

## The Transition Process of a Student with Learning Disabilities from Primary to Secondary Education

### Öğrenme Güçlüğü Olan Bir Öğrencinin İlköğretimden Ortaöğretime Geçiş Süreci

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#### Makale Bilgileri

Geliş Tarihi (Received)

12.05.2025

Kabul Tarihi (Accepted)

23.12.2025

Yayınlanma Tarihi (Published)

06.02.2026

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**Abstract:** Transition services are of critical importance in equipping students with special needs for the future. Students with learning disabilities may experience greater challenges unless they receive specialized assistance. The aim of this study is to understand the challenges faced by a student with learning disabilities and her parent during the transition from primary to secondary education and to provide a framework for developing effective transition strategies. A case study design, one of the qualitative research methods, was adopted for the current study. In the study, which employed a purposive sampling method, the participants were a middle school student with learning disabilities, her parent, and the researcher. The data were gathered through a semi-structured interview form, the researcher's field notes, and document analysis. Descriptive analysis was performed to analyze the research data. The findings illustrated that both the parent and the student with learning disabilities experienced ambiguities during the transition process, felt a lack of guidance in their career choices, and were psychologically exhausted. Furthermore, teachers and families should be encouraged to be more actively involved in the process, and psychological support should be provided. In the context of Türkiye, reviewing legal regulations and shaping educational policies according to the needs of students with learning disabilities is of primary significance.

**Keywords:** Transition, students with learning disability, parents, qualitative research

**Öz:** Özel gereksinimli öğrencilerin geleceğe hazırlanmasında geçiş hizmetleri kritik öneme sahiptir. Öğrenme güçlüğü olan öğrenciler, geçiş sürecinde özel destek almalarında daha fazla zorluk yaşamamaktadır. Bu araştırmanın amacı, öğrenme güçlüğü olan bir öğrencinin ve ebeveyninin ilköğretimden ortaöğretime geçiş döneminde karşılaştıkları zorlukları anlamak ve etkili geçiş stratejileri geliştirmek için bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. Araştırmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden durum çalışması modeli kullanılmıştır. Amaçsal örneklem yönteminin kullanıldığı araştırmada katılımcılar, öğrenme güçlüğü olan bir ortaokul öğrencisi, ebeveyni ve araştırmacıdır. Araştırmanın verileri yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme forma, saha notları ve belge incelemeye yoluyla toplanmıştır. Araştırma verilerinin çözümlemesine ise betimsel analiz ile gerçekleştirilmür. Elde edilen bulgular, ebeveynin ve öğrenme güçlüğü olan öğrencinin geçiş sürecinde belirsizlikler yaşadığı, meslek seçimlerinde yönlendirme eksikliği hissettilerini ve bu süreçte psikolojik olarak yirandıklarını göstermektedir. Ayrıca öğretmenlerin ve ailelerin bu süreçte daha aktif rol alması teşvik edilmeli ve psikolojik destek sağlanmalıdır. Türkiye bağlamında yasal düzenlemelerin gözden geçirilmesi ve eğitim politikalarının öğrenme güçlüğü olan öğrencilerin ihtiyaçlarına göre şekillendirilmesi önem taşımaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Geçiş, öğrenme güçlüğü olan öğrenciler, ebeveyn, nitel araştırma

Türkoğlu-Boyat, G. & Pürsün, T., (2026). The transition process of a student with learning disabilities from primary to secondary education. *Erzincan University Journal of Faculty Education*, 28(2026), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.17556/erziefd.1697874>

#### Giriş

Transition services represent one of the critical areas of focus to ensure that students with special needs, like other students, are adequately prepared for their future lives as independent individuals (Morningstar et al., 2012). Transition is "moving from one place to another" (Bakken & Obiakor, 2008; Sweet et al., 2011). In a sense, there is a process of progression from the known to the unknown (Green, 1997). What is addressed with the transition is the emotional, social, and academic adjustments and changes that accompany it (Waters et al., 2014). It is a comprehensive process that lasts a lifetime and comprises several factors. Education, employment, independent living, and social life are among the primary domains of transition (Pandey & Agarwal, 2013). Despite the challenges in defining a successful transition, it is possible to discuss specific aspects that have been underlined. A number of factors, such as academic achievement, classroom behavior, peer relationships (Anderson et al., 2000), reducing parental anxiety, adaptation to a new school, and adjustment to new routines (Evangelou et al., 2008) are emerging as the essential elements of a successful transition. Within the scope of these factors, the transition process can become a stressful circumstance for students along with diverse impacts

(Chhogyal & Tshering, 2023; Rosenkoetter et al., 2001; West et al., 2010). It can be more complicated, specifically for individuals with special needs, affecting not only academic achievement but also their social, emotional, and psychological adjustment (Carter et al., 2014).

