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TRANSITION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES FROM KINDERGARTEN TO PRIMARY SCHOOL: THE IMPORTANCE OF A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS

Abstract: *The transition from kindergarten to primary school for children with disabilities requires a planned and collaborative approach in which parents and educational professionals from preschool and primary school institutions jointly coordinate support and the adaptation of the educational environment, thereby facilitating the child's successful inclusion in the new school environment. This paper aims to provide an overview of current knowledge on the participation of parents of children with disabilities and professionals during the transition period from preschool institutions to primary school, as well as to identify key factors that contribute to a successful transition. All conclusions and recommendations are based on the analysis of relevant literature and legal frameworks, both Croatian and international, as well as on previous research addressing the transition of children with disabilities.*

Keywords: *transition of children with disabilities, parental participation, educational professionals, inclusive educational environment*

INTRODUCTION

The transition period[1] from kindergarten to school represents one of the significant events in a child's life (Visković, 2018). During this period, the child encounters new and different obligations, adapts to a new environment, and becomes acquainted with unfamiliar individuals (Then & Pohlmann-Rother, 2022). In the context of education, transition may be defined as a shift from one position, phase, school, or environment to another (Šenjug Užarević, 2025). The transition from the preschool education system to primary education is not only a challenge for the child but also for parents, whose support plays a crucial role in the prevention and reduction of negative experiences (Curson et al., 2019). Active parental involvement and early contact with future teachers contribute to more positive transition experiences and enhance children's sense of security (Tatalović Vorkapić, 2024).

Children with disabilities and their families experience various types of transitions. According to Kagan and Tarrant (2010), these transitions occur horizontally − referring to changes in programmes throughout the day or week − and vertically, which involve changes in programmes over time or when children require different services. Barnes-Holmes et al. (2013) suggest that such specific experiences may be associated with lower achievement, poorer self-concept, and difficulties in social relationships.

Over the past two decades, both the number and the variety of programmes available to children with disabilities have increased. Recent literature confirms that such diversity can simultaneously provide an additional network of support while also increasing the complexity of coordination, depending on how these programmes are integrated with formal educational systems (McConkey, 2024).

In order to facilitate the transition process for both children and parents, cooperation among families, preschool institutions, schools, and the local community is of paramount importance. This cooperation includes not only the exchange of information but also systematic planning of the transition through organised programmes, structured transfer documentation, and joint meetings of professionals, parents, and children. Such practices ensure continuity of support and the implementation of activities tailored to the needs of each individual child (Degli Esposti & Cigala, 2025). A range of factors influence both the transition experience and the overall development of the child, all of which must be acknowledged, as they are inherently linked to the key stakeholders involved in providing support during transitional periods (Šenjug Užarević, 2025). Recent reviews highlight that socio-emotional support and

[1] In the literature, the process of children moving from one educational level to another is often referred to as a transition. In this paper, the terms "transition" and "transfer" are used as synonyms.

resources available within the local community significantly shape transition experiences (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Tatalović Vorkapić, 2024).

The literature on transition provides evidence of organisational complexities and challenges faced by children, families, and professionals. Review studies emphasise that social preparation and consistent support are essential for successful transitions (Degli Esposti & Cigala, 2025). Previous research suggests that children with disabilities do not necessarily have significantly poorer transition experiences compared to typically developing children (Evangelou et al., 2008); however, they represent a more vulnerable group, and their experiences are more likely to be shaped by specific contextual factors. Emotional and social aspects of transition are equally important as academic demands, and planned preparation and structured activities significantly improve children's adjustment to the school environment (Degli Esposti & Cigala, 2025).

It has been recognised that careful planning of the entire transition period is essential, including the clear definition of roles, specific tasks, and responsibilities, as well as the involvement of all stakeholders. In order to ensure a successful transition from one life stage to another, it is necessary to integrate various factors into a comprehensive transition planning strategy that includes systematic monitoring and support for each individual (Šenjug Užarević, 2025). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that support during the transition period requires a high degree of individualisation, as measures that are effective for one child may be inadequate for another (Šenjug Užarević, 2025), which is particularly relevant for children with disabilities (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010).

