

Transition to Kindergarten for Autistic Children: An Exploratory Survey of General Kindergarten Teachers

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How to cite this paper: Tobia, J., & D'Amico, M. (2026). Transition to Kindergarten for Autistic Children: An Exploratory Survey of General Kindergarten Teachers. *Creative Education*, 17, 978-997. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2026.176061>

Received: April 6, 2026

Accepted: June 19, 2026

Published: June 22, 2026

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Abstract

The transition to primary school is a critical milestone that introduces new demands and challenges for children, families, and teachers. Children with disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), are particularly vulnerable during this period, facing distinct and heightened challenges. Effective implementation of transition practices by teachers is essential, as it can significantly improve the transition process and promote positive developmental outcomes for these students. The present study examines the implementation of recommended transition practices for children with ASD by general education teachers, assessing their perceived importance and primary concerns. Nine in-service kindergarten teachers were recruited from a large metropolitan city in Canada. Participants completed the Teachers' Perceptions on Transitions (TPOT) questionnaire to assess their use of transition practices, perceptions of these practices, and concerns regarding the transition to school for children with ASD. The findings revealed significant concerns regarding classroom support, communication, and transition preparation. While teachers acknowledged the importance of various transition practices, their implementation was inconsistent due to barriers in transparency, practical constraints, and parental involvement. This research sheds light on the challenges faced by teachers and highlights critical areas for improvement. The insights offer guidance for educators, schools, and policymakers striving to enhance the educational outcomes and well-being of children with ASD.

Keywords

Transition to School, Transition to Kindergarten, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Special Needs, Teacher Practices

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1. Introduction

The transition to school is a complex and demanding experience for all children, but it is particularly challenging for those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (Connolly & Gersch, 2016; Marsh et al., 2017). In the educational context, “transition” refers to the continuity of experiences that children encounter across different periods and spheres of their lives (Connolly & Gersch, 2016). For young children, two transition points are particularly salient: the move from early intervention or home-based services to preschool around age 3, and the shift from preschool to kindergarten around age 5. The transition to school is a dynamic, ongoing process that begins before a child’s school entry, as families gather information, make placement decisions, and prepare their children for new routines and expectations.

This study is guided by Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) and the ecological and dynamic model of transition (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Bronfenbrenner’s framework conceptualizes the transition to school as an ecological transition, occurring when a child’s role or setting changes, influencing and influenced by multiple systems including family, school, peers, and community (Dockett et al., 2014; Starr et al., 2016). The ecological and dynamic model emphasizes the evolving relationships among these contexts over time and highlights that successful transitions rely on effective systems and collaborative supports, rather than solely on the child’s readiness (Jellinek et al., 2022). Both frameworks underscore that transition outcomes are shaped by interactions among children, families, teachers, and broader environments.

As autistic children increasingly participate in inclusive classrooms alongside their neurotypical peers, the preschool-to-kindergarten transition emerges as a critical milestone. Autistic children often face challenges in social interaction, communication, and the ability to generalize skills across settings (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013), making them especially vulnerable during transitions. These vulnerabilities can increase their risk for emotional and behavioural difficulties, peer rejection, bullying, and even school exclusion (Chen et al., 2020).

A strengths-based approach (SBA) further informs this study. SBA emphasizes leveraging each child’s unique skills and abilities, focusing on growth rather than deficits (Lopez & Louis, 2009; Chen et al., 2020). When applied to transition practices, SBA guides teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to collaborate, recognize family expertise, and individualize supports, thereby fostering positive experiences and enhancing outcomes for children with ASD (Yeager & Deardorff, 2022).

1.1. ASD Prevalence

Worldwide, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that about 1 in 100 children are diagnosed with ASD (WHO, 2026). According to the 2019 Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth (CHSCY), approximately 1 in 40 children

(2.5%) aged 5 to 11 years were diagnosed with ASD (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022). While this remains the latest available Canadian prevalence estimate, it is important to note that our true prevalence is likely closer to recent estimates from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which now report autism prevalence at 1 in 31 children (3.2%) (Autism Alliance of Canada, 2025). Similar to international trends, ASD prevalence in Canada appears to be rising. This growing prevalence underscores the increasing number of children with ASD entering the education system, highlighting the need for intensive and evidence-informed transition supports.

