



Competencies of Teachers of Students with Intellectual Disability in Transition Services: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This literature review examines the competencies of teachers working with students with intellectual disabilities in transition services. It highlights the concept of transition services, their history, and their importance in supporting students' transitions from school to post-secondary life. The paper discusses key elements such as planning for transition services and factors contributing to their success. It explores the professional competencies teachers must possess, including knowledge, skills, and strategies to deliver effective transition services. Additionally, the review analyzes previous studies on teacher competencies, identifying gaps in professional preparation. The discussion concludes with recommendations and suggestions aimed at enhancing teacher training and improving outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities in transition services.

Keywords: transition services, intellectual disabilities, students, teachers, professional competencies.

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Students with Intellectual Disability

Intellectual disability is a condition that garners significant attention from specialists, institutions, and international organizations, as no society is devoid of individuals with intellectual disabilities. In this century, an international agreement was made to eliminate terms like "Mental Deficiency," "Mental Retardation," or "Mental Subnormal," as these terms present a negative perception of this valued segment of society. Instead, the term "Intellectual Disability" was introduced, reflecting a more modern and positive perspective (Motawally, 2015). The professional and academic focus on intellectual disability has led to diverse and varied definitions. From a medical perspective, intellectual disability is defined as a condition resulting from halted or incomplete brain development due to disease, injury before adolescence, or genetic factors. Psychological definitions emerged later, emphasizing the measurement of intelligence quotient (IQ) using various mental capacity scales. Social scientists, however, argue that an individual's ability to earn a living or exhibit acceptable behavior does not necessarily classify them as intellectually disabled, even if they exhibit limited mental capacity. All these viewpoints have enriched scientific research, contributing to a precise definition of intellectual disability (Al-Sartawi et al., 2013).

The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) defines intellectual disability as a condition characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, encompassing many practical daily skills and social abilities. This condition manifests from birth to age 22 (Schalock et al., 2021). This definition is among the most widely adopted. The AAIDD, established nearly 130 years ago, includes a vast number of specialists worldwide. The association has offered numerous definitions over the years, with the most recent revision in 2021. It used the term "Mental Retardation" until 2002 (Al-Sartawi et al., 2013). In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Education's Special Education Organizational Guide (2015) which is identical to the American Association on Intellectual and

Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), which looks at intellectual disability as a noticeable decline in general intelligence during the developmental stage, accompanied by clear deficits in adaptive behavior in at least two areas, such as self-care, home living, social and academic skills, community resource use, self-direction, safety and health, and leisure activities.

Transition Services

Transition services have been defined in various ways. According to Abu Al-Nour and Mohammed (2017), these are services provided to individuals with disabilities to help them achieve financial and social independence after school. This includes vocational training, higher education, independent living, community participation, and lifelong learning. Effective transition requires selecting programs based on eligibility for employment while ensuring coordination and avoiding overlaps in service delivery. Al-Quraini (2013) defines them as activities designed to prepare and equip individuals with disabilities to transition from school to work, independent living, and higher education.

Transition Services

Concept of Transition Services

Defining transition services is crucial as it helps set standards for improving and developing educational policies for such services, implementing them, and evaluating their effectiveness. It also enables measurement of student outcomes based on the defined criteria. Recently, the concept of transition has expanded to encompass lifelong services (Al-Ghoneimi, 2018). While the term “transition services” gained prominence in the United States in the 1980s, earlier terms included “study/work programs” in the early 1970s and “vocational education and development” in the late 1970s (Al-Quraini, 2018).

The concept of transition services has received significant attention from specialists, organizations, and centers, resulting in numerous definitions that generally share the same meaning. For instance, Abu Zaid and Al-Tahami (2018) define transition services as enabling students with disabilities to move from school to post-school life through a range of services aimed at fostering independence, employment, and social integration. Meanwhile, Al-Rais and Al-Zahrani (2014) define them as a set of services planned and implemented by a multidisciplinary team to help students with disabilities identify their goals for life after school, whether in higher education, employment, or social and environmental integration. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) defines transition services as a coordinated set of activities designed for children with disabilities, focusing on improving academic and functional performance based on individual needs, interests, and preferences. These services facilitate transitioning to post-school life, including higher education, vocational training, employment, continuing education, adult education, independent living, and community participation. They encompass education, community experiences, job readiness, postsecondary life goals, life skills acquisition, and vocational assessment.