The importance of school and family cooperation, individualized education plans (IEPs), and guidance services for preventing potential difficulties is frequently highlighted (McIntyre et al., 2006). In the United States, transition services are regulated within the framework of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Transition services are defined in the law as "a coordinated set of activities" for individuals with special needs (IDEA, 2004). The same article emphasizes that these activities should be designed based on each child's needs in a personalized way, with regard to their strengths, preferences, and interests. Furthermore, it is also intended to help students with special needs achieve their career and independent living goals, ensuring that they become active citizens of the society they belong to (Bakken & Obiakor, 2008).

Research has illustrated that during the transition process, these students experience similar concerns to their peers with typical development but are subjected to more peer bullying and have low academic self-esteem (Foley et al.,

2016). Some studies have also reported that the anxiety states of students with special needs persist for a long time (e.g., Hughes et al., 2013). In particular, the transition from primary to secondary education can be claimed as one of the most challenging stages in students' educational life due to the changes in several aspects related to the school environment (such as teachers and courses) and the step toward adulthood. Students are likely to encounter problems because of the increased academic demands (Lettrelo & Miles, 2003). The growing number of teachers and the process of learning how to interact with new educators can frequently pose challenges for them. Social acceptance can also be difficult for students in that academic achievement substantially impacts peer relationships. Depending on the difficulties they encounter in academic, social, behavioral, and other domains, students with special needs may experience the expected stress of transitioning to secondary education to a greater extent. Among them, students with learning disabilities (LD) suffer from these difficulties more intensely (Buthelezi & Maseko, 2024; Carter et al., 2010; Smith & Diller, 1999).

These issues signify the importance of preparing transition planning to enable students to gain the knowledge, skills, and self-confidence they need to participate actively in social life and secure their future lives. Indeed, research indicates that even if students with LD have sufficient mental capacity, it may be difficult for them to succeed in the transition process without appropriate support and planning (Nichols et al., 2003). For students with LD to overcome problems and for the stakeholders involved in the process to fulfill their responsibilities, individual transition plans (ITPs) should be designed by integrating them with IEPs (Carter et al., 2009). Nevertheless, with regard to the categories of special education, it is evident that transition planning for students with LD has received less attention (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). Students with LD become better equipped to participate in the workforce and gain independent living and entrepreneurial skills thanks to the vocational training they receive during the transition process (Zainal & Hashim, 2019); however, the inadequacy of work and career programs for adults is considered a significant obstacle that negatively affects these individuals' career preparation during the transition process (Chhogyal & Tshering, 2023).

The fact that students with LD do not have an intellectual disability and are perceived as a group that causes relatively fewer challenges leads to the minimal emphasis placed on their transition planning (Lambie & Milsom, 2010). Another reason contributing to this situation is the legal regulations. For example, providing transition services and planning to individuals with special needs in the United States is a legal obligation within the framework of IDEA (2004). An examination of the legal regulations regarding transition within the context of Türkiye reveals references to the concept of 'transition' and the process of 'transition between grade levels' in the Regulation of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) Special Education Services Regulation dated 2018 (The Ministry of National Education, 2018). However, it does not provide a clear explanation concerning the providers of transition services and the steps involved in the planning. In this respect, it can be declared that there is no systematic arrangement, planning, or legal obligation related to the transition in Türkiye.

Research conducted during the transition process shows that both students with LD and parents are not sufficiently involved in the process. Indeed, the literature indicates that

many students with LD reach high school without even realizing their learning profiles and do not actively participate in transition planning meetings (Nichols et al., 2003; Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Greene, 2017). On the parental side, families' lack of information about the transition process prevents them from interpreting it correctly, which in turn makes it difficult to set goals appropriate to students' individual needs (Gonçalves et al., 2020; Hirano et al., 2018). The success of the transition process, especially for students with LD, is directly related to the proper informing of families and their active participation in the process. However, the failure of schools to establish sufficient and constructive communication with families is a significant shortcoming in this regard. While most families are only informed that their children will leave school at the age of 18, no guidance is provided regarding post-transition options (Ellman et al., 2020). This lack of communication and inadequate planning creates stress, confusion, and uncertainty among parents, leading to the post-school period becoming a traumatic experience (Ellman et al., 2020).

However, successful transition planning requires effective collaboration not only between schools and families, but also between all stakeholders, including community organizations, employers, and special education experts (Zainal & Hashim, 2019). This multi-stakeholder structure will facilitate access to the academic and social support needed by students with LD, enabling them to transition more effectively to independent living after high school. Research conducted during the transition process shows that both students with LD and parents are not sufficiently involved in the process. Indeed, the literature indicates that many students with LD reach high school without even realizing their learning profiles and do not actively participate in transition planning meetings (Nichols et al., 2003; Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Greene, 2017). On the parental side, families' lack of information about the transition process prevents them from interpreting it correctly, which in turn makes it difficult to set goals appropriate to students' individual needs (Gonçalves et al., 2020; Hirano et al., 2018). The success of the transition process, especially for students with LD, is directly related to the proper informing of families and their active participation in the process.