1.2. Transition Practices

Research indicates that the ease with which a child transitions from preschool to kindergarten is influenced, in part, by the strategies employed by educators in collaboration with the child's family. Transition practices can be conceptualized along a continuum of intensity. High-intensity practices are individualized, evidence-informed, and actively implemented with children. These practices include conducting transition meetings and home visits, which require a substantial investment of time and effort to address the individual needs of children, especially those at risk for difficulties (Fontil et al., 2019; Gooden & Rous, 2018). In contrast, low-intensity practices are often generic or group-oriented, requiring minimal individualized effort (e.g., general orientation activities, routine information sharing) (Curby et al., 2018; Gooden & Rous, 2018).

Effective transition practices, particularly high-intensity strategies, begin well before the child physically moves to a new classroom and aims to support individualized needs, reduce anxiety, and enhance engagement (Gooden & Rous, 2018; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Prior studies have shown that when kindergarten teachers implement high-intensity transition practices, it can lead to improved academic outcomes (Schulting et al., 2005). Despite this evidence, high-intensity practices are not widely implemented. Teachers often rely on low-intensity, conventional strategies rather than individualized approaches, limiting the potential benefits for children with ASD (Janus et al., 2007; Lillvist & Wilder, 2017; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Purtell et al., 2020). The variability in the implementation of transition practices is partly due to the barriers that teachers and schools face during the transition process. According to Curby et al. (2018), 95% of teachers reported encountering at least one barrier when attempting to use transition practices. These barriers include resource constraints, training and staffing challenges, organizational obstacles, and complexities in collaborating with parents and other stakeholders.

2. Current Study

Despite the rising prevalence of ASD and the demonstrated benefits of high-intensity transition practices, little is known about how general education teachers

prioritize, implement, and perceive these strategies. The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' use of recommended transition practices, their perceived importance, and their primary concerns. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, the ecological and dynamic model of transition, and a strengths-based approach, this research sought to understand how teachers support children with ASD during the transition to kindergarten.

The following research questions were addressed:

- 1) Implementation: To what extent do general education kindergarten teachers engage in specific transition practices for children with ASD?
- 2) Perceived Importance: How do teachers perceive the importance of such practices?
- 3) Concerns: What are the primary concerns teachers have regarding the transition process for children with ASD?

3. Methods

3.1. Participants and Setting

The sample included nine ($n = 9$) in-service kindergarten teachers from a large metropolitan city in Canada. Participants were recruited between February 1st and April 9th, 2024, from inclusive public elementary schools representing both English ($n = 7$) and French ($n = 2$) school boards. Specifically, general education kindergarten teachers who were actively teaching and possessed a minimum of a bachelor's degree in education were invited to participate. At the time of the study, participating teachers were required to have at least one year of experience teaching students with a formal diagnosis of ASD or those awaiting assessment, whether in current or previous teaching roles. Teachers with special education qualifications or roles were excluded to focus on the experiences of general education teachers.

Recruitment was conducted using purposive sampling, which included snowball sampling through word-of-mouth referrals, outreach to 22 elementary schools in the greater metropolitan area of the city, and engagement with teacher-focused Facebook groups. These recruitment avenues likely accessed teachers who are more actively engaged in professional networks and online educator communities, and who may have a particular interest in inclusive education and transition planning.

3.2. Data Collection

This study employed a cross-sectional descriptive survey design. All procedures were approved by the University Research Ethics Committee (Certificate #30019456). Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained electronically prior to data collection. To protect confidentiality, no identifying information was collected, and survey responses were anonymized and stored on a password-protected server. Following consent, participants received a secure link and password to complete the questionnaire online via Qualtrics. No incentives were provided

for participation.

3.3. Measure

Teachers' perceptions of the transition to kindergarten were assessed using an adapted version of the *Teachers' Perceptions on Transitions* (TPOT) questionnaire (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011). Permission to adapt and use the measure was obtained from the original developer. The original TPOT assesses teachers' involvement in transition practices, perceived importance of these practices, and concerns related to the transition to school. For the present study, the core structure of the TPOT was retained, with adaptations made to ensure relevance for general education kindergarten teachers supporting children with ASD and to maintain child confidentiality. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

The adapted TPOT included 13 commonly used transition preparation activities (e.g., parent contact, transition planning meetings, orientation sessions, and home visits), items assessing teachers' concerns regarding the transition to kindergarten, and open-ended questions capturing additional forms of involvement and perceived barriers to implementing transition practices. Two items from the original measure ("How long have you known this student?" and "How long have you taught this student?") were removed, as the study focused on teachers' general experiences teaching students with ASD within inclusive classroom contexts rather than on a specific student. In addition, certain items were reworded to better reflect the kindergarten transition process and study context (e.g., replacing the transition practice "receive a call from your student's kindergarten teacher" with "receive a call from your student's preschool teacher"). For each transition practice, teachers indicated whether and when the practice was used (e.g., before or after school entry) and rated its importance on a four-point Likert scale (1 = Not important to 4 = Very important). Teacher concerns were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (No Concerns) to 4 (Very Many Concerns). Although formal psychometric properties of the TPOT have not been published, the measure has been used in prior transition research. Given the small sample size, analyses focused on descriptive statistics and qualitative content analysis.