In the first edition of the **Special Education Organizational Guide (2015)**, transition services are defined as those included in a student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) under the “Transition Plan.” These services aim to prepare individuals with disabilities for transitioning from one educational stage to another, postsecondary education, or employment in general settings. The nature, method, duration, and benefits of these services are determined by those who design the transition plan.

Second: History of Transition Services

Transition services and their programs emerged to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities, equipping them with the necessary skills to transition into a world with demands different from the school system they were accustomed to (Al-Qaryouti, 2005). Additionally, family pressures to find services that prepare their children for post-school life, employment in professions suited to their abilities, living independently, or enrolling in higher education contributed to the rise of such services (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007).

The development of transition services for students with disabilities has gone through multiple stages based on scientific, legislative, and practical foundations aimed at clarifying their objectives. Transition

services are considered one of the indicators of success in the educational system for individuals with disabilities. Since the mid-1970s, U.S. legislation has been among the most prominent in focusing on transition services for these students (Al-Quraini, 2018).

In recent years, transition services for individuals with disabilities have gained significant attention in research, studies, and government policies. This has resulted in the issuance of laws and regulations emphasizing the importance of providing transition services to ensure successful transitions from school to real-world and professional life (Abu Zaid & Al-Tihami, 2018). Legislation in the United States has evolved significantly in this area. In 1965, the Vocational Rehabilitation Act granted students with disabilities access to vocational training programs and later prohibited workplace discrimination against individuals with disabilities. In 1968, the Vocational Education Act extended the right of access to vocational training programs for students with disabilities (Al-Quraini, 2018).

According to Al-Rayes and Al-Zahrani (2014), the fundamental change occurred in 1986 when amendments were made to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), during which the term “transition services” was introduced for the first time. The name of this historic law was subsequently changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which was further developed in subsequent years. The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEIA, 2004) stipulates that transition planning should begin at age 16. It mandates that Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) include post-secondary goals and that the transition plan is collaboratively created by the IEP team.

The law emphasizes that disability is a natural part of human experience and does not diminish individuals’ rights to community participation or contribution. It aims to improve educational outcomes for children with disabilities, ensuring equal opportunities, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. In Saudi Arabia, the concept of transition services was first included in the rules and organizational programs for special education institutes issued by the Ministry of Education (formerly the Ministry of Knowledge) in 2005. By 2015, the first edition of the *Special Education Organizational Guide* addressed the importance of incorporating a transition plan into each student’s IEP. It also specified that the transition services, their method of delivery, and duration should be defined by the transition plan developers. Saudi education has been distinguished by keeping pace with advancements aimed at improving education quality, particularly for students with disabilities. This commitment includes providing comprehensive support and services for all categories of students with disabilities while introducing the latest and most effective scientific practices. Recently, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University established a specialized department for transition services for individuals with disabilities at the master’s level. This department aims to train and qualify specialists. Additionally, courses on transition services have been included in universities such as King Saud University and Imam Muhammad bin Saud University, among others. These initiatives underscore the importance and necessity of this field, demonstrating a commitment to equipping specialists with the tools to implement the best global practices in assisting students with disabilities (Al-Hudhaib, 2020).

Planning for Transition Services

The planning process for transition services occurs individually for each student, following an organized schedule to achieve the expected objectives within the designated timeframe. There are two stages of planning for transition services in an IEP:

1. Stage One: Planning Transition Services at Ages 14-15

At this stage, the IEP team designs significant educational experiences to help students with intellectual disabilities prepare for the transition process by age 14. This includes setting post-school transition goals, assessing the current performance level, identifying long-term and short-term objectives, specifying support services, and coordinating activities (Al-Quraini, 2018).

