesses in transition planning as factors that may reduce readiness for post-school life. Taken together, these findings suggest that teachers do not define readiness solely in terms of individual competencies. Rather, participants viewed readiness for post-school life as a process that depends on the combined influence of personal abilities, family support,

educational quality, social acceptance, and institutional planning. Overall, teachers appeared to conceptualize readiness as a dynamic construct emerging from interactions between individuals and their environments rather than as a fixed personal attribute.

Perceived Contributions of School-Based Education to Employment and Social Life

Teachers were asked, “To what extent does the education provided at school contribute to the employment and social lives of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?” The responses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Teachers’ Perspectives on the Contributions of School-Based Education to the Employment and Social Lives of Individuals with ASD

Category	**f**
Contributes to social participation and the development of social skills	11
Contributions depend on the quality of education and instructional materials provided	11
Fully contributes to employment and social life outcomes	10
Contributes to daily living skills, self-care, and social adaptation	10
Contributes to communication and self-expression skills	10
Partially contributes to employment and social life outcomes	9
Contributes to life preparation and meaning-making	6
Contributions depend on teacher competence and family involvement	4
Contributions vary according to early diagnosis, intervention, and individual developmental levels	4
Does not contribute to employment and social life outcomes	4
Contributes to peer adjustment and social inclusion	3

Note. Frequencies (f) indicate the number of times a particular view was expressed by participants. Because participants were able to express multiple views in response to the same question, total frequencies exceed the number of participants. Frequencies are presented solely to indicate the relative occurrence of themes and should not be interpreted as measures of statistical importance, effect size, or priority.

The findings presented in Table 4 indicate that teachers generally perceived school-based education as making meaningful contributions to the employment and social lives of individuals with ASD. Participants most frequently emphasized the role of education in promoting social participation, improving social skills, and facilitating interaction with others. Teachers also highlighted the importance of educational quality and instructional resources, suggesting that the effectiveness of school-based interventions depends not only on participation in schooling itself but also on the nature and quality of

educational experiences provided. These findings suggest that teachers view schools as important contexts for developing competencies that may support successful participation in adult life.

One participant described these contributions as follows:

“They are able to communicate more effectively with other people and overcome many of their difficulties in expressing themselves. They also begin to make better sense of life and their experiences.” (T20)

Teachers further emphasized that structured educational experiences provide opportunities for developing daily living skills, self-care abilities, and social adaptation. Participants frequently referred to communication, independence, and practical life skills as important outcomes that may support successful transition into adulthood.

As one participant explained:

“The education we provide is extremely important for helping individuals socialize with peers and family members, acquire basic self-care skills, and gain essential life knowledge. Similarly, the education we provide plays a critical role in helping them protect themselves from potential dangers, avoid situations that may harm their health, and develop self-care, daily living, and social adaptation skills.” (T13)

The contribution of education to social participation was also emphasized by another participant:

“I believe it makes a positive contribution. At the very least, they can move from being socially withdrawn to becoming more active, and their social life skills improve.” (T42)

At the same time, some teachers argued that the benefits of education do not emerge equally for all individuals. Participants noted that the contribution of school-based education to employment and social life may vary according to the severity of autism characteristics, access to early diagnosis and intervention, teacher competence, and the level of family involvement. These views suggest that educational outcomes are shaped not only by school experiences but also by individual and contextual factors.

One teacher summarized this perspective as follows:

“This varies depending on the quality of the education provided. At the same time, I have seen individuals with strong potential and good cognitive abilities find a place in society quite successfully when they receive education that meets their needs.” (T37)

A smaller number of participants expressed the view that current educational practices do not make substantial contributions to employment and social life outcomes. Nevertheless, when considered as a whole, the findings suggest that teachers do not perceive education merely as a mechanism for developing academic skills. Rather, they view schools as important environments that support social participation, communication, self-care, and daily living skills. At the same time, participants emphasized

that education alone is not sufficient and that its effectiveness is shaped by individual characteristics, family involvement, early intervention opportunities, and broader environmental supports. This finding suggests that teachers understand the influence of education within a wider network of interconnected support systems rather than as an isolated school-based process.

Promoting Independent Living Through School-Based Practices

Teachers were asked, *"What practices do you implement during the school process to develop independent living skills among individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?"* The responses are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
School-Based Practices Used to Promote Independent Living Skills Among Individuals With ASD

Category	**f**
Practices aimed at improving communication and self-expression skills	18
Practices aimed at developing daily living skills	13
Practices aimed at supporting social skills	12
Practices aimed at supporting self-care skills	11
Practices aimed at promoting community adaptation skills	9
Practices aimed at supporting cognitive skills	5
Practices aimed at reducing problem behaviors	4
Practices aimed at developing responsibility-taking skills	4
Practices aimed at supporting psychomotor skills	3
One-to-one instructional practices	3
Sensory integration-based practices	2
Play-based instructional practices	1

Note. Frequencies (f) indicate the number of times a particular view was expressed by participants. Because participants were able to express multiple views in response to the same question, total frequencies exceed the number of participants. Frequencies are presented solely to indicate the relative occurrence of themes and should not be interpreted as measures of statistical importance, effect size, or priority.

As shown in Table 5., teachers reported prioritizing practical and functional interventions that facilitate everyday functioning and social adaptation. The area receiving the greatest emphasis was the development of communication and self-expression skills, which participants considered essential for establishing meaningful interactions with others. This was followed by efforts to promote daily living skills and social skills, both of which were viewed as critical for enabling individuals to function

independently in adulthood. Teachers' responses suggest that independent living skills are regarded as one of the primary developmental domains supporting successful post-school transition. Participants frequently linked classroom-based interventions to broader goals of community participation and social adaptation following graduation.

One teacher explained:

"To develop independent living skills, we work on self-care skills such as using the restroom independently, washing hands, brushing teeth, and changing clothes without assistance. In addition, instructional activities and simulations can be designed to teach essential life skills such as paying bills, shopping, and using public transportation by following bus stops and getting off at the correct destination." (T37)

Participants' responses further indicated that these practices extend beyond daily living skills and encompass multiple developmental domains. Teachers described supporting students' cognitive, affective, social, and psychomotor development through a variety of educational activities designed to enhance independence and self-awareness. One participant stated:

"We carry out activities to support their social development and adaptation. Through various activities, we try to help students acquire independent living skills and develop self-awareness. We implement practices targeting cognitive, affective, social, and psychomotor development." (T13)

In addition to these core areas, teachers reported implementing several complementary interventions, although these were mentioned less frequently. These included activities designed to strengthen cognitive skills, reduce problem behaviors that interfere with learning and social participation, foster responsibility-taking, and support psychomotor development. Participants also emphasized efforts to address stereotypical and problematic behaviors.