3.4. Data Analysis

The TPOT questionnaire yielded two quantitative scores based on teachers' responses: The Total Teacher Involvement Score and the Overall Concerns Score. Following the scoring procedures specified by Quintero and McIntyre (2011), the Total Teacher Involvement Score was calculated by summing the number of practices reported as used at any time (range = 0 - 13), regardless of differences in timing or intensity across practices. The Overall Concerns Score reflected each teacher's rating of their general level of concern regarding the transition to kindergarten for students with ASD, using a 5-point Likert scale (0 = No Concerns to 4 = Very Many Concerns). In addition to the quantitative analyses, qualitative

content analysis was conducted on the open-ended responses, allowing for the identification of recurring themes, patterns, and contextual details related to teachers' experiences, perceived barriers, and desired forms of involvement in the transition process.

Qualitative data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach to examine processes related to the transition to kindergarten for children with ASD. This methodology allowed theories to emerge organically from participants' experiences, providing insight into processes, actions, and interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Five open-ended items were coded by the primary investigator following established qualitative-coding procedures. First-cycle In Vivo coding was used to capture participants' own language and perspectives, followed by second-cycle Pattern coding to organize codes and identify recurring themes (Saldaña, 2021). An inductive codebook was developed and refined throughout the analysis, and analytic memos documented coding decisions, emerging categories, and theoretical reflections, creating an audit trail and supporting reflexivity (Maxwell, 2013).

4. Results

4.1. Teacher Involvement in Transition Practices

The TPOT questionnaire assessed the transition practices used by kindergarten teachers for students with ASD, including their timing (fall, spring, summer, continual, or not practiced). The most common practices were monthly contact with parents and meetings with the elementary school team, both continually employed by 55.6% of teachers. A considerable proportion of teachers (44.4%) provided ongoing written communication to families, while 33.3% did so only in the spring.

Table 1. Timing and frequency of teachers accompanying autistic students on kindergarten classroom visits.

Practice Timing	Frequency	Percent (%)
Fall	1	11.1
Spring	3	33.3
Summer	1	11.1
Continual	1	11.1
Do not practice	3	33.3
Total	9	100.0

Transition planning meetings with the preschool team and participation in the transition planning team were less frequent, with 55.6% of teachers not engaging in these activities. Phone calls from preschool teachers and home visits for students were also rarely practiced, with 88.9% of teachers reporting no involvement. None of the teachers coordinated curriculum with preschool teachers, and only one (11.1%) reported having a preschool teacher visit the kindergarten classroom.

Involvement in accompanying children on visits to kindergarten classrooms varied widely, with 33.3% of teachers not participating and an equal percentage doing so only in the spring (see **Table 1**). Most teachers (44.4%) accompanied children to their own kindergarten classroom in the spring, while 22.2% did so only in the fall.

The majority of teachers (55.6%) conducted kindergarten orientations for students in the spring, whereas 22.2% did so in the fall. Conversely, 44.4% of teachers held parent orientations in the fall, with 33.3% doing so in the spring.

4.2. Additional Involvement

Five teachers engaged in additional practices to support the transition for children with ASD. These activities included using Special Needs Department resources, implementing staggered school days, administering student questionnaires, liaising with school district consultants, and occasional communication with professionals handling the child's case. Teachers suggested several improvements for the transition process for students with autism. These included increasing resource allocation, incorporating visits from specialists like occupational therapists and speech-language pathologists, and introducing a simplified readiness checklist for parents. They also emphasized the need for better collaboration between preschool and elementary staff to gather comprehensive student background information. Additionally, improved communication between parents and teachers was highlighted to better understand the child's home environment and support needs.

4.3. Total Teacher Involvement Score

The Total Teacher Involvement Score reflects the cumulative number of transition practices used by teachers at any point. Scores range from 0 to 13, with higher values indicating greater involvement. As shown in **Table 2**, the Total Teacher Involvement Score within the sample ranged from 5 to 11, with a mean score of 7.56 (SD = 1.94).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of Total Teacher Involvement Score.