2. Stage Two: Planning Transition Services at Age 16 and Beyond

According to IDEIA (2004), the IEP must include a transition plan when the student with a disability turns 16. The IEP team must develop measurable, appropriate goals based on the student's strengths, preferences, and needs. Families and students should participate in IEP meetings, ensuring that annual goals and transition services provide the knowledge and skills needed for life after school. Although the process may take time, its ultimate goal is to prepare students for a productive, independent, mature, and fulfilling life (Mazzotti et al., 2009).

To ensure the success of a transition plan, Abu Zaid and Al-Tihami (2018) recommend adopting a person-centered planning approach. This involves collaboration between the transition plan team, the student, and their family. Goals should be set based on the preferences and needs of individuals with disabilities. Family involvement plays a crucial role in the success of the transition plan. Families and students with disabilities should actively participate in decision-making during the IEP and transition planning process, identifying available community programs and services to support students with disabilities post-school. Continuation of the transition planning process beyond school graduation is also essential for long-term success.

Success Factors of Transition Services for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

Below are practices categorized by researchers as contributing to the success of transition services for students with intellectual disabilities:

- Paid and Unpaid Work Experience:

Experiencing paid and unpaid work during secondary school years is a positive indicator of post-school success for individuals with intellectual disabilities in securing employment, mastering job skills, and maintaining long-term job placement (Abu Zaid & Al-Tihami, 2018).

- Active Interagency Collaboration:

It is essential to determine methods of collaboration between community institutions involved in providing transition services, especially those offering post-secondary services. Coordinating these services ensures a focus on enhancing the academic and vocational achievements of students, facilitating their transition, and helping them secure appropriate jobs (Al-Rais & Al-Zahrani, 2014).

- Training on Self-Determination:

Self-determination refers to individuals with intellectual disabilities making decisions about their own lives. It is considered a best practice for supporting these individuals. Enhancing self-determination requires providing them with support, opportunities, and education (Al-Harbi, 2021). The transition team must teach and train students to make their own decisions, safeguard their rights, and advocate for themselves (Khalil & Mustafa, 2017).

- Training on Social Skills:

Social skills are crucial during transition planning for individuals with intellectual disabilities to help them live independently and secure appropriate employment. Social skills foster positive interactions across various environments, including workplaces, schools, and public spaces, thereby aiding independent living (Barakat, 2020).

- Training on Independent Living Skills:

Daily life skills, such as preparing meals, personal hygiene, safety maintenance, and eating habits, are closely linked to the success of transition services for individuals with intellectual disabilities. These skills are essential for obtaining employment and achieving independent living (Khalil & Mustafa, 2017).

- Parental Involvement:

Parental involvement (or that of guardians) plays a critical role in various aspects of transition planning. The success of transition services for individuals with intellectual disabilities is strongly tied to parental support in decision-making and overcoming challenges during the transition process (Al-Rais & Al-Zahrani, 2014).

- Inclusive Education:

Receiving education in mainstream schools enables students with intellectual disabilities to acquire diverse social and academic skills. This fosters successful transitions into post-school life and helps them secure suitable jobs or careers (Abu Zaid & Al-Tihami, 2018).

- Preparation for Employment:

Preparing individuals with disabilities for employment should be integrated into vocational training programs. These programs must provide specialized training to assess job-related skills and align them with students' interests, attitudes, and readiness, enabling them to acquire the necessary professional skills (Khalil & Mustafa, 2017).

Professional Competencies of Teachers for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

The concept of competency emerged in the educational and training field during the 1980s and has since been regarded as a novel concept. Its multiple definitions and characterizations have made it challenging to pinpoint a single definition, leading to its varied interpretations across social and educational contexts (Farahawi, 2011). Linguistically, competency refers to "something that suffices or substitutes for another, differing from *efficiency*, which denotes worthiness and equivalence" (Suleiman, 2011). The term "competencies" is both scientific and colloquial, describing what individuals can understand and do at a high level of proficiency. It is defined as "the ability to perform a task." Teacher competencies encompass the various abilities required to perform their roles effectively. They are composite abilities, including skills, knowledge, and attitudes (Leila, 2018). Teacher competencies are defined as all the positive personal characteristics, attributes, and professional capabilities that enable teachers to perform their roles with a high level of proficiency in the educational process (Al-Anzi, 2022).