One teacher explained:

"Although it varies depending on the age group, we first focus on helping students recognize themselves and their immediate environment. Then we identify their interests and implement interventions aimed at reducing obsessive or problematic behaviors." (T29)

Teachers also highlighted practices intended to promote self-confidence and responsibility:

"Since every student is different, we implement various activities to help them become more independent. We assign responsibilities that match their abilities in order to build their self-confidence." (T12)

Finally, participants noted that one-to-one instruction, sensory integration-based approaches, and play-based teaching strategies were also used when appropriate to meet individual needs.

Taken together, these findings suggest that teachers do not conceptualize independent living skills merely as the acquisition of isolated daily living behaviors. Rather, participants viewed independent living as a multidimensional construct encompassing communication, self-expression, social participation, self-care, and community adaptation. Teachers' perspectives indicate that the primary purpose of school-based practices is not simply to teach specific skills but to support individuals with ASD in functioning more independently after graduation. In this respect, independent living skills were conceptualized as a comprehensive and functional life competence rather than a collection of discrete behavioral outcomes.

Supporting Post-School Transition Through Family Involvement

Teachers were asked, *"What role should families play in preparing individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) for post-school life?"* The responses are presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Teachers' Perspectives on the Role of Families in Preparing Individuals With ASD for Post-School Life

Category	**f**
Monitoring and supporting the child during the post-school period	8
Family training and active participation in educational processes	8
Maintaining a supportive and constructive attitude	8
Educational, counseling, and therapeutic services for families after graduation	7
Family–teacher collaboration	7
Supporting the child's socialization	7
Providing opportunities to develop independent living skills	5
Continuation of home-based educational practices	5
Fulfilling parental responsibilities	4
Adopting a conscious, patient, and understanding approach	4
Utilizing resources for parental self-development	3
Family expectations regarding economic independence and employment	2
Early preparation and planning for post-school life	1

Note. Frequencies (f) indicate the number of times a particular view was expressed by participants. Because participants were able to express multiple views in response to the same question, total frequencies exceed the number of participants. Frequencies are presented solely to indicate the relative occurrence of themes and should not be interpreted as measures of statistical importance, effect size, or priority.

The findings presented in Table 5 indicate that teachers regarded families as a central and multidimensional source of support during the transition to post-school life. The most frequently emphasized roles included monitoring and supporting the individual after graduation, actively participating in educational processes, and maintaining a constructive and supportive attitude. These themes emerged consistently across participants' accounts. Given the perceived limitations of institutional support mechanisms in the region, teachers frequently highlighted family commitment and parental involvement as critical factors influencing successful transition outcomes.

One participant stated:

"Families should maintain a supportive attitude and follow a guiding approach when helping their children cope with challenges they may encounter." (T24)

Teachers also emphasized the importance of reinforcing school-acquired skills within everyday environments. According to participants, families can contribute to successful transition by supporting educational practices at home and creating opportunities for students to apply learned skills across different life contexts. Several teachers stressed that effective collaboration between schools and families, together with the repetition of acquired skills in home and community settings, may facilitate the generalization and maintenance of learning outcomes.

As one participant explained:

"The practices implemented by special education teachers can be reinforced at home and in social environments to enhance development. Education should continue at home, and acquired skills should be reinforced. School-based and home-based education should progress in parallel." (T22 and T26)

Participants further emphasized the importance of maintaining continuous school–family collaboration and providing post-graduation counseling and therapeutic services for families. Many teachers suggested that professional guidance and counseling services could support both families and individuals during the transition process.

One participant noted:

"There should be family education and counseling services. Families' knowledge about the challenges experienced by their children can be improved. Counselors could be assigned to support families during the post-school transition process." (T28, T39, and T38)

Teachers also viewed family support for socialization, opportunities for independent functioning, home-based educational continuity, and informed parenting practices as important contributors to successful transition outcomes. Several participants specifically highlighted the importance of allowing individuals with ASD greater autonomy and responsibility.

One teacher explained:

“Families need to respect their children’s personal space more. They should trust them, allow them to do things independently, and provide opportunities for them to take responsibility and develop the ability to live on their own.” (T2)

Finally, participants identified early planning for adulthood and realistic family expectations regarding employment and economic independence as important long-term considerations.

Taken together, these findings suggest that teachers perceive families not merely as supportive figures but as key stakeholders whose involvement directly influences the success of post-school transition. From the participants’ perspective, family responsibilities extend beyond emotional support and include maintaining acquired skills, creating opportunities for independent living, facilitating social participation, and engaging in future-oriented planning. Teachers’ responses indicate that post-school transition cannot be sustained through school-based interventions alone; rather, the continuity and quality of family involvement were viewed as critical determinants of successful transition outcomes.

Community Acceptance and Support

Teachers were asked, *“How would you evaluate the level of societal acceptance and support for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?”* The responses are presented in Table 6.

Table 7
Teachers’ Perspectives on the Level of Community Acceptance and Support for Individuals With ASD

Category	**f**
Views indicating that the level of societal acceptance and support is inadequate	16
Views indicating that society lacks sufficient awareness and understanding of ASD	13
Views indicating that public knowledge about ASD is limited and insufficient	12
Views suggesting that societal acceptance and support have increased compared to previous years	4
Views indicating that society adequately accepts and supports individuals with ASD	4
Views suggesting that society holds prejudicial attitudes toward individuals with ASD	3
Views indicating that society fails to fulfill its responsibilities toward individuals with ASD	2
Views indicating insufficient empathy and understanding within society	2
Views indicating inadequate accommodations for individuals with ASD in social life	1

Note. Frequencies (f) indicate the number of times a particular view was expressed by participants. Because participants were able to express multiple views in response to the same question, total frequencies exceed the number of participants. Frequencies are presented solely to indicate the relative occurrence of themes and should not be interpreted as measures of statistical importance, effect size, or priority.

The findings presented in Table 7 indicate that a substantial proportion of teachers perceived societal acceptance and support for individuals with ASD as inadequate. Participants frequently attributed this situation to limited public awareness, insufficient knowledge, and a lack of understanding regarding ASD. Teachers further suggested that limited societal acceptance may negatively influence social participation opportunities and the experiences of individuals with ASD during the post-school transition period. Nevertheless, some participants acknowledged that public awareness and acceptance have improved compared to previous years.

One participant explained:

“When the broader social context is considered, individuals with ASD are sometimes left in the background. Looking at societal processes as a whole, it becomes evident that these individuals are negatively affected and that society does not sufficiently fulfill its responsibilities toward them.” (T12)

At the same time, not all teachers evaluated societal acceptance negatively. Several participants reported observing gradual improvements in public awareness and supportive attitudes toward individuals with ASD. However, prejudice, limited empathy, and the lack of accommodations that address the needs of individuals with ASD in community settings were also identified as important concerns.