	<i>n</i>	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD	Variance
Total Teacher Involvement Score	9	5	11	7.56	1.944	3.778

4.4. Perceived Importance of Transition Practices

The most crucial practices rated as very important by the majority of teachers included: attending meetings with the school team (77.8%), giving orientation about kindergarten for parents (77.8%), monthly contact with students' parents (66.7%), providing written communication regarding the transition to the family (66.7%), giving orientation about kindergarten to students (66.7%), holding transition planning meetings with the preschool team (55.6%), and accompanying children to their own kindergarten classroom (55.6%).

Accompanying children on visits to a kindergarten classroom in general received mixed ratings, with 44.4% of teachers rating it as very important and another 44.4% rating it as a little important. Participating as a member of the transition planning team was rated as somewhat important by 44.4% of teachers, while 33.3% rated it as very important. Additionally, receiving a phone call from the preschool teacher was considered somewhat important by the majority of teachers (55.6%), while 33.3% rated it as very important.

The least important practices, rated as not important by the majority of teachers, included having a preschool teacher visit the kindergarten classroom (44.4%), working with preschool teachers to coordinate curriculum (44.4%), and completing home visits for students (44.4%). Notably, only one teacher rated completing home visits for students as very important.

4.5. Overall Concerns

The TPOT questionnaire evaluated kindergarten teachers' overall concerns regarding the transition process for children with ASD, generating an Overall Concerns Score ranging from 0 (No Concerns) to 4 (Very Many Concerns). Scores in the sample ranged from 1 (Minimal Concerns) to 4 (Very Many Concerns). Notably, 66.6% of teachers reported having either many or very many concerns, with equal proportions in each category. One teacher (11.1%) reported minimal concerns, and none indicated no concerns (see [Figure 1](#)).

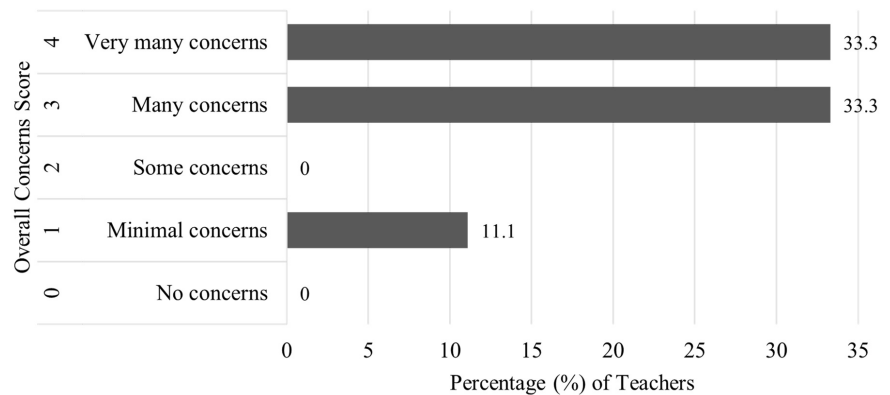


Figure 1. Distribution of overall concerns scores among kindergarten teachers for students with ASD.

4.6. Specific Concerns

Teachers identified three main concerns regarding the transition process for students with ASD: 1) classroom environment, support, and resources; 2) effective communication and collaboration; and 3) transition preparation and support.

4.7. Classroom Environment, Support, and Resources

Teachers expressed various concerns about classroom diversity and the uniqueness of each student. Teacher 3 noted “every child is very different, and this is

true with ASD students as well.” Concerns were also raised about the pace of the transition process, with Teacher 1 articulating “it can be too much too soon for some.” This concern was compounded by overcrowded kindergarten classes, which teachers felt limited their ability to provide adequate support for children with ASD. The suitability of the kindergarten environment for certain types of care was also questioned. Teacher 1 emphasized “kindergarten is not a place to toilet [train] students, nor is it a place to provide individualized care for students with ASD.”

Challenges related to social integration, the length of the school day, and participation of children with ASD in classroom activities were also significant. Teacher 2 stressed, “I am concerned about them getting the support they need to be successful.” Another issue raised by Teacher 9 was that children displaying signs of autism when starting elementary school often lack an official diagnosis, which prevents them from receiving necessary support.

Behaviour management and resource availability were critical issues, particularly given the overwhelming presence of special needs students in public schools. Teachers expressed concerns about how to help children with ASD self-regulate and stressed the importance of receiving comprehensive information about a child’s behavior before school starts. Teacher 5 highlighted the strain on the education system, stating “public schools are overwhelmed with special needs students and there are not enough resources for the students with severe ASD.” The need for resource time was also emphasized by Teacher 7, even for children without a formal diagnosis.