However, the failure of schools to establish sufficient and constructive communication with families is a significant shortcoming in this regard. While most families are only informed that their children will leave school at the age of 18, no guidance is provided regarding post-transition options (Ellman et al., 2020). This lack of communication and inadequate planning creates stress, confusion, and uncertainty among parents, leading to the post-school period becoming a traumatic experience (Ellman et al., 2020). However, successful transition planning requires effective collaboration not only between schools and families, but also between all stakeholders, including community organizations, employers, and special education experts (Zainal & Hashim, 2019). This multi-stakeholder structure will facilitate access to the academic and social support needed by students with LD, enabling them to transition more effectively to independent living after high school.

This research is, thus, believed to be noteworthy since it is expected to fill the knowledge gaps regarding how successful transition planning can be guided by incorporating the views of students with LD and their parents. The transition from primary to secondary education can be challenging for students with LD (Nichols et al., 2003). Considering that this

transition process will also affect students' perspective and success in secondary education, identifying their perceptions of the process and experiences throughout it is of utmost importance. Additionally, since students with learning difficulties are more likely to disengage from school and resist continuing their education due to factors such as underachievement and negative peer relationships, it is essential to specify the gaps in the transition process to secondary education (Harris, 2016).

Another important point that makes this research significant is that studies on transition services for students with LD have largely focused on the transition from secondary to higher education (e.g., Herridge, 2017; Young-Jones, 2023). However, systematic research on early transitions, such as the transition from primary to secondary education for students with LD, is quite limited in the literature. When examined under the heading of special education, it is seen that research on transition services often focuses on individuals with developmental disabilities (Bakkaloglu, 2013; Carter et al., 2014; Fontil et al., 2020; Kutlu & Berk, 2023; Sönmez, 2017). Indeed, studies reveal that students are not sufficiently involved in transition planning (Georgallis, 2015), families do not have sufficient information about the process (Ellman et al., 2020), and effective collaboration among relevant stakeholders cannot be achieved (Zainal & Hashim, 2019). These factors have led to the transition from primary to secondary education becoming a complex process involving not only structural but also psychosocial challenges. Therefore, this study aims to explore the transition process and the expectations of students with LD and their parents. The findings are expected to serve as a guide for promoting secondary school attendance and effectively planning this stage, which plays a pivotal role in the transition to higher education.

## Method

### Research Design

Case study design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used for the current study. It is applied to comprehend a particular situation in-depth and explore the details specific to that situation by analyzing it thoroughly (Creswell, 2005; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Yin (1984) views case studies under four headings: single holistic design, single embedded design, multiple holistic design, and multiple embedded design. The single-case holistic design, involving the examination of a single unit of analysis (an individual, an institution, a school, etc.), is preferred when studying situations that have not been addressed in previous research (YeşilbaşÖzenç, 2022). This research explores the perspectives of a student with LD and her parents regarding the transition from primary to secondary education. As this issue will be examined comprehensively, the single-case holistic design has been selected, given that no prior research has focused on the transition process with regard to LD.

### Research Participants

The purposive sampling method was employed to select the participants of the study. It is a sampling method that contributes to the identification of the targeted phenomenon among the readily accessible participants (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). As this study adopted a single-case design, the purposive selection of one student with LD and her parent was made to enable a holistic and contextually grounded

exploration of their transition experiences. In qualitative case study research, such depth-oriented sampling is particularly valuable, as the rich data obtained from a single case can reveal the underlying dynamics of the transition process more effectively than a broader but less detailed sample (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study's participants are a middle school student diagnosed with LD, the mother of this student, and the first author who interacted with the student during the process. In order to protect the privacy of the participants, the student was assigned the code name 'Deniz,' and her mother was anonymized as 'Mrs. Meral.'

Deniz is a middle school student with LD and a 14-year-old girl. She receives her education in a secondary school in Tokat province with a resource room program. The syllabus she follows in the resource room corresponds to the fourth-grade level, although, in the general education content, she is enrolled in the eighth grade. It is known that Deniz was diagnosed with LD when the difficulties she experienced in reading and writing in the first grade of elementary school persisted in the second grade and the family applied for an evaluation in another city. Deniz, who received her education at a rehabilitation center from the second grade of elementary school to the fourth grade, has started attending resource room instruction since the fourth grade. She has a weekly twelve-hour program within the framework of the resource room. In addition, within the context of the time when the first author collected the research data, she has been supported for four hours a week for about seven months.

Mrs. Meral is 41 years old and a high school graduate. She is married and a housewife with two children. She noticed that Deniz mixed up letters in the first grade and sought help from teachers, but they claimed that it would improve over time, neglecting the struggles Deniz experienced. She is primarily interested in Deniz's education and training process.

### The Researcher

The first author performed the observations and kept field notes during the data collection process. She is pursuing postgraduate education in the field of special education. She established a trusting relationship with the participants within the framework of ethical rules. Attention was paid to the participants' privacy and voluntary participation in the data collection process. During the interviews and observations, she tried to collect in-depth data in a comfortable setting by empathizing with the participants.