As one teacher noted:

“Society’s perceptions of individuals with ASD are often shaped by their behaviors. Behaviors that differ from social norms tend to create prejudice, and individuals with ASD who exhibit behavioral difficulties often experience lower levels of societal acceptance.” (T29)

Taken together, these findings suggest that teachers do not evaluate post-school transition solely in terms of the skills possessed by individuals with ASD. Participants viewed societal acceptance, public awareness, and the availability of inclusive social environments as important environmental factors influencing whether individuals can effectively utilize their skills in everyday life. Teachers’ perspectives indicate that individual competencies alone may not be sufficient to ensure successful transition outcomes when societal support is limited. At the same time, the observation that some participants perceived improvements in public awareness suggests that societal acceptance is viewed as a dynamic and modifiable process. Overall, these findings indicate that teachers conceptualize post-school transition as a multidimensional process shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by broader societal conditions.

Additional Support Needs and Recommendations for Policies and Programs

Teachers’ views regarding the additional supports and services needed to promote successful post-school outcomes for individuals with ASD, as well as policy and program recommendations aimed at

strengthening transition processes, were analytically integrated into a comprehensive framework. The findings are presented in Table 7.

Table 8
Recommendations for Additional Supports, Policies, and Programs to Improve Post-School Transition Outcomes for Individuals With ASD

Category	Coded Items	f
Employment, vocational development, and economic independence-oriented structures	Vocational training, employment opportunities, skill-development workshops, programs supporting economic independence, and direct financial assistance initiatives	32
Institutional, legal, and sustainable policy arrangements	Legal regulations, policy development, institutional frameworks, state-supported continuing education after graduation, special education centers, individualized transition planning, counseling, and monitoring programs	32
Social participation and community engagement opportunities	Community-based living centers, social venues, post-school activities, clubs, sports, arts, leisure opportunities, ASD-friendly communities, and public awareness initiatives	25
Lifelong education and therapeutic support mechanisms	Lifelong learning programs, continuing support services, physical therapy, rehabilitation, sensory support, behavioral therapy, assessment services, home-based support, and guidance services	24
Family-focused counseling, awareness, and collaboration resources	Family education, counseling, psychosocial support, parent awareness programs, family–educator collaboration, and post-graduation family support mechanisms	12

Note. Frequencies (f) indicate the number of times a particular view was expressed by participants. Because participants were able to express multiple views in response to the same question, total frequencies exceed the number of participants. Frequencies are presented solely to indicate the relative occurrence of themes and should not be interpreted as measures of statistical importance, effect size, or priority.

As shown in Table 8, teachers' recommendations primarily focused on vocational development, employment opportunities, legal and institutional reforms, social participation, lifelong education, and family support. These recommendations reflect participants' evaluations of the needs and challenges encountered during the post-school transition process. Considering the limited availability of sheltered workplaces, vocational rehabilitation centers, and employment opportunities in the region, teachers emphasized the need for local and national initiatives that extend beyond school-based interventions and directly support employment and economic participation.

One participant stated:

"I believe vocational education should be planned according to individuals' interests and strengths, and internships and social activities should be supported through school–community collaboration. Creating inclusive communities that welcome individuals with special needs is particularly important for successful post-school adaptation." (T17)

Teachers' emphasis on employment-related structures was accompanied by recommendations for stronger institutional and legal frameworks capable of supporting transition processes in a more systematic manner. Participants frequently highlighted the importance of interagency collaboration and formalized transition planning mechanisms.

One teacher explained:

"I think the education of these individuals is often limited to the school setting. Relevant institutions should develop roadmaps and programs for the post-school period and implement collaborative projects through interagency cooperation." (T22)

Participants also emphasized the importance of creating community spaces and programs that support social participation and functional life skills development. These practical needs were illustrated by the following comments:

"A social living environment should be created where individuals can both acquire social skills and sustain their daily lives under family supervision." (T19)

"Individuals with ASD need additional support in acquiring practical and functional skills such as paying bills, using public transportation correctly, shopping independently, knowing their home address, remembering personal and family information, and developing literacy skills necessary for everyday life." (T37)

Teachers further highlighted the importance of vocational training, therapeutic services, psychosocial support mechanisms, and social opportunities. One participant summarized these needs as follows:

"They need behavioral therapy, skill-development workshops, vocational training programs, psychosocial support, social clubs, and sports activities." (T33)

Several participants also emphasized the importance of lifelong educational opportunities and continuing support beyond the traditional school years.

As one teacher noted:

"I do not think education should be limited to a certain age. Educational opportunities should continue into adulthood, and support provided by family and social services should be expanded." (T20)

Taken together, these findings suggest that teachers do not conceptualize post-school transition merely as the process of adapting after graduation. Rather, participants viewed successful post-school outcomes as dependent upon the coordinated functioning of employment opportunities, economic independence, lifelong learning, social participation, family support, healthcare services, and institutional arrangements. Teachers' perspectives indicate that skills acquired during schooling can only be translated into sustainable outcomes when supported by ongoing post-school services and resources. Overall, participants appeared to conceptualize post-school transition as a holistic and collaborative

process that extends beyond the educational system and requires the coordinated involvement of multiple institutions and support networks.

Teacher Competencies and Resource Needs

Teachers were asked, *"As an educator or teacher, what types of training or resources do you need to provide more effective guidance to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) during the post-school transition process?"* The responses are presented in Table 9.

Table 10
Teachers' Perspectives on Competencies and Resource Needs for Supporting Individuals with ASD During the Post-School Transition Process

Category	**f**
Family counseling, training, and collaboration resources	14
Instructional materials, programs, and assessment resources	13
Professional development and ASD-related knowledge resources for teachers	12
Psychological counseling, guidance, and sensory support resources	9
Training and resources supporting social skills and community participation	6
Institutional, interdisciplinary, and rehabilitation-based support resources	5
Technology-based educational tools and digital resources	3
Programs supporting post-school education and transition planning	2

Note. Frequencies (f) indicate the number of times a particular view was expressed by participants. Because participants were able to express multiple views in response to the same question, total frequencies exceed the number of participants. Frequencies are presented solely to indicate the relative occurrence of themes and should not be interpreted as measures of statistical importance, effect size, or priority.

The findings presented in Table 9 indicate that teachers require various forms of training and resources to provide more effective guidance to individuals with ASD during the post-school transition process. Among the most frequently emphasized needs were family counseling and educational services, resources that facilitate family–school collaboration, and structured tools that teachers can utilize throughout the transition process. These findings suggest that participants viewed successful transition support as extending beyond direct interventions with individuals and requiring support mechanisms that actively involve families.