4.8. Effective Communication and Collaboration

Teachers also expressed concerns about potential obstacles related to parental involvement during the transition. Specifically, teachers noted challenges in relying solely on parent observations to address students’ needs. Teacher 5 mentioned the lack of transparency from parents and daycare facilities, while Teacher 4 highlighted the importance of honest and thorough communication with the child’s early childhood education (ECE) program. Additionally, teachers expressed concerns about not receiving adequate background information regarding the child’s preschool and home situation prior to the transition.

4.9. Transition Preparation and Staff Support

Teachers raised several concerns regarding the preparation for the transition and support from staff. They voiced apprehensions about the timing and intensity of transition practices, noting that premature introduction of new routines could overwhelm children with ASD. Teacher 6 stressed the importance of one-on-one time with these students before the school year begins and ensuring their familiarity with the school environment. Teacher 8 also expressed concerns about “having enough support from the school team during the transition process.” Teacher 1 highlighted the inconsistent procedures across the school districts for manda-

tory meetings before children with special needs transition to school. Moreover, teachers expressed the need for a detailed profile of the child's diagnosis, including information on severity, capabilities, and challenges.

4.10. Barriers to Transition Practices

Eight kindergarten teachers identified several barriers hindering the effective transition to school for students with special needs. Three main themes emerged: 1) transparency and communication, 2) practical barriers, and 3) parental involvement.

4.11. Transparency and Communication

Teachers identified transparency and honesty as significant barriers, noting that parents often hesitate to fully disclose their child's difficulties. Teacher 1 noted, "a barrier could be parents not being fully transparent with their child's weaknesses, or perhaps, not being open to accepting their child's situation." The stigma associated with ASD was also mentioned as a hindrance. Teacher 4 expressed:

Parents are often reluctant to be fully open and honest with the school team. There is a fear of judgment or worries that their child will be rejected from our school if they are truly honest about their child's strengths and challenges. In the past, this has set students up for failure as we didn't have a clear picture of their needs and abilities.

Additionally, poor communication and collaboration between parents, elementary schools, and preschools were cited as major barriers.

4.12. Practical Barriers

Teachers noted several practical barriers, including the lack of full-time support for students with ASD. Teacher 8 explained "in the public school system, integration aides are not given full school day hours, leaving the teacher to lose effectiveness in those moments." The presence of other students with "uncoded needs" also "requires a teacher to be spread more thinly amongst the class." Additional practical constraints included limited time, funding, and access to specialists, as well as insufficient training to support students effectively. Teacher 7 mentioned that "depending on the individual needs of the student with ASD (e.g., non-verbal), it can be difficult to understand the effectiveness of each transition practice."

4.13. Parental Involvement

The absence of familial support and uninvolved parents were identified as significant challenges. Teacher 8 noted, "when parents are not involved in their child's education, it takes much longer to learn about the child's needs, thus hindering the ease of transition into the classroom." Teacher 4 stressed the importance of gathering insights from preschool staff to better understand the child's previous experiences and needs, beyond the parents' perspectives.

5. Discussion

5.1. Teacher Involvement in Transition Practices

Addressing the first research question, this section focuses on the extent to which teachers reported engaging in recommended transition practices for children with ASD. Research indicates that effective teacher strategies play a crucial role in the smooth transition from preschool to kindergarten (Denkyirah & Agbeke, 2010; Lillvist & Wilder, 2017; Schischka et al., 2012; Villeneuve et al., 2013). Consistent with ecological perspectives that emphasize the role of relationships and context in child development, teachers' transition practices support children through coordinated efforts across home and school environments. While some teachers demonstrated high involvement in transition practices, others were less engaged, reflecting variability in implementation across the sample.

Teachers frequently engaged in monthly contact with parents and held meetings with the elementary school team, reflecting the literature's emphasis on the importance of effective communication and information sharing with families (Fontil et al., 2019; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Marsh et al., 2017; Schischka et al., 2012; Schulting et al., 2005; Starr et al., 2016; Villeneuve et al., 2013). This finding aligns with research advocating for regular parent contact and supports recommendations for meeting with staff to evaluate children's needs (Gooden & Rous, 2018; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011). Despite this, concerns remained about the adequacy of school team support, suggesting that while meetings were frequent, their effectiveness in addressing teachers' specific needs during transitions may be limited. Nearly 50% of teachers reported providing ongoing written communication to families, reinforcing the importance of maintaining connections before and after kindergarten (Denkyirah & Agbeke, 2010; Gooden & Rous, 2018, Quintero & McIntyre, 2011).