### Data Collection Tools and Analysis

The data was gathered via demographic information form, semi-structured interview forms, researcher's field notes, and document analysis related to the process. The researchers designed semi-structured interview forms after reviewing the literature on the subject and creating the theoretical framework (Büyüköztürk et al., 2018). Two different interview forms were developed since interviews were planned with the student and the parent separately. Before the interviews, the student and her mother were informed about the research process, and their consent to participate was obtained. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the student and her parent on different days. They were asked to fill out demographic information forms before the interviews. During the research process, the first author carried out her observations as a participant. This author, who became one of the participants, kept the field notes and carried out document reviews related to the situation. Regarding the data analysis, the researchers

reviewed all the field notes and reviews. Descriptive analysis was performed to analyze the research data. The data obtained according to the conceptual framework determined before the research were summarized, and direct quotations were included to support the accuracy of the findings (Çırak-Kurt, 2018).

### Trustworthiness of the Research

The practices to ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings can be listed as follows. Credibility corresponds to the fact that the data obtained through data collection tools reflect the truth (Merriam, 2013). For credibility within the scope of this research, data triangulation was used by employing the demographic information form, semi-structured interview forms, the researcher's field notes, and document analysis. The first author of the research, who engaged in long-term interactions with the student and her parent, ensured that the participants felt comfortable throughout the interviews. Transferability is realized by providing detailed information about the research (Creswell, 2005). In this sense, the demographic data of the participants and the information about adopting the purposive sampling method were included. Dependability is related to the design of data collection tools and the stages of data collection and analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Thus, the interviews with Deniz and Mrs. Meral were recorded with a voice recorder. After the researchers transcribed the data, it was ensured that another expert confirmed the consistency. Lastly, confirmability was accomplished by sharing the opinions of Deniz and Mrs. Meral with direct quotations from the interviews.

### Findings

Six themes were identified by analyzing the research documents, interviews, and field notes. These themes can be listed as future planning, the transition process to secondary education, exam application, support providers and areas requiring support, predictions, and suggestions regarding the transition to secondary education. Information about the themes and sub-themes are presented in Figure 1.

#### Future Planning

#### Unclear Career Direction

Mrs. Meral reported that long-term planning, such as pursuing a degree at a university, is indefinite due to the challenges

faced up to the current point in their educational journey. Although it is stated as if the decision has been made in the field of gastronomy, it is seen that there are alternative career options with the comments, "You know, something different like computer, nutrition..." Thus, Mrs. Meral stated that they also have no defined plans for high school. These fields were gastronomy, nutrition, and computer. Mrs. Meral seems to have influenced the profession Deniz will pursue in the future based on the opportunities available to her. She expressed, "I mean, we are focusing on gastronomy right now because we have some opportunities... You know, at least to establish a place for her and allow her to continue in that way so that we can help her as long as we are with her." With this statement, it is understood that she is planning to progress in the field of gastronomy with the help of the familiar network and her father's profession. Deniz's "Gastronomy ..." response to the question about the field of study she desires and the researcher's observations also support this finding.

#### Lack of Participation in Planning

Mrs. Meral stated that Deniz does not have a clear plan regarding her educational life. In addition, she said, "We want her to be self-sufficient, to do things alone, and to be capable of handling challenges on her own because we cannot always be there for her." From this statement, it is evident that the family's priority is to help Deniz gain independence. The troubles that Mrs. Meral experienced during the elementary school period led them to leave Deniz on her own, making it difficult for them to plan for the future. Mrs. Meral noted that Deniz remained at the elementary school level due to the challenges faced during elementary school and expressed the necessity of leaving the child to manage independently with the following words: "She is at the elementary school level, so we faced some problems. That is why we are struggling with the recovery process... You know, we hope it will be okay." She also commented that although she decided on gastronomy in secondary education, the syllabus she followed in the resource room did not support her choice. Additionally, based on Deniz's and Mrs. Meral's statements, the researcher's field notes, and document analysis revealed that the school had no plan for the transition to the secondary education process, and the family was unaware of individualized education planning.