This paper aims to provide an overview of existing knowledge regarding the participation of parents of children with disabilities and professionals during the transition period from preschool institutions to primary school, as well as to identify key factors that contribute to successful transitions. The methodology is based on an analysis of relevant literature and legal frameworks (both Croatian and international), as well as previous research focusing on the transition of children with disabilities.

THE CONCEPT AND STATUS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

When discussing the concept and status of children with disabilities within preschool and primary education systems, particularly from the perspective of convention-based obligations, norms, and national legislative frameworks, differences are evident already in the definition of the term "child with disabilities." Following the biopsychosocial model of the World Health Organization, the term "children with developmental disabilities"

refers to a group of children who experience long-term limitations in social participation and interaction with their environment due to physical, mental, or psychological impairments (Then & Pohlmann-Rother, 2022). Based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Croatian Parliament, 2007), the definition of children with disabilities is embedded in Article 1, paragraph 2, as also highlighted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in General Comment No. 9 (Croatian Parliament, 2010), which refers to the general definition of persons with disabilities: ”Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (Croatian Parliament, 2007). It is necessary to emphasise the national context and the issue of the official translation of the term ”persons with disabilities,” and consequently the term ”children with disabilities,” as used in the aforementioned legislation. The translation of the English term ”disabilities” as ”invaliditet” is not consistent with the social model, as also pointed out by the UN Committee (Lisak, 2013). Such translation may imply that these individuals are weak, helpless, or incompetent, which is factually incorrect and contrary to a human rights-based approach and contemporary understandings of the term (Lisak, 2013). These differences in definition and classification often represent the first administrative and practical challenge in ensuring continuity of support for the child during the transition to school.

In Croatian legislation, certain terminological differences are present in defining children with disabilities depending on the education system and the possibilities of exercising rights. In the early and preschool education system, children with disabilities are defined according to the State Pedagogical Standard for Preschool Education (Croatian Parliament, 2008). According to Article 2, paragraph 2, item 4, a child with disabilities is defined as a child with an established type and degree of impairment according to regulations within the social welfare system, who is included in either a regular or specialised educational group within a kindergarten or in a specialised educational institution. The same document (Article 4, paragraph 2) also specifies categories of disabilities, including children with visual impairments, hearing impairments, speech and communication disorders, personality changes caused by organic factors or psychosis, behavioural disorders, motor impairments, intellectual disabilities, autism, multiple disabilities, as well as children with health conditions and neurological impairments (e.g., diabetes, asthma, heart disease, allergies, epilepsy, etc.). In the system of primary and secondary education, students with disabilities are defined by the Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools (Croatian Parliament, 2023). According to this law, students with disabilities include those with developmental disabilities, learning difficulties, behavioural and emotional problems, as well as those

whose difficulties are influenced by educational, social, economic, cultural, and linguistic factors. A more detailed classification of disabilities is provided by the Orientation List of Types of Disabilities, which forms part of the Regulation on the Education of Students with Developmental Disabilities (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2015b). This classification includes visual impairments, hearing impairments, speech-language and communication disorders, and specific learning difficulties, impairments of organs and organ systems, intellectual disabilities, behavioural disorders and mental health impairments, as well as multiple types of developmental difficulties.

A comparison of the aforementioned regulations indicates that similar categories of disabilities are recognised in both preschool and school systems; however, the classification within the school system is more detailed. At the same time, it is evident that legislative and normative frameworks primarily emphasise the identification of the type and degree of a child's difficulties, while considerably less attention is given to the child's strengths, interests, talents, and developmental potential. Such an approach may result in a predominantly deficit-oriented perspective, where the child is defined primarily through their difficulties rather than through their abilities and developmental possibilities.