One participant emphasized the importance of family-oriented resources by stating:

"First and foremost, there is a need for family education and an intensive behavioral education program for children with autism." (T26)

Another frequently mentioned area of need involved access to instructional materials, transition programs, and assessment tools. Participants indicated that educational resources specifically designed for the learning characteristics of individuals with ASD, particularly those incorporating strong visual supports and practical applications, could enhance educational and transition-related outcomes. Accordingly, the diversity and accessibility of instructional materials emerged as important resources for preparing individuals for post-school life.

As one teacher explained:

“There is a need for books with less text, more pictures, and vivid colors, as well as additional special education resources.” (T34)

Participants also emphasized the need for ongoing professional development opportunities that would enable them to access current knowledge and evidence-based practices related to ASD. Teachers suggested that in-service training programs, academic resources, and expert consultation could enhance their capacity to provide effective guidance throughout the transition process.

One participant stated:

“To address teachers’ inadequacies in this area, I believe they should review articles and theses written by experts in the field. In addition, systematic seminars and conferences led by specialists should be offered in all educational institutions.” (T37)

Teachers further identified psychological counseling services, guidance resources, and sensory support interventions as important components of effective transition support. Participants also emphasized the value of training programs designed to strengthen social skills and community participation, as well as institutional and rehabilitation-based services that facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration.

Although mentioned less frequently, technology-based educational tools, digital resources, and specialized programs designed to support post-school transition were also identified as important needs. Teachers’ perspectives suggest that awareness-raising efforts should not be confined to school settings but should also be disseminated through digital and public communication platforms.

As one teacher noted:

“There is a need for digital, visual, and written information boards in all public spaces that explain the needs of individuals with special needs and the issues that should be considered when interacting with them.” (T29)

Taken together, these findings suggest that teachers do not perceive their responsibilities during the post-school transition process as limited to classroom instruction. Rather, participants viewed themselves as assuming broader roles involving family counseling, transition planning, support for social integration, and collaboration with various institutions and service providers. At the same time, teachers

emphasized that fulfilling these responsibilities effectively requires access to professional knowledge, practical instructional materials, interdisciplinary support systems, and institutional resources. Overall, these findings indicate that teachers conceptualize post-school transition not merely as an educational service directed toward students but as a multidimensional support process requiring the active involvement of multiple stakeholders.

School–Community Collaboration

Teachers were asked, *"What are your recommendations regarding school–community collaboration to improve the quality of life of individuals with ASD during the post-school transition process?"* The responses are presented in Table 10.

Table 10
Teachers' Perspectives on School–Community Collaboration for Supporting Individuals with ASD During the Post-School Transition Process

Category	**f**
Activities aimed at increasing public awareness and community understanding	26
Practices strengthening collaboration among schools, families, and communities	23
Educational programs, seminars, and professional development activities	12
Community-based and institutional support programs	7
Arrangements related to transition planning, employment, and life-course preparation	7
Recommendations concerning physical, social, and public-space accessibility	4
Policy initiatives, legal regulations, and advanced educational supports	3

Note. Frequencies (f) indicate the number of times a particular view was expressed by participants. Because participants were able to express multiple views in response to the same question, total frequencies exceed the number of participants. Frequencies are presented solely to indicate the relative occurrence of themes and should not be interpreted as measures of statistical importance, effect size, or priority.

The findings presented in Table 10 indicate that teachers' recommendations regarding school–community collaboration primarily focused on increasing public awareness, strengthening interorganizational cooperation, and developing practices that support successful post-school transition. The most frequently emphasized recommendations involved activities aimed at improving societal awareness of ASD and establishing stronger collaborative relationships among schools, families, and community stakeholders. These findings suggest that teachers view successful transition outcomes as dependent upon shared responsibility among multiple actors rather than on the efforts of schools alone.

One participant stated:

“I believe that seminars, in-service training programs, and workshops should be organized to increase public awareness. Specialists should be involved in the process, employment opportunities should be expanded, special scholarships should be provided for higher education, and existing legal regulations should be reviewed.” (T17)

Participants also emphasized the importance of developing sustainable collaboration mechanisms among schools, families, and communities. In addition to awareness-raising activities, teachers highlighted educational programs, seminars, and professional development opportunities targeting educators, families, and different segments of society as important strategies for supporting successful transition outcomes. These findings indicate that participants viewed transition support as a collective responsibility requiring coordinated efforts across multiple sectors.

As one participant explained:

“I believe that school–community collaboration must be strong for the post-school process to be managed effectively. Public institutions and the private sector should provide various supports and opportunities to facilitate students’ participation in community life after graduation.” (T16)

Teachers further emphasized the importance of planning and support mechanisms that extend beyond graduation. Participants highlighted the need for initiatives related to transition planning, employment opportunities, and long-term life-course preparation. Community-based support programs, institutional partnerships, accessibility improvements within physical and social environments, and policy reforms were also identified as important components of effective school–community collaboration.

Taken together, these findings suggest that teachers do not perceive post-school transition as a responsibility that can be managed solely by schools. Rather, participants viewed successful transition outcomes as requiring sustainable collaboration among schools, families, communities, governmental agencies, and other stakeholders. Teachers’ perspectives indicate that the skills acquired during schooling can only be translated into sustainable post-school outcomes when supported by coordinated social and institutional systems. Overall, these findings suggest that participants conceptualize post-school transition as a collaborative, community-based process requiring the active participation of multiple stakeholders rather than as an issue that can be addressed at the individual or institutional level alone.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers’ perspectives on the post-school transition experiences of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Overall, the findings suggest that teachers perceive post-school transition as a multidimensional process shaped by interactions among individual characteristics, family involvement, educational experiences, community participation, institutional supports, and broader societal conditions. Across the themes identified in the study, participants consistently emphasized that successful transition outcomes cannot be explained solely by

individual skills or impairments. Rather, teachers highlighted the importance of coordinated support systems that extend beyond the school environment and continue into adulthood. In this respect, the findings contribute to the growing body of transition research by illustrating how educators conceptualize the complex relationships among personal, social, educational, and environmental factors influencing post-school outcomes for individuals with ASD.

Challenges Encountered During the Post-School Transition Process

The findings revealed that teachers perceived post-school transition challenges as extending beyond individual skill deficits and encompassing a wide range of social, environmental, and systemic factors. Although difficulties related to daily living skills, self-care, and independent functioning were frequently mentioned, participants emphasized that barriers encountered in community settings, employment opportunities, and social participation were equally important. This finding suggests that teachers conceptualize post-school transition as a multidimensional process shaped by interactions between individuals and their environments rather than as a challenge rooted solely in personal limitations.

This interpretation is consistent with previous studies indicating that individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often encounter substantial difficulties in employment, independent living, community participation, and social inclusion after leaving school (Shattuck et al., 2012; Roux et al., 2013; Hedley et al., 2017). Similar to the present findings, international research has shown that transition outcomes are influenced not only by individual functioning levels but also by the availability of environmental supports, community resources, and opportunities for participation. Consequently, successful transition cannot be understood solely through the lens of individual competence but must also consider broader contextual factors that either facilitate or hinder participation in adult life.