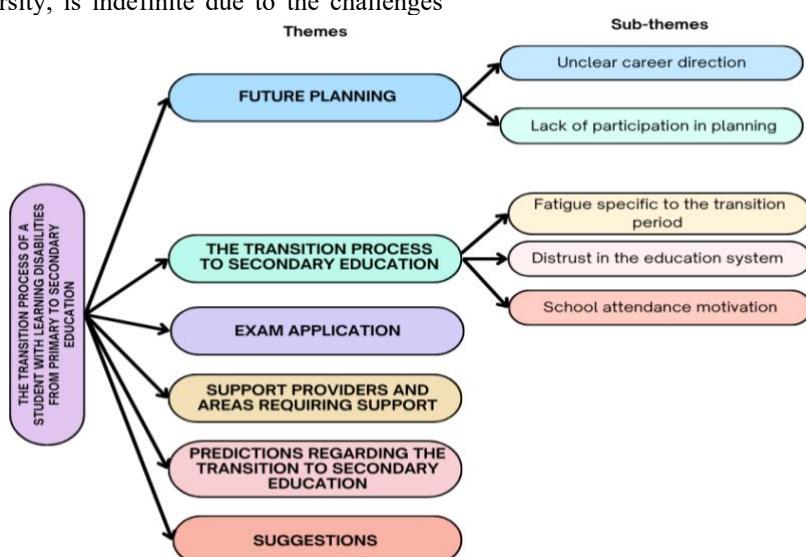


Figure 1. Themes and sub-themes

## The Transition Process to Secondary Education

### Fatigue Specific to The Transition Period

Mrs. Meral pointed out that she has been exhausted and desperate as a result of her struggle with LD since elementary school. She said, "I am very tired. I am sure of it because we had a lot of struggles... In several ways since elementary school... It was so hard to explain this situation [learning disability] to all teachers since elementary school, even to the school counselor..." Additionally, with the statement, "Let it flow. Not everyone has to do something, and it felt like there was always something in front of us, like a barrier... I hope that these children will have more opportunities in the future. It seems a bit difficult here [referring to the province they live in]. Not yet, I mean..." She indicated that not receiving adequate teacher assistance has intensified these feelings.

### Distrust in The Education System

When Mrs. Meral sought assistance from the teachers, her fatigue heightened due to receiving responses as given in her statement, "They placed our child in the second plan, stating that not everyone has to read since elementary school." It was detected that Deniz's exclusion from the general education classroom and being assigned the same tasks and duties in the resource room by constantly focusing on what she could not accomplish heightened Mrs. Meral's feelings of despair and anxiety. She expressed her experiences, "Because she could not read, they constantly insisted on studying multiplication. The child could not do it either..."

Mrs. Meral reported that they did not receive any guidance or planning support from the institution regarding the transition process to secondary education. "We could not get much support, but it is manageable... Since she cannot attend class lessons much, we do not interact much with the teachers in the classroom." She pointed out this statement that they did not receive support either from the resource room teacher or from general education teachers. She quoted her dialogue with the teachers about gastronomy: "Let her step out of the school environment... she can progress through certifications externally. Okay, we'll accept her, but at least she should have a high school or university diploma if she can manage..." Additionally, with the statement, "Let it flow. Not everyone has to do something, and it felt like there was always something in front of us, like a barrier... I hope that these children will have more opportunities in the future. It seems a bit difficult here [referring to the province they live in]. Not yet, I mean..." She indicated that not receiving adequate teacher assistance has intensified these feelings.

### School Attendance Motivation

Mrs. Meral commented about Deniz's transition to high school: "They have never cared about it until now. She thinks she will get through high school the same way, but it will not be like that... she will understand when she starts, which will wear her out." Deniz, on the other hand, described the process she has been going through as "Difficult ..." and "Bad ..." and said, "I think I will not be able to move on to high school." The researcher's field notes are also consistent with the idea that they have experienced emotional ups and downs during the process.

With the statement, "It is better for her not to continue her education than to resent her entire life. Everyone has their own share, their own destiny..." she expressed that she would

prefer Deniz not to continue her education rather than experience psychological distress. Regarding the researcher's observations, difficult experiences in the past support the assumption that the family has concerns about their children's motivation to attend school.

### Exam Application

Mrs. Meral mentioned that Deniz had to handle the exam application and preparations independently, without any support from the institution: "There is no need for her to take the exam. She cannot do much anyway, so we do not want to stress her. They said she could not accomplish much. I visited the Guidance and Research Center (GRC) and obtained a letter for the medical board report so that she could take the exam and experience the excitement and tension of this exam. They did a little for her and gave us the news just two days before the exam [exam application], as we were the ones taking care of the arrangements. Of course, by that point, we had already handled our procedures... because we were informed. They [the school] said they would let us know. We only received the medical board approval report a month and a half later. Had we applied at the start of the application, we probably would not have received it in time"

Mrs. Meral also said that the school had a negative attitude towards Deniz's entrance to the exam, "The school is probably good among middle schools at the moment, I guess...the level or the reputation is fine. I guess it would be low in terms of, well, because she could not do it. They may have perceived it as if the child would lower the level. Last year, she had a couple of friends [with LD] who could not take the exam." Similarly, Deniz conveyed the attitude of her teacher and the school regarding the exam, "My mother told my resource teacher that I wanted to take the exam. He also did not want me to enter, saying I could not do anything in the exam. Then, Mom and Dad came to the school and discussed taking the exam, and they agreed." Mrs. Meral declared, "On that day, I even explained our idea on this gastronomy issue and our plans in this respect. Then they said she did not need to attend high school either. Instead of that, she can get a certificate; there are six-month courses providing certificates. Here, the school counselor also told us that she does not need to attend a high school." Deniz shared her experience regarding the exam application process: "I felt bad. Every day at school, they discouraged me from taking the exam... They kept saying that I could not accomplish anything anyway." The researcher's observations likewise support that Deniz and Mrs. Meral were demotivated constantly and had psychological distress during the process.