Although preschool and school institutions share a common educational goal, their legal and curricular frameworks are not fully aligned. The National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2015a) emphasises the importance of continuity in education and highlights the significance of transitions between educational systems; however, it does not prescribe a specific obligation for cooperation between preschool institutions and primary schools in the transition process of children with disabilities. On the other hand, the National Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2017) emphasises that the learning process should take into account individual differences, encourage collaboration, and be based on experiences that foster motivation and active participation of students in the learning process (Somolanji Tokić, 2018b).

TRANSITION FROM PRESCHOOL INSTITUTIONS TO PRIMARY SCHOOL

The most common transition periods encountered by children include the transition from preschool education to primary education, the transition from classroom-based to subject-based teaching, and the transition from primary to secondary education (Perry & Dockett, 2006; Strnadová & Cumming, 2014). The transition period may be defined as a shift or change from one environment to another (Rous & Hallam, 2006; Marković & Alviž Rengel, 2020), referring to changes (Wehmeyer & Webb, 2012) in terms of moving from one form of schooling to another, that is, situations in which the child must be prepared to

acquire new skills. Each transition places very specific demands on children, their family members, and teachers (Strnadová, Cumming & Danker, 2016). Transition is an inevitable part of every child's life (Smolkin, 1999) and that of their family, representing a continuous process of planning, implementation, evaluation, and coordination among all participants involved (Ankeny et al., 2009). Upon enrolment in primary school, both the child and the parents are faced with a new environment, new staff, and different expectations, making transition a particularly sensitive period for students with disabilities (Petani, 2017; Janus et al., 2007; McIntyre et al., 2010; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011).

Transition encompasses a wide range of changes for both children and families, including changes in the support structures that surround them, as support services within the preschool system are replaced by support practices within the school system (Daley et al., 2011). During this process, adequate support for children and families is often not guaranteed (Janus & Siddiqua, 2018). As a result, children with disabilities are more likely to experience difficulties in coping with the transition compared to their typically developing peers (Jiang et al., 2021). Then and Pohlmann-Rother (2022) point out that there is limited information regarding the transition of children with disabilities from preschool to primary education. Existing literature is primarily focused on specific groups of children, such as those with autism spectrum disorders.

In order to structure the research field in a systematic manner, Then and Pohlmann-Rother (2022) propose the development of an inclusive transition model that would serve as a conceptual framework. Based on a broad concept of inclusion, the same authors emphasise the need for a generic model of inclusive transition designed to categorise transitions to school for all children. At the same time, the model can serve as a structural matrix for describing the prerequisites and needs of specific groups of children during transition.

The generic model of inclusive transition is based on an ecosystemic perspective of transition (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It is structured across three key levels:

1. **Individual level** – includes the child and the family/parents, who assume a dual role in the transition process: as recipients of support and as active agents shaping the transition experience (Griebel & Niesel, 2009). According to Albers and Lichtblau (2014), other key actors include the child's peers, educators, teachers, the neighbourhood, and service providers.
2. **Process level** – encompasses all processes that influence the successful course of transition. Five key processes are identified: adaptive support for the child, support and active involvement of the family/parents, peer interaction, (multi)professional collaboration among teachers, and coordination among institutions regarding structural, curricular, and pedagogical-didactic issues.

3. **Societal level** – includes the administrative framework and legal provisions that enable the activation of transition actors. The course and success of inclusive transition processes are influenced by the skills and perspectives of participants (individual level), the processes and interactions among actors (process level), and the broader social framework (societal level). While the societal level provides a general framework, the individual and process levels are interconnected (Then & Pohlmann-Rother, 2022).