One particularly notable finding was teachers' emphasis on challenges encountered in public environments such as transportation systems, shopping centers, hospitals, and other community settings. These observations suggest that skills acquired within school settings may not automatically generalize to real-world contexts. Previous research has similarly highlighted the difficulties individuals with ASD experience when transferring learned skills across settings and adapting to unpredictable social and environmental demands (Anderson et al., 2018; Nuske et al., 2019). The teachers' accounts therefore reinforce the importance of providing transition experiences that extend beyond classroom instruction and incorporate authentic community-based learning opportunities.

Another important finding concerns the distinction teachers made between individual and structural barriers. Participants frequently referred to employment opportunities, economic independence, and access to support services as significant determinants of post-school outcomes. This observation aligns with studies demonstrating that unemployment and underemployment remain among the most persistent challenges faced by adults with ASD worldwide (Hedley et al., 2017; Wehman et al., 2014). Rather than attributing unsuccessful transition outcomes exclusively to individual impairments, teachers

appeared to recognize the role of labor market conditions, institutional supports, and service accessibility. Such findings suggest an awareness that transition outcomes are influenced by systemic factors operating beyond the individual level.

The findings also revealed concerns regarding the sustainability of skills acquired during the school years. Several teachers suggested that reductions in educational and support services following graduation may contribute to skill regression and increased dependence on families. Similar concerns have been reported in previous research, which has documented discontinuities between school-based services and adult support systems, often referred to as the “service cliff” experienced by many individuals with ASD after leaving formal education (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011; Shattuck et al., 2012). The present findings therefore support growing evidence that transition planning should not end at graduation but should instead include mechanisms that facilitate continuity of support into adulthood.

From an ecological perspective, these findings can be interpreted as reflecting the interconnected influence of multiple environmental systems on transition outcomes. Teachers’ references to family support, community acceptance, employment opportunities, institutional services, and public accessibility indicate that post-school transition is embedded within a network of interacting systems. Consistent with Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, the challenges described by participants appear to emerge not only from characteristics of the individual but also from interactions among family, school, community, and broader societal structures. This interpretation further supports the view that improving transition outcomes requires coordinated efforts across multiple ecological levels rather than interventions focused exclusively on individual skill development.

The findings suggest that teachers perceive post-school transition as a complex and context-dependent process influenced by individual competencies, family involvement, social acceptance, environmental accessibility, and institutional support mechanisms. This perspective contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for more comprehensive and collaborative approaches to transition planning for individuals with ASD.

Readiness for Post-School Life

The findings revealed that teachers viewed readiness for post-school life as a multidimensional and dynamic construct rather than as a characteristic determined solely by individual abilities. Participants frequently emphasized that readiness depends on a combination of factors, including the individual’s developmental characteristics, the quality of educational experiences, family involvement, educator support, and broader social conditions. This finding suggests that teachers perceive transition readiness as a process shaped by interactions among multiple systems rather than as a fixed outcome achieved through the acquisition of specific skills alone.

One of the most prominent findings was that teachers associated readiness with the combined influence of individual functioning, educational quality, and support provided by families and educators. This perspective is consistent with previous transition research indicating that successful post-school

outcomes are influenced by a combination of personal, educational, and environmental factors (Test et al., 2009; Morningstar et al., 2018). Rather than defining readiness exclusively through academic achievement or functional skills, participants emphasized the importance of applying acquired competencies in real-life settings and adapting to changing environmental demands. Such findings support contemporary approaches that conceptualize transition readiness as a holistic construct involving academic, social, vocational, and adaptive domains.

Another notable finding was that teachers rejected the notion of a uniform level of readiness among individuals with ASD. Instead, participants emphasized that readiness varies considerably according to individual characteristics, educational experiences, and support opportunities. This observation aligns with previous studies demonstrating substantial heterogeneity in transition outcomes among individuals with ASD and highlighting the importance of individualized transition planning (Wehman et al., 2014; Nuske et al., 2019). The findings therefore reinforce the view that transition services should be tailored to the unique strengths, needs, and aspirations of each individual rather than relying on standardized approaches.

At the same time, many teachers expressed concerns that individuals with ASD may not feel adequately prepared for post-school life. Participants frequently linked insufficient readiness to limitations in self-care skills, daily living competencies, social adaptation, and economic independence. Similar concerns have been documented in previous research, which has reported that many young adults with ASD encounter difficulties in achieving independent living and successful community participation despite years of formal schooling (Shattuck et al., 2012; Roux et al., 2013). These findings suggest that although educational experiences may contribute significantly to skill development, additional supports may be required to facilitate the transfer of these skills to adult life contexts.

Teachers also highlighted the role of family knowledge and involvement in shaping readiness for post-school life. Participants suggested that limited family awareness regarding transition planning may negatively affect preparation for adulthood. This observation is consistent with literature emphasizing the central role of families in transition planning and implementation (Hagner et al., 2012; Morningstar et al., 2018). Families often serve as primary advocates, decision-makers, and support providers during the transition process; therefore, inadequate access to information and resources may limit opportunities for successful post-school outcomes.

Furthermore, participants noted that insufficient support for social development and limited societal acceptance may reduce readiness for adult life. These findings suggest that readiness is influenced not only by individual competencies but also by opportunities for meaningful participation in social and community environments. Previous studies have similarly highlighted the importance of social inclusion, peer relationships, and community engagement in promoting successful transition experiences among individuals with ASD (Anderson et al., 2018; Sosnowy et al., 2018). Consequently, transition readiness may be better understood as a product of both personal development and environmental responsiveness.

Another important observation concerns the perceived inadequacy of formal planning and transition programs. Several teachers argued that limited preparation for post-school life and the absence of systematic transition planning may hinder readiness. This finding is particularly relevant within contexts where transition services are not formally institutionalized. Previous research has consistently emphasized the importance of structured transition planning, interagency collaboration, and coordinated support services in promoting positive adult outcomes (Test et al., 2009; Wehman et al., 2014). The present findings therefore suggest that strengthening formal transition planning processes may contribute to improved readiness for post-school life.

From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, readiness appears to emerge from interactions among individual, familial, educational, and societal systems. Teachers' accounts indicate that readiness cannot be explained solely by personal competencies but is also influenced by the availability of support networks, educational opportunities, family engagement, and social acceptance. This interpretation supports ecological perspectives that view successful transition as the result of coordinated interactions across multiple levels of an individual's environment.

The findings suggest that teachers conceptualize readiness for post-school life as a dynamic and context-dependent process shaped by the interplay of individual abilities, educational experiences, family support, social inclusion, and institutional planning. This perspective contributes to the growing body of research advocating for comprehensive and collaborative approaches to transition preparation for individuals with ASD.