### Support Providers and Areas Requiring Support

Mrs. Meral said she would like to receive regular information and feedback on Deniz's education, using the following words: "I would have liked a route to be specified. In this way, a child... We have done this up to now... In the Turkish language, she could read these many words, and now she can read these many... to provide information like you explained to us. Nevertheless, they gave no information in any regard. We keep going, and it is just about multiplication. I have already gotten tired of multiplication." In response to Mrs. Meral's request for external support, the school replied, "Do you have money to waste? The child does not understand anyway. She does not want anything. If you have money to throw away for no reason, then we should just teach more lessons here." Mrs. Meral stated that they received support from experts, "We have

struggled together with you. In Kayseri ..... [she is talking about a non-governmental organization] with the director of the association. We went there and visited him." Deniz expressed those who supported her during the process as "My family and you...". Concerns about the transition to secondary education also drove the family's access to the researcher of this study. The researcher tried to meet the family's needs by providing information and guidance. The researcher's field notes also support all these findings.

### **Predictions Regarding the Transition to Secondary Education**

Mrs. Meral expressed her concern about facing similar challenges during Deniz's transition to secondary education: "I want to move because we will encounter the same issues when transitioning to high school. However, since her father is a tradesman, he cannot close his business immediately... But how much quality education can we get here? In other words, if we face the same problems in high school, I honestly do not feel capable of fighting against them..." Deniz also shared a similar view to her mother, saying, "I do not want to be here." Regarding the school research, she declared, "My sister is searching for it in Ankara. She wants me to study there because there are more opportunities..." The researcher's observations further indicate that the family wishes to live in a province with better resources for Deniz based on the negative experiences they have encountered.

Furthermore, Mrs. Meral foreshadows that Deniz will likely have adaptation problems with her teachers and friends, saying, "At first, it will be a trouble. Because the environment will change, friends will change, and there will be a process of getting used to teachers. The child is someone who takes time to adjust..." and "...until she gets used to it, we will undergo the same things again." This finding is supported by the field notes, where Mrs. Meral repeatedly shared with the researcher that they anticipated a psychologically challenging transition to secondary education, that they would face difficulties, and that Deniz was reluctant to think about the process. In addition, when Deniz reflects on completing secondary education, she expresses what she foresees, "It will be complicated. I do not know anything about eighth grade right now. That is why I will lag behind and be excluded from classes again." When the researcher's document analysis and field notes were examined, it was evident that the resource room program is based on the fourth-grade curriculum, and Deniz is at the fifth-grade level.

### **Suggestions**

Ms. Meral stated, "I wish there were schools for these children. I am sure there are enough students to fill a whole school." She further said, "I mean, just like centers for autism, there should be centers for such children, not excluding them... Other children often exclude them, and they are so cruel." She suggested that Deniz should be engaged individually and that there should be specialized schools. She remarked on the need for special education teachers in the resource room: "If there were special education teachers like you, I am sure these children would be saved." She also suggested that course durations and educational content should be individualized for students with LD. The field notes kept by the researcher as a result of his observations and the content of the resource room syllabus examined within the framework of document analysis also support the notion that there is no individualized planning.

Further, Deniz reported, "They could have started resource room education from elementary school. It could have been better." The researcher's field notes were in line with this in

that though she was diagnosed with LD in the second grade, she started to receive resource room services when she was a fifth grader. In addition, regarding the support during the transition to high school, she said, "They could have searched for schools that I could attend; they could have found one."

### **Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

This research examined the views of a student with LD and her parent on the transition process from primary to secondary education and addressed the challenges faced and solution proposals concerning future planning, the transition process to secondary education, exam application, support providers, and areas where support is needed, predictions and recommendations for transition to secondary education.

The result revealed that during the transition from primary to secondary education, the student with LD and her parents encountered profound uncertainties concerning both the transition process to secondary education and future planning. These uncertainties can be attributed to structural issues, such as the absence of individualized support services and inadequate orientation. The unresolved educational issues dating back to elementary school can be identified as the primary cause of the confusion experienced by the student with LD and her parents. In addition, although the transition process to secondary education will commence following primary education, the fact that the school does not provide any planning or guidance regarding the process is an essential factor that pushes parents into ambiguity. This situation may stem not only from systemic deficiencies in planning, but also from teachers' inadequate training in transition-focused education (Chhogyal & Tshering, 2023). It was discovered that insufficient planning for the transition process may hinder students with LD in achieving their educational, professional, and social goals.

According to another result from the research, the IEP was not applied efficiently during the transition process, and the parents lacked knowledge of IEP preparation and implementation. Recent studies have highlighted similar concerns. In these studies, parents frequently mentioned obstacles such as limited communication with schools and insufficient information about their roles in IEP preparation. This situation hinders genuine participation (Cavendish & Connor, 2018). The effective use of IEPs is defined in the literature as one of the fundamental tools that facilitate the transition process (Carter et al., 2006). Indeed, parental involvement has consistently been identified as a critical factor in ensuring that IEPs reflect students' true needs and desires (Goscicki et al., 2023). However, within the scope of this research, it was found that the absence of parental involvement in the IEP process and the lack of information provided to them caused the student's individual needs to be ignored. This result corroborates other research findings underlining the consequences of a lack of knowledge during the transition process (e.g., Hirano et al., 2018). Furthermore, although there are no legal regulations in the Turkish context specifically for transition planning (MEB, 2018), the mere existence of legal regulations may not be sufficient for planning transition processes (Cheong & Yahya, 2012). Follow-up mechanisms involving the family, school, and other stakeholders, if any, can increase the chances of success in the transition process (Fullarton & Duquette, 2015).