Transition brings about changes in the child's identity, learning strategies and forms, changes in family roles, and a reduction in the child's autonomy in making decisions about everyday activities (Visković, 2018; Then & Pohlmann-Rother, 2022). As previously stated, the success of transition largely depends on the quality of communication and cooperation between the school, the family, and the preschool institution (Marković & Alviž Rengel, 2020, according to Griebel & Niesel, 2017). Successful transition is often associated with improvements in the child's academic and functional abilities (Somolanji Tokić & Kretić-Majer, 2015), whereas negative adaptation may result in anxiety, school avoidance, negative attitudes towards school, and difficulties in adjustment (Petani, 2017). Negative transition experiences may have long-term effects on the child's behaviour and academic success (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Pierce & Bruns, 2013).

In order to avoid these negative effects, it is necessary to implement transition planning prior to the transition period itself (Wehman & Targett, 2011; Marković & Alviž Rengel, 2020). It is particularly important for children with disabilities to create an individualised support plan that includes preparation of all participants: staff, peers, parents, and the child (Konkoli Zdešić, 2018; Pećnik, 2013). Transition programmes should begin several months before school enrolment, with one of their key goals being the preparation and support of parents in order to help them prepare the child for school (Pećnik, 2013). Veselinović (2006) identifies various forms of transition practice, such as telephone communication between teachers and parents prior to the start of school, one-day visits of preschool children to the school, shortened classes, joint school visits, parent meetings, and other teacher-led initiatives. It is also important to emphasise that the preschool institution should provide all relevant documentation to the school the child will attend, including reports, opinions, and assessments from previous institutions (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2015b).

Monitoring the child's progress and involving professionals in the transition process is crucial for successful adaptation. The development of a portfolio enables educators and professionals to monitor tasks, goals, and outcomes, as well as to identify the child's strengths and weaknesses (Krampač-Grljušić et al., 2021). An individualised plan is based on the child's potentials, interests,

and strengths, while parents play a key role in providing information about the child's specific characteristics (Clifford, 1999). Research indicates that cooperation between educators, teachers, and families in the development of individualised transition programmes ensures continuity of education and a stable environment for the child (Marković & Alviž Rengel, 2002), while the lack of clearly defined guidelines for cooperation between preschool institutions and schools, as well as the need for curriculum alignment, remain ongoing challenges (Janus et al., 2007; Gallagher, 1999).

COOPERATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS IN THE TRANSITION PERIOD

The concept of cooperation is defined as a lower level of relationship in which communication between participants primarily occurs in situations when difficulties arise. In contrast, a partnership relationship is based on equality among participants, timely and two-way communication, mutual sharing of information, active listening, respect, and shared responsibility among all involved (Jurčević Lozančić et al., 2019). A partnership relationship between preschool institutions and schools, as well as with parents, represents an important factor in achieving a successful transition of children with disabilities from preschool to the school system (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

Cooperation between parents and schools is established with the aim of promoting the holistic development of children and improving their educational and social outcomes (Krampač-Grljušić et al., 2021). Successful cooperation between parents and educational professionals has a positive impact on children's achievements, personal development, and behaviour, and contributes to reducing the stress that parents of children with disabilities are often exposed to (Ljubetić, 2014).

Mutual trust between parents and educational professionals, as well as the exchange of information in the best interest of the child, enables the joint identification of optimal solutions for children with disabilities, for example, when selecting an appropriate school or educational programme. Recent research confirms the importance of such an approach and emphasises that parents are key partners in planning transition processes, as they possess unique knowledge about their child's needs and abilities (Besi et al., 2019; Kangas & Ukkonen-Mikkola, 2021).

As previously emphasised, cooperation is considered essential for creating a supportive and effective environment for children. Drawing on the work of Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000), transition is not viewed as an isolated phenomenon within the child, but rather as a product of dynamic interactions within the mesosystem.

Individual characteristics of the child, including social interest, communicative competence, and intrinsic motivation, may substantially facilitate successful adaptation to novel contexts (Test et al., 2009). Parents, possessing the most intimate understanding of their children's needs, provide essential support, security, and protection, which is particularly critical during periods of transition. The trust cultivated between parent and child exerts a pronounced positive influence on the adaptive process (Dunst et al., 2007).