The professional competencies of teachers for students with intellectual disabilities are critical in the field of special education. Teachers of students with intellectual disabilities are the cornerstone of the educational and training process, and its success hinges on their preparation and qualifications. According to Arafa (2013), the professional competencies of teachers for students with intellectual disabilities refer to the knowledge and skills necessary for teaching these students. Al-Ajmi and Al-Dosari (2015) define them as the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that teachers acquire during or before service, enabling them to perform their professional tasks efficiently, effectively, and swiftly, both inside and outside the classroom, to achieve educational objectives. Suleiman (2011) expands the definition to include cognitive, professional, emotional, personal, and practical skills that teachers of students with intellectual disabilities must possess. These competencies include fundamental knowledge about individuals with intellectual disabilities, such as diagnosis, theories, behavior modification, evaluation, plan writing, program development, teaching methods, appropriate activities, social skills training, and effective interaction with families. These skills aim to help students with intellectual disabilities develop their abilities and integrate into society.

Studies on the Competencies of Teachers for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

A recent study conducted by Al-Dihani and Al-Haim (2015) aimed to determine the extent to which teachers of students with intellectual disabilities in Kuwait possess teaching competencies in light of the professional practice standards adopted by the Council for Exceptional Children in the United States. The study also sought to identify the impact of variables such as gender, academic qualification, special education qualification, years of experience, and interest in teaching students with intellectual disabilities on the alignment of teacher performance with international competencies. The sample included 200 teachers from all government schools in Kuwait. The study employed a descriptive methodology and used a questionnaire as its tool. The results indicated, a moderate alignment of teacher performance with international standards, high ratings in the areas of classroom management and teaching implementation, and moderate ratings in the areas of planning and assessment. The study recommended focusing on teacher preparation programs, particularly on practical aspects such as classroom management, teaching implementation, and assessment. It also suggested conducting further studies on teaching competencies

aligned with international standards and evaluating the effectiveness of training programs for teachers of students with intellectual disabilities during service.

Another study carried out by Al-Ajmi and Al-Dosari (2015) aimed to explore the reality and importance of professional competencies for teachers of students with intellectual disabilities in Riyadh. Using an analytical descriptive approach, the study utilized a questionnaire and involved 246 teachers working in intellectual education programs within general education schools. The findings showed that teachers rated the availability of professional competencies as moderate across all dimensions of the study, and that all professional competencies were deemed highly important by the teachers. The study recommended providing in-service training programs to enhance professional competencies, improving teacher preparation programs across all aspects, and focusing on curriculum development to advance professional skills.

Al-Shuboul and Al-Qudah (2016) conducted a study that aimed to determine the importance of special education teachers' competencies in assistive technology in Makkah and Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. It also explored the relationship between teachers' perceptions of the importance of these competencies and their possession of them, considering variables such as gender, academic qualification, experience, and training. The study, based on a descriptive methodology, involved 190 teachers of students with intellectual disabilities working in private and government institutions in Jeddah and Makkah. Key findings included that, all assistive technology competencies were deemed important, gender had a statistically significant effect on the importance of competencies in favor of female teachers concerning training, and no significant effect was found for experience or academic qualification. Recommendations included conducting workshops and training sessions in special education centers, staying updated with developments in assistive technology, incorporating these competencies into teacher training programs, and integrating them into specialized university programs.

In a similar area of research, Al-Nahdi et al. (2017) carried out a study that aimed to understand the preparation of special education teachers in light of the competencies required for general and special education teachers and to identify similarities and differences in essential skills. The study involved 156 teachers and used a comparative descriptive methodology. Results showed that a significant overlap between the competencies required for general education teachers and special education teachers, particularly regarding basic knowledge and skills. Results also indicated that there is a need for specialized strategies for special education exceeding those required for other fields; and a minority of teachers viewed Saudi university programs for special education teachers as adequately meeting their needs.