Contributions of School-Based Education to Employment and Social Life

The findings indicated that teachers generally perceived school-based education as making meaningful contributions to the post-school lives of individuals with ASD. Participants frequently emphasized that educational experiences support social participation, communication, self-care, daily living skills, and adaptation to community life. Rather than viewing education solely as a mechanism for academic instruction, teachers described schools as important environments in which students acquire competencies necessary for participation in adult life.

One of the most prominent findings was the perceived contribution of school-based education to social development and social participation. Teachers reported that educational experiences help individuals with ASD improve their communication skills, engage more effectively with others, and participate more actively in social environments. This finding is consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of school-based interventions in promoting social competence, communication skills, and community participation among individuals with ASD (Odom et al., 2010; Lord et al., 2018). The emphasis placed on social outcomes suggests that teachers regard social development as a central component of successful transition preparation.

Participants also highlighted the role of education in fostering self-care, daily living skills, and independent functioning. Teachers described schools as environments where students learn essential life skills that may support greater autonomy in adulthood. Similar findings have been reported in transition literature emphasizing that functional life skills, adaptive behavior, and independent living competencies are among the strongest predictors of successful adult outcomes for individuals with ASD (Wehman et al., 2014; Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). The present findings therefore reinforce the importance of integrating practical life skills instruction into educational programs designed for students with ASD.

Another notable finding concerns teachers' perceptions that educational experiences contribute to students' ability to make sense of and navigate everyday life. Participants suggested that structured educational environments provide opportunities for individuals with ASD to develop confidence, self-expression, and adaptive coping skills. Such observations are consistent with literature suggesting that schools play a significant role not only in academic development but also in supporting broader psychosocial adjustment and participation in adult roles (Hagner et al., 2012).

At the same time, teachers acknowledged that the benefits of education are not experienced equally by all students. Participants frequently emphasized that the effectiveness of school-based education depends on factors such as the quality of instruction, availability of appropriate materials, teacher competence, early intervention opportunities, family involvement, and the individual characteristics of the student. This finding aligns with previous studies demonstrating considerable variability in educational and transition outcomes among individuals with ASD (Nuske et al., 2019; Anderson et al., 2018). Consequently, educational effectiveness appears to be influenced by a combination of individual and contextual factors rather than by educational provision alone.

Importantly, some participants argued that current educational practices may not always provide sufficient preparation for employment and adult life. Although teachers generally acknowledged the positive contributions of schooling, several expressed concerns regarding the limited extent to which school-based learning translates into long-term employment and community participation outcomes. Similar concerns have been documented internationally, where researchers have noted persistent gaps between educational achievement and successful adult outcomes among individuals with ASD (Hedley et al., 2017; Roux et al., 2013). These findings suggest that educational programs may need to place greater emphasis on vocational preparation, community-based experiences, and transition-focused instruction.

From an ecological perspective, teachers' accounts indicate that the contribution of education extends beyond classroom instruction and is closely connected to interactions among schools, families, and community environments. Participants frequently referred to the importance of family involvement, teacher expertise, and environmental supports in determining whether educational gains are maintained and generalized beyond school settings. This observation supports Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes that developmental outcomes emerge through interactions between individuals and the multiple systems surrounding them.

Overall, the findings suggest that teachers perceive school-based education as an important foundation for post-school success among individuals with ASD. However, participants also recognized that educational experiences alone may not be sufficient to ensure successful transition outcomes. Instead, the effectiveness of education appears to depend on its integration with family support, community opportunities, individualized interventions, and broader support systems. These findings highlight the importance of viewing education as one component of a larger ecological network that shapes transition experiences and adult outcomes.

Family Roles and Support Needs in the Transition Process

The findings highlighted the central role of families in supporting the post-school transition of individuals with ASD. Teachers consistently emphasized that successful transition outcomes depend not only on the skills and competencies of the individual but also on the extent to which families actively participate in planning, preparation, and ongoing support processes. Participants viewed families as key stakeholders whose involvement may substantially influence the sustainability of educational gains and the successful adaptation of individuals with ASD to adult life.

One of the most prominent findings was the perception that families play a critical role in fostering independent living skills, social participation, and adaptation to post-school environments. Teachers frequently reported that family support extends beyond emotional encouragement and includes practical guidance, advocacy, supervision, and opportunities for skill development in everyday contexts. This finding is consistent with previous research identifying families as primary facilitators of transition planning and implementation for individuals with ASD (Hagner et al., 2012; Morningstar et al., 2018). The literature similarly emphasizes that family engagement contributes significantly to the development of independent living, vocational, and community participation skills.

Participants also suggested that inadequate family knowledge regarding ASD and transition planning may hinder successful post-school outcomes. Several teachers expressed concerns that some families lack sufficient information about available services, employment opportunities, transition supports, and long-term planning strategies. Similar concerns have been documented in previous studies, which indicate that families often experience uncertainty regarding adult services and future planning following graduation (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011; Sosnowy et al., 2018). These findings suggest that increasing access to family education and transition-related information may enhance the effectiveness of transition preparation efforts.

Another important finding concerns the perceived need for ongoing family involvement beyond the school years. Teachers emphasized that transition should not be viewed as an event occurring at the point of graduation but rather as a continuous process requiring sustained support throughout adulthood. This observation aligns with contemporary transition frameworks that conceptualize transition as a long-term developmental process involving multiple life domains and support systems (Test et al., 2009; Wehman et al., 2014). Participants appeared to recognize that maintaining and

generalizing acquired skills often depends on the continuity of support provided within home and community environments.

The findings further indicated that teachers viewed collaboration between families and schools as an essential component of successful transition planning. Participants suggested that effective communication and shared decision-making between educators and families facilitate more realistic goal setting and more coordinated support strategies. Similar findings have been reported in international transition research, which consistently identifies family–school partnerships as critical predictors of positive post-school outcomes (Morningstar et al., 2018; Hagner et al., 2012). The present findings therefore reinforce the importance of collaborative approaches that actively involve families throughout the transition process.

From an ecological perspective, the role assigned to families by participants reflects the influence of the microsystem and mesosystem on developmental outcomes. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory suggests that interactions between home and school environments play a crucial role in shaping individual development. Teachers' accounts support this interpretation by indicating that readiness, adaptation, and long-term success are influenced not only by individual abilities but also by the quality of interactions among family members, educational settings, and community resources.

Overall, the findings suggest that teachers regard families as indispensable partners in the post-school transition process. Participants emphasized that successful transition outcomes require not only educational interventions but also informed, engaged, and supported families capable of facilitating skill generalization, promoting independence, and advocating for continued opportunities after graduation. These findings further highlight the need for family-centered transition planning and support services that extend beyond the school setting.