Although parents serve as pivotal partners within the familial context, transition practices grounded in interprofessional collaboration across educational levels ensure continuity within institutional frameworks (Ahtola et al., 2011). Consequently, in conjunction with the support offered by parents as primary caregivers (Milanović et al., 2000), a comprehensive and integrated support network emerges within the child's environment, thereby mitigating potential challenges associated with the transition from early childhood to primary education.

The significance of a collaborative partnership between parents and educational professionals is further corroborated by contemporary research in the domain of inclusive education. Hyassat et al. (2024) demonstrate that educators in specialized settings regard parental engagement as a critical determinant of successful inclusive practice, emphasizing that systematic communication and collaborative involvement with parents enhance understanding of the educational needs of students with disabilities.

Besi et al. (2019) identify parental trust in educational practitioners, perceptions of school and learning efficacy, and the provision of adaptive support to the child as the principal determinants of successful transitional experiences. Within the conceptual framework of the bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007), children's adaptation to extrafamilial systems entails substantial transformations in identity, role expectations, and interpersonal relationships. Empirical evidence indicates that the central factors underpinning successful transition encompass parental trust in teachers, parents' perception of the educational process, and active support during the child's adaptation to novel circumstances (Besi et al., 2019).

The National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education (Ministry of Science, Education, and Sports, 2015a) posits that the precondition for effective interaction among educational stakeholders is the readiness of all participants to engage in reciprocal cooperation and active participation. This encompasses the establishment of a robust partnership between preschool institutions and families, timely and transparent communication, information exchange, and the empowerment of parents in their parenting role. High-quality collaboration between educational institutions and parents manifests through systematic dissemination of information, reinforcement and facilitation of parental agency, recognition and accommodation of the unique needs of both parents

and children, and parental inclusion in shared decision-making processes concerning children's developmental, academic, and social engagement within peer contexts (Ministry of Science, Education, and Sports, 2015a).

The broader transition experience is also contingent upon the structural and resource provisions of the educational system. This encompasses the establishment of appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks, alongside the allocation of material and human resources necessary to support transitions. The operationalization of inclusive education principles necessitates recognition of diversity and the acceptance of all learners, coupled with systemic readiness to implement adaptive measures and provide individualized support (UNESCO, 2009). In this regard, the Strategy for Education, Science, and Technology (Ministry of Social Policy and Youth of the Republic of Croatia, 2014) underscores the imperative of systematic attention to the needs of children and their parents, as well as the essentiality of inter-institutional collaboration across the educational system.

In numerous international contexts, various models of institutional support for families have been established, including family support centers. These centers operate within local communities and guide parents regarding the upbringing and educational development of their children (Milanović et al., 2000). Their objectives include the cultivation of parental competencies and knowledge, promotion of parental motivation for active engagement in educational processes, and facilitation of self-directed learning and confidence-building among parents (Milanović et al., 2000). Such centers exemplify collaborative networks encompassing diverse institutions, including preschools, schools, public health agencies, rehabilitation centers, and civil society organizations (Brahm & Bowling, 2009).

CHALLENGES IN COOPERATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

Despite the recognized importance of collaboration for the successful transition of children with disabilities, various barriers frequently emerge in practice. One such barrier is the lack of communication between early childhood professionals and primary school teachers (Clifford, 1999; Somolanji Tokić, 2018a).

Parents often assume excessive responsibility for transmitting information between different systems, which can be stressful and suboptimal (Janus et al., 2007; Janus & Siddiqua, 2018). Limitations in time and resources may further impede the planning and implementation of effective inter-institutional collaboration (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011). Additionally, parents sometimes encounter restricted participation in decision-making and a lack of feedback regarding their child's progress (Janus et al., 2007). Similar obstacles have been

identified in more recent studies of transitional processes. Ain (2025) notes that parents of children with autism spectrum disorder often demonstrate strong interest in participating in transition planning but are insufficiently involved in decision-making processes. Key barriers include inadequate communication between parents and schools, lack of information, and limited opportunities for engagement in planning educational services.