Recommendations included improving the training and qualification of both general and special education teachers.

In 2019, Majoko conducted a study in Zimbabwe's Midlands educational province, this qualitative study aimed to explore teaching competencies from the perspective of teachers of students with disabilities. It involved 24 teachers and used interviews as a data collection tool. Findings revealed that achieving inclusive education requires key competencies such as assessment and evaluation, differentiated instruction, classroom management, and collaborative behavior. The study emphasized the importance of both pre-service and in-service training to equip teachers with the skills needed for effective education, focusing on individual differences among students.

Ahmed's study (2022) aimed to identify the teaching and ethical competencies required for teachers of students with intellectual disabilities, from their perspective. It used an analytical descriptive approach and involved a sample of 40 teachers. Key findings included that statistically significant differences were found in the importance of ethical and teaching competencies, while no significant differences existed in competencies based on gender or years of experience. The study recommended continuous in-service training, regular workshops, and updating university curricula to align with the identified teaching competencies.

Johnson (2014), carried out a study that aimed to examine the perceptions of special education teachers and the quality of their performance of transition competencies to support the transition of high school students to post-secondary education, employment, and independent living, the study population consisted of secondary and special education teachers who work with students suffering from prevalent disabilities, including: (a) specific learning disabilities, (b) behavioral disorders, (c) other health impairments, or (d) language and speech disorders, within a school system in North Georgia. The study sample included 80 teachers who had provided services to students with prevalent disabilities. The study adopted a descriptive approach, using a modified version of the "Morningstar, Benitez & Vree, 2005" transition survey model for secondary teachers as the data collection tool. The results indicated a significant and positive increase in the frequency of performance of competencies within transition planning, with higher performance rates in areas such as cooperation, assessment, educational planning, and transition planning. The results also showed a medium, positive correlation and a statistically significant relationship between teachers' perceptions of performance competence rates in transition planning and educational planning. The findings revealed that there were differences in self-efficacy levels of teachers and their performance rates of transition competencies. Finally, the study recommended several suggestions, the most important of which was conducting surveys at the beginning of the school year to allow timely feedback and planning for continuous improvement.

Alnahdi (2014) conducted a study aimed at understanding the perspectives of special education teachers regarding readiness to provide transition services in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The study sample consisted of 350 teachers, and a descriptive methodology along with a questionnaire was used for data collection. The results revealed negative perceptions about the teachers' ability to provide transition services in preparation programs and no significant differences were attributed to gender or academic qualifications. The study recommended that Saudi universities combine professional competency programs with the development of a local program to enhance teachers' abilities to provide transition services. The study also highlighted the need for in-service training programs for special education teachers on essential skills, such as developing transition plans, prioritizing middle and high school teachers, and expanding training to include all teachers working in special education programs.

In Alnahdi's (2016) study, which aimed to uncover the best practices for activating transition services while considering teachers' perspectives on transition service practices, the study sample included 369 teachers, and the descriptive approach with a questionnaire was used for data collection. The results showed that one of the best transition practices for students with intellectual disabilities was exposing them to practical experiences, vocational training, or both during their high school years. This was considered one of the most critical practices among all the options listed in the study for providing successful transition services. The second most important practice was giving students with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to participate in activities with their typically developing peers. The third level of importance was family involvement in developing the transition plan. The study found that at the fourth and fifth levels, practices related to enhancing decision-making skills and assigning life skills goals to students with intellectual disabilities in middle and high school were equally important. The sixth practice involved providing students with opportunities for independence at school, while the last level of practice was improving students' social skills. The study also revealed that female teachers considered all items more important than male teachers did.