In this context, inadequate guidance services provided during the process have a negative impact on the career choices of students with LD. From the parents' perspective,

the school's and teachers' failure to adequately guide students with LD in their career choices has caused parents to feel alone in this process and to try to choose a career for their children based on their own resources, regardless of their academic success. Shogren and Plotner (2012) state that if transition planning is not sufficiently individualized, students will experience uncertainty when making career decisions. Similarly, Lambie and Milsom (2010) suggest that inadequate career counseling services may limit students' future career choices. The research reveals that the parent prioritized the idea of establishing a workplace that the child with LD could manage and based their decision on the suitability of a single profession (gastronomy). However, the fact that the student was guided without assessing whether they possessed the necessary skills for this career field is a striking finding of the research. In contexts such as Hong Kong, goal-oriented career guidance has been found to be of vital importance for certain students with LD, as it facilitates their transition to higher education or employment (Yau & Yuen, 2020). Additionally, international research indicates that structured and inclusive career guidance systems are critical in preparing young people with disabilities for meaningful employment and social participation (Critten, 2020; Whittenburg et al., 2023).

Another result revealed that the parent faced emotional and psychological distress during the transition to secondary education. Her predominant emotions were found to be fatigue and despair. It can be said that the parent's intense experience of these feelings is caused by her effort to cope alone with the challenges starting from school life. Moreover, it was determined that the transition process caused adverse psychological effects on both the parent and the student. For the parent, this process was characterized as despair, anxiety, and boredom, while for the student, it was difficult and hopeless. It was observed that the constant recurrence of similar types of tasks at school, the failure to evaluate the student's achievement with these tasks, and the exposure to indifferent attitudes have laid the ground for the emergence of negative emotions.

At this point, the parent stated that teachers had adopted an approach of "not everyone has to read." Although it is not known for certain whether teachers directly expressed this sentiment, it can be said that this exclusionary attitude, as perceived by the parent, had a negative impact on the student's emotional world and should be discussed from an ethical perspective. Such statements undermine the right to education for students with LD, increase the risk of stigmatization, and contradict the principles of inclusive education (United Nations, 2006). Therefore, the experience shared by the parent necessitates that low expectations and exclusionary approaches be evaluated not only from a pedagogical perspective but also within a rights-based framework (Oliver, 1990; Florian, 2015). In this sense, a significant finding of the research is that students with LD and their parents have developed negative perceptions regarding further education. Cavendish and Connor (2018) emphasized that the psychological support provided during transition plays a crucial role in adapting students and families.

In the present study, however, it was uncovered that the student and her parents were largely deprived of psychological support. At this point, the necessity of transition planning that will support the parent and the student with LD in having positive thoughts about the future should come to mind. Although transition plans are developed in research, inconsistencies are observed in the topics addressed in the

plans due to the lack of solid collaboration between families and professionals (Ward et al., 2003). Some studies have also shown that parents can play an active and constructive role in transition planning, easing the student's adaptation (Zainal & Hashim, 2019; Grigal & Neubert, 2004). This indicates that the passive role observed in this case is not inevitable but may depend on structural and contextual factors.

The study's results demonstrated that the lack of support they experienced during the exam application and preparation processes is an influential factor leading to loss of motivation in planning educational life. The fact that transition services are a legal obligation in the United States within the scope of IDEA (2004) provides students with substantial advantages in this process. In the case of Malaysia, it has been demonstrated that structured vocational transition programs with clearly defined policy frameworks have led to significant improvements in the educational outcomes of students with LD (Zainal & Hashim, 2019). The absence of similar legal regulations in Turkey indicates that the transition process is not supported at the institutional and structural levels, pointing to a significant gap. Gonçalves et al. (2020) pointed out that the inadequacy of legal regulations may result in educational institutions not fulfilling their responsibilities. It is noteworthy that the school and the teachers exhibited a negative attitude toward the student's exam application, according to the statements of the student and her parent. The second notable issue arising from the parent's views is the suggestion that the student with LD does not need to continue formal education and should instead be directed toward certificate programs. This situation indicates that no effective cooperation and planning existed among the school, teacher, family, and student during the transition process, and the importance of transition planning was not fully comprehended.

Another finding from the study is that parents of children with LD did not receive sufficient information and support regarding their children's educational status. Despite parents requesting information about their children's performance, development, and support needs, the institutions their children attended did not provide satisfactory feedback. This situation is consistent with similar research findings and shows that insufficient inter-institutional cooperation and lack of institutional flexibility hinder effective transition planning (Chhogyal & Tshering, 2023). In addition, it can be said that the lack of information led the parent to seek alternative solutions for their child's education. Indeed, in this study, guidance was provided to parents by the researcher and the interviewed expert rather than the institution responsible for planning the transition process. Carter et al. (2006) also emphasize that transition planning requires the active participation of all stakeholders. In this study, the parent's lack of information and support regarding their child's educational process prevented them from contributing more effectively to the transition process and led to an increase in the problems the student experienced throughout their academic journey.