A systematic review of the literature on parental experiences during the transition to school demonstrates that the quality of communication between parents and professionals significantly influences the overall transitional experience, parental satisfaction, and sense of security during the process of change (Morawska et al., 2024). Outcomes for children with disabilities improve when teachers, early childhood educators, parents, and the local community actively collaborate and jointly plan the transition period (Kohler et al., 2017).

Theoretical models of collaboration and support networks are not merely abstract constructs but have direct practical application. A lack of coordination and timely information exchange among preschools, schools, and parents may result in children with disabilities failing to receive optimal support. Consequently, understanding partnership structures, the roles of parents and professionals, and the establishment of support networks is critical for ensuring a successful transition from preschool to primary school (Soodak & Erwin, 1995; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

The document National Strategy for the Rights of Children in the Republic of Croatia for the Period 2014–2020 identifies as strategic objectives the improvement of the education system and the provision of services tailored to children's needs, while promoting their active participation (Ministry of Social Policy and Youth of the Republic of Croatia, 2014). Although educational policy objectives are clearly defined, their implementation in practice is often challenged by various obstacles within the educational system. Particularly, difficulties arise in establishing effective collaboration among educational stakeholders, especially when working with children with disabilities. Such difficulties stem from differences in the competencies of professionals involved in child education, as well as from insufficient communication among professionals directly engaged in the educational process, most notably between preschool educators and primary school teachers (Clifford, 1999; Somolanji Tokić, 2018a).

Research indicates that outcomes for students with disabilities improve when teachers, families, and community members collaborate to implement a comprehensive approach to transition planning, which subsequently informs the development of educational programs for students (Kohler et al., 2017). International studies (Jiang et al., 2021; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012; McIntyre et al., 2007) emphasize that children participating in early childhood education

programs develop stronger relationships with teachers and exhibit fewer behavioral difficulties upon school entry. Jiang et al. (2021) further highlight that children with disabilities, particularly those with language impairments and learning difficulties, experience the greatest challenges in adapting to educational demands and organizational skills, although individualized educational programs and teacher support facilitate the transition process.

In the Republic of Croatia, when transitioning from preschool to the formal school system, it is often necessary to determine an appropriate educational program for the child, yet schools frequently lack critical information from preschools. This deficiency in timely information exchange complicates the planning of suitable support for the child in the new educational environment. In practice, parents of children with disabilities are often the sole source of information for the primary school, which can heighten their stress and sense of responsibility (Janus et al., 2007).

Parents of children with disabilities identify four primary challenges encountered when their child begins primary school: lack of communication with the school, limited participation in educational decision-making, a perception of not being welcomed at school, and insufficient knowledge of the child's progress (Janus et al., 2007; Janus & Siddiqua, 2018). These findings underscore the importance of systematically developing communication and partnership frameworks between families and educational institutions. Some of these challenges can be addressed through timely collaboration between preschool and primary school institutions, with active parental involvement in school communication. Continuous information exchange between institutions can contribute to a better understanding of the child's needs and enable more effective planning of educational support. Conversely, a lack of collaboration and communication may result in the child being unnecessarily subjected to repeated assessments, which can be a source of stress.

Research confirms that parents wish to participate in transition activities from preschool to primary school and consider such activities beneficial, regardless of whether their children have disabilities (Janus et al., 2007). Conversely, studies (Marković & Alviž Rengel, 2020; Morawska et al., 2024) indicate that parents often experience the transition process as stressful and insufficiently supported, particularly when they are not involved in planning or decision-making regarding educational programs.

Čudina-Obradović (2008) emphasizes the necessity of educating parents to prepare their children for school from early childhood, promoting continuous professional development for staff, increasing the number of educators, establishing shared criteria for school readiness assessment with educational institutions, and fostering collaboration with parents and first-grade teachers.