Teacher Competencies, Resource Needs, and School–Community Collaboration

The findings revealed that teachers perceived successful post-school transition as requiring not only student-focused interventions but also adequate professional competencies, access to specialized resources, and strong collaboration among schools, families, community organizations, and public institutions. Participants emphasized that their ability to effectively guide individuals with ASD during the transition process depends on the availability of appropriate training, instructional materials, professional support networks, and coordinated community services. These findings suggest that teachers view themselves as important facilitators of transition but also recognize the limitations of working in isolation from broader support systems.

One of the most prominent findings was teachers' expressed need for additional professional development opportunities related to ASD and transition planning. Participants reported a desire for access to current research, specialized training programs, expert consultation, and evidence-based practices that could enhance their capacity to support students beyond the school years. This finding is

consistent with previous studies indicating that educators often feel insufficiently prepared to address the complex demands associated with transition planning and adult-life preparation for students with disabilities (Morningstar et al., 2018; Test et al., 2009). The present findings therefore reinforce the importance of continuous professional development focused specifically on transition services and ASD-related interventions.

Teachers also highlighted the importance of access to appropriate instructional materials, transition programs, and assessment tools. Participants emphasized that visual supports, structured learning materials, individualized teaching resources, and practical transition-oriented programs may facilitate more effective preparation for adulthood. Similar observations have been reported in the special education literature, where evidence-based instructional resources have been identified as important contributors to skill acquisition, independence, and successful transition outcomes (Odom et al., 2010; Wehman et al., 2014). These findings suggest that professional competence alone may be insufficient unless accompanied by adequate material and institutional support.

Another important finding concerns the emphasis placed on family counseling and family–school collaboration resources. Teachers frequently reported that families require guidance, information, and structured support throughout the transition process. This observation is consistent with previous findings highlighting the importance of family-centered approaches in transition planning and implementation (Hagner et al., 2012; Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). Participants appeared to recognize that effective transition support requires not only preparing students but also empowering families to navigate post-school opportunities and challenges.

The findings further revealed the perceived importance of psychological counseling services, social skills training, sensory support resources, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Teachers emphasized that successful transition outcomes often depend on coordinated efforts among educators, counselors, rehabilitation specialists, healthcare professionals, and community service providers. Such observations support previous research advocating for multidisciplinary approaches to transition planning that integrate educational, vocational, social, and health-related supports (Test et al., 2009; Wehman et al., 2014). These findings suggest that transition should be viewed as a collaborative process requiring expertise from multiple professional domains.

A closely related theme involved recommendations for strengthening school–community collaboration. Participants consistently emphasized the need for increased public awareness, stronger family–school–community partnerships, and broader societal support for individuals with ASD. Teachers argued that improving community understanding of ASD could facilitate social inclusion, employment opportunities, and participation in community life. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies demonstrating that community acceptance and social support significantly influence transition experiences and adult outcomes among individuals with ASD (Anderson et al., 2018; Sosnowy et al., 2018).

Teachers also highlighted the importance of institutional coordination and long-term planning mechanisms. Participants recommended the development of community-based support programs, employment initiatives, transition services, and policy frameworks that extend beyond graduation. These observations align with international research emphasizing the importance of interagency collaboration and coordinated transition systems in promoting successful adult outcomes (Morningstar et al., 2018; Wehman et al., 2014). The findings therefore suggest that transition planning should not be confined to educational settings but should involve multiple institutions working toward common goals.

From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, these findings illustrate how transition outcomes are influenced by interactions across multiple ecological levels. Teachers' references to family support, school resources, community awareness, institutional collaboration, and policy development reflect the interconnected nature of the systems surrounding individuals with ASD. Successful transition appears to depend not only on the characteristics of the individual but also on the extent to which these systems operate in a coordinated and supportive manner.

Overall, the findings suggest that teachers perceive effective post-school transition as a shared responsibility requiring professional competence, family engagement, interdisciplinary collaboration, community participation, and institutional support. Participants viewed transition not as a task that can be accomplished solely within the classroom but as a multidimensional process that necessitates coordinated efforts across educational, familial, social, and policy contexts. These findings further support the need for comprehensive transition frameworks that integrate multiple stakeholders and support systems throughout the transition to adulthood.

Interpreting the Findings Through Ecological Systems Theory

The findings of this study can be comprehensively understood through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes that human development is shaped by reciprocal interactions between individuals and the multiple environmental systems in which they are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). Although the theory was not used as a coding framework during data analysis, it provides a useful perspective for interpreting the relationships among the themes that emerged from teachers' accounts of post-school transition experiences.

At the individual level, teachers frequently referred to challenges associated with communication, self-care, independent living, social participation, and adaptive functioning. These findings correspond to the characteristics of the individual and the immediate developmental demands encountered during the transition to adulthood. However, participants consistently emphasized that these individual characteristics alone were insufficient to explain transition outcomes. Rather, the extent to which individuals were able to apply their skills in real-life contexts appeared to depend heavily on the quality of support available within their surrounding environments.

Within the microsystem, teachers highlighted the importance of family involvement, educator support, and direct interpersonal relationships. Participants viewed families as central actors in preparing individuals with ASD for adulthood and maintaining the skills acquired during the school years. Similarly, teachers perceived their own roles as extending beyond academic instruction to include guidance, advocacy, and transition preparation. These findings suggest that interactions occurring within immediate environments play a crucial role in shaping post-school experiences and opportunities.

The findings also underscored the importance of mesosystem interactions, particularly those involving collaboration among schools, families, and community organizations. Teachers repeatedly emphasized that successful transition outcomes depend on coordinated communication and shared responsibilities among these stakeholders. Participants noted that when families, educators, and community agencies work together, individuals with ASD may experience greater continuity of support and more opportunities for successful participation in adult life. Conversely, limited collaboration was often perceived as a factor contributing to difficulties during the transition process.

At the exosystem level, teachers referred to institutional services, employment opportunities, rehabilitation programs, community resources, and support organizations. Many participants emphasized that access to such resources substantially influences transition outcomes despite operating outside the direct control of individuals with ASD. In particular, concerns regarding limited employment opportunities, insufficient support services, and discontinuities between school-based and adult services suggest that broader organizational structures may either facilitate or constrain successful transition experiences.

The influence of the macrosystem was reflected in participants' discussions of social acceptance, public awareness, cultural attitudes toward disability, educational policies, and legal regulations. Teachers frequently expressed concerns regarding societal misconceptions about ASD and insufficient public awareness, suggesting that broader social attitudes may affect opportunities for community participation, employment, and independent living. Participants also highlighted the need for stronger policy frameworks and more systematic transition planning procedures. These findings indicate that transition experiences are shaped not only by immediate support systems but also by broader social and institutional contexts.