Transitions benefit from strong connections between preschool and kindergarten teachers (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). However, most teachers did not participate in transition planning meetings with preschool teams, highlighting a gap in collaboration across key educational contexts that may influence children's socio-emotional adjustment (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Additionally, more than half of the teachers did not take part in transition planning teams, despite evidence supporting the effectiveness of these meetings (Nuske et al., 2018).

Many teachers did not conduct home visits or make phone calls to preschool teachers, both recommended for individualized support (Gooden & Rous, 2018). While kindergarten orientations were commonly provided, this low-intensity practice may only partially meet the needs of children and families (Fontil et al., 2019). Teachers often preferred low-intensity transition practices, which might be insufficient in addressing the complexities of the transition (Janus et al., 2007; Lillvist & Wilder, 2017; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Purtell et al., 2020). Given the reliance on self-reported practices and perceptions from a small sample, these findings may not fully represent the experiences of all kindergarten teachers.

5.2. Additional Involvement

Beyond standard practices, teachers engaged in various supplementary activities to support transitions for students with ASD. They used transition resources such as social stories and visual schedules, which have proven effective in reducing anxiety and problematic behaviors in children with autism (McDougal et al., 2020; Saad, 2016; Thomas & Karuppali, 2022). To facilitate smoother adjustments, teachers implemented progressive school days and distributed questionnaires to better understand incoming students. They also collaborated with school board consultants and professionals, aligning their efforts with effective transition practices (Schischka et al., 2012). From an ecological and strengths-based perspective, these actions represent teachers' intentional efforts to leverage child strengths while interacting across multiple systems to support development (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003).

5.3. Perceived Importance of Transition Practices

In line with the second research question, this section examines how teachers perceived the importance of various recommended transition practices for children with ASD. Teachers highlighted several key practices for a smooth transition to school. These practices included attending meetings with the school team, providing kindergarten orientation sessions for parents and students, maintaining monthly contact with parents, offering written communication to the family regarding the transition, holding transition planning meetings with the preschool team, and accompanying children to their own kindergarten classroom. These findings are consistent with a review showing that primary school teachers universally support evidence-based transition practices (Marsh et al., 2017).

While teachers generally valued a range of transition practices, it is important to differentiate between high- and low-intensity transition practices. High-intensity practices, which require significant time and effort to address individual needs, were valued alongside low-intensity practices, which are more general (Gooden & Rous, 2018). Teachers frequently highlighted the importance of low-intensity practices like kindergarten orientations, while also valuing high-intensity practices such as maintaining monthly contact with parents and holding transition planning meetings. Notably, some high-intensity practices, such as having a preschool teacher visit the kindergarten classroom or coordinating curriculum with preschool teachers, were rated as less important by several teachers. These practices facilitate interactions across multiple systems (e.g., preschool and kindergarten) that can support individualized adaptation, particularly for children at greater risk for transition-related difficulties (Curby et al., 2018; Schulting et al., 2005).

5.4. Teacher Concerns

5.4.1. Classroom Environment, Support, and Resources

This section directly addresses teachers' primary concerns regarding transitions for children with ASD. Teachers expressed concerns about meeting the diverse

needs of students, especially those with ASD, highlighting the challenges of the transition process and the need for individualized support. Overcrowded classrooms and inadequate resources were noted as major issues, reducing the effectiveness of support (Lopez & Louis, 2009; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). Teachers also raised concerns about social integration, the length of the school day, and the participation of students with ASD in classroom activities. Given the increased risk of emotional and behavioural issues for these students, effective behaviour management and adequate resources are critical (Chen et al., 2020; Dockett et al., 2011; Marsh et al., 2017; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015).

5.4.2. Effective Communication and Collaboration

Successful transition planning relies on strong collaboration among early childhood education programs, schools, families, and communities (Dockett et al., 2014). Teachers noted issues with parental involvement and communication from daycare facilities, which are crucial for successful transitions (Fontil & Petrakos, 2015; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Effective vertical transition planning, which involves the smooth movement of a child from one educational program to another, is essential for a child's future development, as it significantly impacts their social and academic growth (Denkyirah & Agbeke, 2010). The implementation of strengths-based approaches relies on strong communication among stakeholders throughout the transition process (Chen et al., 2020).

5.4.3. Transition Preparation and Support

Teachers expressed concerns about getting to know students before the start of the school year and ensuring their familiarity with the school before they enter. Recognizing transition planning as a gradual, ongoing process is essential (Rous et al., 2007). Teachers emphasized the need for a clear understanding of each child's diagnosis, capabilities, and challenges, as well as a consistent procedure to transition planning meetings. Adopting a strengths-based, holistic, approach to transition planning is crucial for fostering ongoing communication between parents, teachers, and early intervention staff (Chen et al., 2020).