The literature further highlights the importance of continuous alignment of preschool and primary school curricula and work plans, positive relationships

among children, families, and professionals, and sustained partnerships between families, educational institutions, and the local community (Kagan & Tarrant, 2010; Pierce & Bruns, 2013; Petani, 2017; Ravenscroft et al., 2017; Lu & Li, 2025; Vukašinović et al., 2025).

REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON THE TRANSITION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

As previously emphasized, a review of the available literature and legal frameworks indicates a misalignment between the early and preschool education system and primary education. In the Republic of Croatia, the collaboration among preschool institutions, the local community, and parents is not clearly defined (Marković & Alviž Rengel, 2020), and the lack of alignment between preschool and primary school curricula complicates the provision of a smooth transition for children with disabilities.

Existing legal frameworks and pedagogical literature confirm the systematic misalignment between preschool education and primary education, representing a challenge to the continuity and quality of educational support. The absence of clear guidelines for collaboration among parents, local communities, and educational institutions (Marković & Alviž Rengel, 2020), as well as uncoordinated curricula, renders school transition particularly challenging for children. Family and preschool constitute critical systems in early childhood, where the child grows, develops, and fulfills basic needs; therefore, these two systems should be integrated into a clearly defined and continuous collaborative framework (Marković & Alviž Rengel, 2020).

Research by Kudek Mirošević and Jurčević Lozančić (2014) highlights significant differences in attitudes toward inclusion between preschool educators and primary school teachers; educators generally hold more favorable views regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education compared to teachers. In line with a holistic approach, it is necessary to redefine the roles of all professionals and introduce systematic changes to their training to foster a genuine and effective inclusion process (Marković & Alviž Rengel, 2020).

Systematic literature analyses indicate that parents often experience the transition from preschool to school as stressful and insufficiently supported, particularly when they are not involved in planning and decision-making regarding educational programs (Morawska et al., 2024). Studies emphasize the importance of practical support strategies and professional collaboration with families, especially for children with intellectual disabilities (Kushwaha, 2025). Although theoretical models (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) stress collaboration, in practice, parents often feel excluded, which hinders the effectiveness of transitional processes (Krampač-Grljušić et al., 2020).

The need for stronger, coordinated support during the transition period is evident in the experiences of both parents and professionals. In the absence of a monitoring system, transition planning requires a long-term and structured approach (Šenjug Užarević, 2025). Coordinated support—including teachers, peers, families, and the broader community—contributes to long-term positive outcomes (Riches, 1996; Kohler et al., 2017).

Soodak and Erwin (1995) note that parents frequently feel alienated and marginalized by teachers and professionals who exclude them from decision-making. This is corroborated by Krampač-Grljušić et al. (2020), as illustrated by one mother's statement: "The state is not inclined to help either children or parents of children with special needs, nor to include them in programs that are necessary. (…) When we enrolled our son in school, a doctor determined the educational program." This testimony underscores the importance of parental involvement in the transition process and highlights the significance of a partnership between families and educational professionals. Systematic and coordinated collaboration enables parents to be recognized as partners, reducing stress and enhancing the effectiveness of inclusive practices. Families must have the right to choose services provided to the child and participate in decisions regarding the scope of these services (McWilliam, 1999; cited in Roll-Pettersson, 2001). Contemporary approaches to support emphasize the leading role of families in selecting interventions and determining the intensity of services, which is often diminished when the child enters school.

The mother further states: "No one asked for our opinion regarding the model of education. The commission decided on the program. It is very rigid. Children are placed into two or three molds, without considering their current abilities or what distinguishes them. (…) I think the education system still does not adapt to the capabilities of children with disabilities" (Krampač-Grljušić et al., 2020).

A study conducted in Croatia compared the characteristics of children transitioning from preschool to school based on the assessments of preschool parents and first-grade parents. Results indicate that preschool parents statistically significantly rated their children as more prepared for school compared to parents of first graders (Veselinović, 2006), suggesting insufficient parental awareness of school requirements and potential challenges that become evident only upon school entry (Petani, 2017).