Taken together, the findings suggest that post-school transition is best understood as an ecological process involving continuous interactions among individual, familial, educational, community, and societal systems. Teachers did not interpret transition challenges solely as consequences of individual impairments; instead, they consistently referred to the influence of environmental supports, institutional structures, family engagement, and social conditions. This perspective aligns closely with ecological theories of development and supports growing calls within the transition literature for more comprehensive, collaborative, and systems-oriented approaches to supporting individuals with ASD during the transition to adulthood.

Overall, the ecological interpretation of the findings highlights the importance of moving beyond deficit-oriented explanations of transition difficulties and recognizing the complex network of relationships and contextual factors that influence adult outcomes. Such an approach may provide a more comprehensive foundation for developing effective transition policies, educational practices, and support services for individuals with ASD.

Recommendations for Future Resear ch

The findings of this study indicate that the post-school transition process was examined primarily through teachers' professional observations and evaluations. However, because the study was limited to the perspectives of teachers and specialists, future research should adopt a multi-stakeholder approach by including individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), their families, employers, and representatives of organizations providing post-school services. Such studies could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how the post-school transition process is experienced by different stakeholders.

Participants in this study identified various challenges related to social participation, independent living, employment, and institutional support mechanisms during the post-school transition process. However, these findings were based on teachers' observations and interpretations. Therefore, future research should employ longitudinal designs that examine the actual life experiences and transition outcomes of individuals with ASD after graduation. Such studies may provide valuable insights into how skills acquired during the school years are associated with outcomes in adulthood.

The findings of this study are limited to the perspectives of teachers and specialists working in the Southeastern Anatolia Region of Türkiye. Accordingly, comparative studies conducted across different geographical regions may help reveal the influence of regional conditions on post-school transition processes. Furthermore, cross-national comparative research could contribute to a deeper understanding of the cultural and structural dimensions of post-school transition experiences.

Finally, this study focused exclusively on the post-school transition experiences of individuals with ASD. Future research should therefore consider examining and comparing the post-school transition experiences of individuals with other disability groups, including learning disabilities, hearing impairments, visual impairments, intellectual disabilities, and other special educational needs. Such studies may help identify both common and unique needs across different disability populations.

In addition, future research should investigate post-school transition processes within the framework of interactions among individual, familial, social, and institutional factors and seek to develop theoretical models that explain these relationships. Such efforts may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex and multidimensional nature of post-school transition experiences.

Practical and Policy Implications

The findings of this study suggest that teachers do not explain the post-school transition process of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) solely in terms of individual skills and competencies. Rather, participants emphasized the importance of family support, opportunities for social participation, institutional services, and environmental conditions in shaping transition experiences. Teachers also associated challenges encountered during the post-school period not only with individual limitations but also with the coordination and continuity of different support systems. Accordingly, the findings indicate that effective post-school transition planning may benefit from greater collaboration among schools, families, communities, and relevant service providers.

A substantial proportion of participants reported that teachers require additional knowledge, instructional materials, counseling resources, and professional support to guide individuals with ASD more effectively during the transition process. In this regard, the findings suggest that in-service training and professional development opportunities focusing on post-school transition planning, family collaboration, independent living skills, and employment preparation may be beneficial for educational professionals.

In addition, participants frequently highlighted the need for enhanced opportunities related to social participation, vocational education, counseling services, and lifelong support mechanisms. These findings suggest that community-based support programs, vocational training opportunities, family support services, and initiatives specifically targeting post-school transition may represent important areas for future development. However, these implications should be interpreted as stakeholder perspectives derived from teachers' professional observations and evaluations rather than as evidence generated through intervention-based research. Consequently, the findings should be viewed as informing potential directions for practice and policy rather than providing definitive evidence regarding the effectiveness of specific programs or services.

Limitations

This study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the findings are based on the perspectives of teachers and educational professionals working with individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Although participants had direct experience with students with ASD, the study did not require participants to have systematically followed individuals after school completion. Therefore, the findings reflect teachers' professional observations, evaluations, and interpretations rather than the direct post-school experiences of individuals with ASD.

Second, data were collected exclusively through semi-structured interviews. Although this approach provided rich and detailed accounts, the findings were not supported by additional data sources such as observations, document analyses, transition plans, or longitudinal follow-up data. Furthermore, member checking was not conducted, which may be considered a limitation regarding the verification of participants' interpretations.

Third, the study was conducted with teachers and specialists working in the Southeastern Anatolia Region of Türkiye. Regional differences in service availability, institutional support mechanisms, and socio-cultural conditions may have influenced participants' perceptions. Therefore, the transferability of the findings should be considered within contexts that share similar characteristics.

Substantial proportion of participants were early-career professionals. As a result, perceptions regarding post-school transition may have been influenced by participants' professional experience levels. In addition, participants may have been inclined to evaluate their own practices or institutional contexts positively, creating a potential risk of social desirability bias. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted as stakeholder perspectives rather than objective indicators of post-school transition outcomes.

Conclusion

This study explored teachers' perspectives on the post-school transition experiences of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the Southeastern Anatolia Region of Türkiye. The findings suggest that teachers do not perceive post-school transition as a process determined solely by individual characteristics or skill deficits. Instead, participants emphasized the interconnected roles of educational experiences, family involvement, social acceptance, employment opportunities, institutional services, and broader environmental conditions in shaping transition outcomes.

Teachers identified a range of challenges related to social participation, independent living, employment, and access to support services. At the same time, participants acknowledged the positive contributions of school-based education in promoting communication, social interaction, self-care, and daily living skills. However, they also highlighted that the sustainability of these gains beyond graduation depends on the availability of ongoing support from families, communities, and relevant institutions.

The findings further revealed that teachers view successful transition as a collaborative process requiring active family participation, effective school–community partnerships, professional support for educators, and coordinated institutional services. Participants emphasized the importance of transition planning, public awareness, employment opportunities, and long-term support mechanisms that extend beyond the school years.

When interpreted through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the findings indicate that post-school transition is influenced by interactions among individual, familial, educational, community, and societal systems. Teachers consistently referred to factors operating across multiple ecological levels, suggesting that transition outcomes cannot be fully understood through individual characteristics alone. Rather, successful transition appears to depend on the extent to which these systems function in a coordinated and supportive manner.

This study contributes to the growing literature on post-school transition by providing evidence from teachers working with individuals with ASD in Türkiye. The findings support the view that post-school

transition is a multidimensional and context-dependent process that requires collaboration among multiple stakeholders and sustained support across different stages of adulthood.

Declarations

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Data availability

The data are not publicly available due to privacy restrictions. The raw de-identified data may be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding authors.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and the ethical standards governing research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Necmettin Erbakan University (Decision No. 29825, dated 20 February 2026).

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study. All participants were teachers or educational professionals aged 18 years and older; therefore, parental or guardian consent was not required.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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