5.4.4. Barriers to Transition Practices

Teachers in the study identified three main obstacles to the implementation of transition practices: transparency and communication, practical barriers, and parental involvement.

5.4.5. Transparency and Communication

Teachers reported that parents' reluctance to fully disclose their child's difficulties significantly hinders the transition process for children with ASD, often due to stigma or fears of rejection. This finding aligns with research by Curby et al. (2018), which revealed that parental beliefs and behaviors can impede kindergarten transitions. Furthermore, discrepancies between family beliefs and educational practices can further complicate effective transitions (Gooden & Rous, 2018). Additionally, limited communication among parents, elementary schools, and pre-

schools hampers “knowledge transfer”, highlighting a gap in understanding between stakeholders (Purtell et al., 2020).

5.5. Practical Barriers

Teachers identified several practical barriers, particularly the absence of full-time support for students with ASD. This issue corresponds with findings from Gooden and Rous (2018), who report that inadequate support services and disruptions in their delivery present significant challenges (Gooden & Rous, 2018). The limited hours allocated to integration aides within the public school system partially contributes to this deficiency in support services. These findings further reinforce previous research indicating that teachers consistently cite staffing challenges and shortages of specialized personnel as obstacles to implementing effective transition practices (Gooden & Rous, 2018). These observations underscore that ecological contexts and systemic factors can influence how transition practices are implemented, without implying causality.

Teachers also cited time and financial limitations as substantial barriers. Insufficient funds for summer preparation and compensation for pre-school year transition work are key issues (Curby et al., 2018; Gooden & Rous, 2018). Additionally, the presence of students with “uncoded needs” in the classroom, who have not yet been formally identified as having special needs, adds to teachers’ challenges by stretching their resources thin. A lack of adequate teacher training to support students with ASD further complicated the transition process, highlighting a gap in teacher readiness for effective transitions (Beamish et al., 2014; Curby et al., 2018).

5.6. Parental Involvement

Teachers expressed concerns about how uninvolved parents affect their ability to understand a child’s needs, which hinders the transition into the classroom. This concern is consistent with previous research showing that teachers frequently identify the lack of communication between schools and parents as a pervasive barrier in the transition process (Beamish et al., 2014; Janus et al., 2007). However, one needs to consider that family communication may also be shaped by stigma, prior school experiences, and system-level constraints. As well, challenges in effective communication and relationship-building may be exacerbated by language barriers and cultural differences in communication styles (Starr et al., 2016). Despite these concerns, teachers frequently engaged in monthly contact with parents, reflecting their proactive efforts to involve parents in the transition process. This suggests that while teachers are striving to engage parents, challenges in achieving effective parental involvement persist.

6. Limitations

The results of this study must be interpreted within the context of several limitations. First, the purposive sampling method limits the external validity of the findings, making them applicable only to the metropolitan city where the study took

place and not necessarily generalizable to the broader Canadian population (Andrade, 2021). The small sample size also limits the ability to draw statistically significant conclusions. Considerations related to data collection methods also warrant attention. For instance, technology requirements (i.e., completing an online survey) may have excluded individuals lacking adequate resources or technological proficiency. The TPOT questionnaire also lacked established psychometric properties, raising concerns about the reliability and validity of the instrument in this specific context. Furthermore, all qualitative analysis was conducted by a single coder, which limits the ability to establish inter-rater reliability.

7. Implications for Research

To enhance our understanding of the transition to school process and address existing gaps in the literature, several key recommendations for future research are proposed. First, future studies should consider using a larger sample size to enable deeper insights and enhance the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, it is recommended to recruit participants from both urban and rural settings to capture a comprehensive range of experiences and challenges across different geographical locations. The current study's participants were mainly from a major metropolitan city, leaving much to learn about the perspectives of teachers in rural communities. Moreover, it is essential to consider the effects of transition practices for children from lower financial means, particularly how these practices act as a moderator between poverty status and child outcomes. Research is needed to explore the transition practices used by teachers in schools situated in communities with higher concentrations of racial/ethnic minorities and poverty. Gaining insight into these dynamics will inform more effective and equitable transition strategies to support all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

8. Implications for Practice

The findings of this study provide important insights into the transition for children with ASD, with implications for teachers, schools, and policymakers. For teachers, transition strategies should be tailored to each child's unique needs, leveraging family strengths. A strengths-based approach, emphasizing continuity and effective communication between previous and new services, is crucial. Teachers are uniquely positioned to lead high-intensity transition practices that require sustained engagement and collaboration. Given the well-established benefits of these practices for children with ASD, their lower perceived importance among teachers is particularly concerning. To address this gap between evidence and practice, **Table 3** outlines key high-intensity transition practices that teachers can implement to better support successful transitions.