Research involving parents who have undergone the transition process highlights the need for more intensive collaboration and a clearer legal framework (Konkoli Zdešić, 2018). These findings align with literature indicating that teachers perceive insufficient involvement of preschool institutions and the local community in the transition process (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011). The isolation of key stakeholders and the lack of intersectoral collaboration create an institutional gap that hinders the continuity of support,

underscoring the need to redefine transitional practices toward a comprehensive and legally grounded partnership (Subhan, 2025).

The connection between the quality of transition and children's subsequent socio-emotional adjustment emphasizes the importance of a proactive approach (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012). Children who participate in early education programs establish stronger relationships with teachers, positioning institutional support as a foundation for their well-being. Parents' desire for detailed information and active involvement in planning (McIntyre et al., 2007; Petani, 2017) should not be viewed merely as a preference but as an untapped resource for creating a stable environment for the child.

Jiang et al. (2021) conducted a study with a sample of 801 children, including children with disabilities and typically developing children, monitoring adaptation during transition. The study focused on friendship formation, adherence to routines and rules, adaptation to educational demands, participation in group activities, and development of organizational skills. Children exhibited the greatest difficulties in meeting educational demands and developing organizational skills, and difficulties in one area increased risks in others. Individualized educational programs and teacher support facilitate transition; however, it remains a stressful process requiring collaboration (Jiang et al., 2021; Šenjug Užarević, 2025).

The literature identifies three key areas for successful transition: (a) continuous alignment of preschool and school curricula and work plans; (b) positive relationships among the child, family, and professionals; and (c) partnership between families, preschool institutions, schools, and the community (Kagan & Tarrant, 2010; Pierce & Bruns, 2013; Petani, 2017). Consistent policies and practices for primary school teachers are necessary to improve understanding of parents and children during the transition period (Lu & Li, 2025).

A lack of collaboration and communication between preschools and schools often results in parents assuming the role of intermediary, increasing stress and complicating transition (Janus et al., 2007; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011). The "two-way connectivity" strategy emphasizes the necessity of collaboration between preschool and school to ensure a smooth transition. This policy shift confirms that successful transition is not solely the child's responsibility but a joint endeavor of the family, educational institutions, and the broader community (Lu & Li, 2025).

Recent studies indicate that barriers to parental involvement in transition activities often stem from institutional constraints, including a lack of structured procedures and communication channels (Then & Pohlmann-Rother, 2023; Ain, 2025). Children who participate in early education programs exhibit lower levels of behavioral difficulties and develop better relationships with teachers upon school entry (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012). Individualized educational plans facilitate transition, yet the process remains stressful, highlighting the

need for systematic collaboration strategies (Jiang et al., 2021; Hyassat et al., 2024; Ain, 2025).

Based on reviewer recommendations, there is an emphasized need for systematic involvement of parents, preschool institutions, and schools in joint transition planning, the implementation of individualized support plans and strategies that reduce stress and support children's developmental needs, and the establishment of clearer legal frameworks and procedures that enable more effective collaboration among all participants in the process.

CONCLUSION

Since the enactment of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006, the educational trajectory of children with disabilities has increasingly become a focus of public attention and research (Then & Pohlmann-Rother, 2022). Although research exists, the perspectives of the children themselves, as well as broader social and organizational conditions affecting their transition from preschool to primary school, are rarely examined. A successful transition requires systematic planning, enhanced collaboration among professionals, parents, and the local community, as well as the active involvement of children. Clear procedures and an organized framework enable a more inclusive educational pathway and increase the autonomy of both children and families (Heslop & Abbott, 2007). Research indicates that a well-organized transition positively influences children's educational achievements and psychophysical development. Further studies are necessary to understand the impact of transition on family dynamics and the long-term success of the child.

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