The research findings also displayed that the parent believes their child with LD will face similar challenges when transitioning to secondary education and that relocating to a different city would facilitate finding solutions to these issues. Furthermore, it was determined that the student with LD underperforms in comparison with her peers in academic performance, struggles to keep up with the course content, anticipates being excluded by her peers once again, and expresses concerns about facing difficulties upon transitioning to secondary education. This pessimism is consistent with

previous studies reporting that negative school experiences and lack of participation in extracurricular activities increase feelings of hopelessness among students with LD (Carter et al., 2010).

This situation indicates that both the parent and the student are rather pessimistic. It can be argued that offering systematic and accurate guidance in transition planning for students with LD, as well as providing support to parents throughout this process, will reduce the burden on both the students and their families. Student-centered transition plans designed for students with LD during the transition process should include self-determination strategies such as expressing their rights and articulating their needs (Cheong & Yahya, 2013). Indeed, for students with LD who often encounter learned helplessness, these strategies can contribute to their feeling more competent and successful, thereby supporting their development of future aspirations. At this point, it is considered important that transition plans for students with LD focus on goals aimed at strengthening self-determination skills.

The research results revealed the imperative need for designing individualized transition plans, improving career counseling services, and providing psychological support during transition. Moreover, encouraging parents and institutions to take a more active role in these processes, along with revisiting legal regulations within the context of Türkiye, will be crucial steps in supporting students' future educational and professional paths. It should also be noted that not only legal regulations but also the necessity of effective monitoring and oversight mechanisms should be addressed (Cheong & Yahya, 2012). The literature shows that when structured transition programs, vocational education, and inter-institutional cooperation are prioritized, students with LD achieve higher levels of educational and employment outcomes (Chhogyal & Tshering, 2023; Harun et al., 2020; Zainal & Hashim, 2019). Therefore, adapting similar practices to the Turkish context could be considered a promising policy direction.

### **Recommendations**

Transition planning for students with LD should be customized according to their individual needs and goals. It is crucial that students, families, teachers, and other stakeholders who can contribute to the transition process proactively participate in the preparation of these plans. Vocational guidance and career counseling services should be provided to students from primary school onwards. These services must assist students in identifying their career goals based on their interests and abilities and in developing plans to achieve these goals. During the transition process, psychological support services for students with LD and their parents need to be increased. It is assumed that these services will help them cope with the stress and anxiety they experience during the process. Teachers should be encouraged to participate in educational programs that will enhance their awareness of the needs of students with LD and enable them to develop solutions to the difficulties they face during the transition process.

In particular, training sessions can be organized on how to incorporate transition-related goals into the IEP preparation process. Parents also need to be informed and supported so that they can take an active role in their children's educational process. Family education programs focusing on the concept of transition can be developed by improving parents' knowledge and skills related to the process through guides and

brochures. Career days can be organized by school administrations to enable parents to participate more effectively in their children's education and career planning, and their participation can be encouraged. Revisiting the legal regulations and policies related to transition planning and the educational processes of students with LD is critical. These regulations should ensure the delivery of educational programs and support services tailored to the individual needs of the students. In addition, a similar study in which the opinions of teachers are taken into account could be recommended for practitioners.

In line with these recommendations, it is likely to improve the transition processes of students with LD from primary to secondary education and minimize the challenges encountered. By means of the cooperation of educational institutions, teachers, families, and other stakeholders, it can be ensured that these students can achieve tremendous success in their academic journeys and develop optimistic plans for the future.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations to this study need to be acknowledged. First, the research is a case study conducted only with a student with LD and a parent. This limited sample significantly restricts the generalizability of the obtained findings. In other words, these findings are valid solely to the participants of this study, and caution must be applied to the applicability to a larger group of students and their parents. The voice of a student with LD was sought to be made visible in the study; however, due to communication limitations, the statements were captured in a brief and concise manner, which partially constrained the depth of the data. Moreover, a single case study may not thoroughly reflect the in-depth and diverse experiences of students with special needs and their parents about the transition process. Given these limitations, it is essential to study with a broader and more eclectic sample in future research to increase the validity and reliability of the findings obtained.

### **Author Contributions**

All authors equally contributed to all stages of the article. All authors have read and approved the final version of the study.

### **Ethical Declaration**

This study was conducted with the approval of the Ethics Committee for Social and Human Sciences Research of Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University (Protocol No. 10.24), granted during the 10th meeting held on 11.06.2024.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with any institution or individual within the scope of this study.

### **Acknowledgments**

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the participants who contributed to this research.

### **Declaration of Generative AI Usage**

ChatGPT was utilized for English language editing during the revision process of this study. The tool was used for the purposes of grammar checking and enhancing text flow. The accuracy of the generated output was verified by the authors, and necessary adjustments were implemented. The authors assume full responsibility for the content of the work.

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