Schools can use transition programs to establish meaningful and responsive relationships among children, families, and educators. To address barriers related to limited communication and lack of collaboration, schools should implement

scheduled joint planning meetings, enabling teachers to share information and plan individualized supports. By positioning strengths at the core of transition plans, students with ASD and their families are better positioned to benefit from positive experiences. Ongoing support and resources for teachers, including access to specialists and professional development, are essential to mitigate practical barriers such as insufficient training during the transition process. Schools should also provide workshops for parents with information, coping strategies, and advocacy tips to support them during the transition process.

Table 3. Practical guide to high-intensity practices for children with ASD entering kindergarten.

High-Intensity Practice	When to Implement	Who Is Involved	Practical Implementation Example	Targeted Benefit
Preschool-Kindergarten Teacher Collaboration	Spring prior to school entry	Preschool teacher, kindergarten teacher	Brief structured meeting to review child's profile (strengths, needs, effective supports)	Promotes continuity of expectations and instructional approaches
Preschool Teacher Classroom Visit	Late spring or early fall	Preschool teacher, kindergarten teacher	Preschool teacher visits kindergarten classroom to provide contextual insights	Reduces child anxiety and supports smoother adjustment
Individualized Transition Planning Meetings	Spring before entry	Parents, teachers, school team	Meeting focused on child-specific goals, sensory needs, and transition supports	Ensures individualized planning rather than universal approaches
Ongoing Parent-Teacher Communication	Monthly during transition period	Kindergarten teacher, parents	Scheduled check-ins focused on adjustment, routines, and emerging concerns	Supports consistency between home and school
Individualized Environmental Adaptations	Prior to and during school entry	Kindergarten teacher, support staff	Adjust classroom layout, sensory supports, or schedules based on child profile	Reduces sensory overload and behavioural dysregulation
Targeted Support Coordination	Early fall	School team, professionals/specialists (e.g., school psychologist, speech-language pathologist, resource teacher)	Coordination with special education staff and other professionals to plan supports	Addresses needs proactively rather than reactively

From a policy perspective, clear guidelines and standards for transition practices are needed to ensure consistency. Despite recommendations from the *Ministry of Education (2010)* for effective transition planning spanning at least 12 months, these practices are often not fully implemented. To address gaps in system-level coordination, policies should mandate dedicated transition teams, pre-school year transition planning meetings, and regular communication with parents. Increased government funding is necessary to support these efforts, including compensating staff for pre-school transition work and preparing for children with disabilities during the summer. University-based teacher preparation programs should equip pre-service teachers with the skills needed to ensure effective transitions for children with ASD. It is hoped that the findings from this study will, at the very least, generate a discourse on the importance of investing in spe-

cial education and policies that foster inclusivity in educational settings.

9. Conclusion

The current study explored how general education kindergarten teachers from a metropolitan city in Canada implement transition practices for children with ASD, focusing on their perceived importance and primary concerns. Findings revealed variability in the use of high- and low-intensity practices, the importance of individualized supports, challenges in communication and collaboration, and systemic barriers such as limited staffing and resources. Limitations include a small purposive sample, reliance on self-reports, and use of adapted measures without established psychometrics. The results are descriptive and cannot support causal conclusions, highlighting trends rather than universal patterns.

Key Takeaways:

- Teachers value both low- and high-intensity transition practices, but high-intensity practices are less consistently applied.
- Individualized supports that leverage child and family strengths are critical.
- Strong collaboration and communication among families, schools, and professionals can enhance the transition process.
- Practical and systemic barriers, including staffing, training, and funding, influence implementation.

Implications for Practice:

- Implement individualized transition plans using standardized child profiles, including sensory supports, visual schedules, and classroom layout adjustments.
- Provide professional development and access to specialists so teachers can effectively implement high-intensity transition practices.
- Establish district-level transition teams to coordinate pre-school year planning, ensuring consistent processes across schools.
- Allocate dedicated resources for staff who conduct pre-school transition work and summer preparation activities.

Funding Statement

This research received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards and was approved by the Concordia University Human Research Ethics Committee (Certificate #30019456).

All participants provided informed consent to take part in the study. Participants also provided informed consent for the publication of anonymized data. All identifying information has been removed to ensure confidentiality.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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