Al-Qahtani and Al-Quraini (2017) conducted a study to assess the level of use of transition plans in individualized education programs for female students with intellectual disabilities from the perspectives of teachers and administrators in intellectual education institutes and intellectual integration programs. The study used a descriptive analytical approach, with a questionnaire as the data collection tool. The study sample consisted of 204 teachers and administrators. The results indicated that the implementation of transition plans in the study community was relatively average, suggesting a lack of inclusion of transition plans within individualized education programs. The results also showed significant differences related to training in transition planning, but no significant differences were found for the variables of job nature, years of experience, or academic qualifications. The study recommended offering training courses and

workshops for teachers and administrators to develop their professional and cognitive skills in transition services.

In Al-Quraini's (2017) study, which aimed to identify the factors influencing the low level of transition services for students with multiple disabilities in Saudi Arabia, the study population included all staff and students in educational institutions for students with multiple disabilities in Saudi Arabia, totaling 426 individuals, with a sample size of 153. The study used a descriptive approach and a questionnaire for data collection. The results revealed that the factors influencing the low level of transition services for students with multiple disabilities were as follows: the lack of professional development programs in this field, weak cooperation between community organizations (both governmental and private), and inadequate teacher preparation in universities, which resulted in low teacher competencies in the area of transition services. The results also found no statistically significant differences attributable to gender, academic qualifications, years of experience, or training related to transition services. The study recommended training and developing staff in transition services and enhancing teacher preparation programs in special education at Saudi universities to support transition services.

Al-Masri (2017) conducted a study to assess the reality of transition services provided to female students with intellectual disabilities in Al-Kharj Governorate. The study population included seven government schools with special education programs for intellectual disabilities, as well as four private centers. The study sample consisted of 95 individuals from all staff working at these schools and centers. The study used a transition services scale and a scale of barriers to providing transition services as data collection tools, employing a descriptive methodology. The results showed that the level of transition services provided to female students with intellectual disabilities in Al-Kharj was moderate, with life skills and independence ranked the highest and career guidance and counseling ranked the lowest. The study recommended developing and integrating transition services programs into early-age curricula and raising awareness among those working with individuals with intellectual disabilities and the community regarding the concept of transition services.

Al-Rammani et al. (2018) conducted a study to assess the transition services for people with intellectual disabilities from the perspectives of parents and teachers working in special education centers in Jordan. The study sample included 99 parents and 101 teachers. The study used a questionnaire as a tool to evaluate transition services for individuals with intellectual disabilities and adopted a descriptive analytical approach. The results indicated that the life skills domain had a high mean score of 3.22, while psychological and emotional services had a lower mean score of 2.97 from the parents' perspective, with a medium evaluation. The vocational training domain had a high mean score of 3.37, while the integration and participation domain had a lower mean score of 3.22 from the teachers' perspective. The study recommended conducting further research on the role of workers and their awareness of the importance of transition services.

Al-Sartawi and Al-Humaidi (2018) conducted a study to evaluate the transition services provided to students with learning disabilities in secondary education programs for girls in Riyadh from the perspectives of students and teachers regarding their importance and types. The study used a descriptive methodology and relied on a questionnaire for data collection. The sample consisted of 123 teachers and students. The results revealed a weakness in the provision of transition services for students with learning disabilities in secondary programs, according to the perspectives of the sample members. The study recommended the need to qualify learning disabilities teachers and raise their awareness of the concept of transition services and train them to build transition plans correctly.

Finally, in Hamada's (2020) study, which aimed to identify the obstacles hindering the implementation of transition services from the perspectives of teachers of students with hearing impairments and intellectual disabilities, as well as to suggest solutions to overcome them, the study population included teachers in special education schools in Qalyubia Governorate, Egypt. The sample consisted of 75 teachers. The study used a questionnaire as a data collection tool and adopted a descriptive analytical approach. The findings showed that the primary obstacles to implementing transition services at the preparatory level were

related to external community factors, followed by family, psychological, and emotional obstacles. These obstacles were found to be statistically significant, while school-related obstacles were next in importance, and vocational training obstacles ranked last. The study recommended raising awareness of the importance of transition services for individuals with disabilities in light of local and international trends, academically and professionally qualifying teachers, and developing cooperation between local community institutions and schools for students with disabilities.

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