



THE IMPACT OF TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMS ON THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION OF FEMALE STUDENTS WITH PARTIAL PHYSICAL DISABILITIES AND LIMITED COGNITIVE ABILITIES IN THE BEDOUIN COMMUNITY IN SOUTHERN ISRAEL

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Abstract:

Transition from school to adulthood represents one of the most critical stages in the lives of individuals with disabilities. Effective transition programs are designed to promote independence, vocational readiness, and successful community participation. This study explores the impact of transition programs and educational activities implemented in special education schools on developing independence and readiness for future life among female graduates with disabilities in the Bedouin community in southern Israel. The study employed an interpretive qualitative research design to explore participants' lived experiences and perceptions of the transition services they received during their school years. Fifteen female graduates with disabilities participated in the study. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, followed by snowball sampling to recruit additional participants with similar characteristics. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach. The findings indicate that transition programs contributed to the development of several essential life skills, including computer literacy, reading and writing skills, responsibility, and basic decision-making abilities. However, participants also reported significant challenges, including limited opportunities for practical vocational training, insufficient educational and technological resources, inadequate post-school transition services, and sociocultural barriers associated with the unique characteristics of the Bedouin community. Participants emphasized the importance of comprehensive, continuous, and employment-oriented transition programs that promote independence and long-term empowerment. The study concludes that transition services in special education require further development to address the specific needs of female students with disabilities within culturally diverse communities. Strengthening collaboration among schools, families, community organizations, and vocational service providers is essential for facilitating successful transitions to adulthood and improving future life outcomes.

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1. Introduction

The transition from school to adulthood represents one of the most critical developmental stages in the lives of individuals with disabilities. During this period, students are expected to acquire the academic, social, vocational, and independent living skills necessary for successful participation in society. Consequently, transition programs have become a fundamental component of special education services, aiming to prepare students for post-secondary education, vocational training, competitive employment, independent living, and community participation through individualized and coordinated planning (Morningstar & Clavenna-Deane, 2018; Hanafi & Bin Hameed, 2021).

Over the past two decades, increasing international attention has been directed toward improving transition services in response to the global movement advocating for equal opportunities and social inclusion for individuals with disabilities. Previous studies have demonstrated that effective transition programs rely on comprehensive planning, collaboration among schools, families, rehabilitation agencies, and employers, as well as individualized support tailored to students' strengths and future aspirations (Department of Health, 2006; Wehman *et al.*, 2018; Bhatt, 2019).

Contemporary research further emphasizes that successful transition should not be evaluated solely by employment outcomes. Rather, it should also be assessed by individuals' ability to develop independence, make informed decisions, communicate effectively, solve everyday problems, and actively participate in social and economic life. These competencies contribute significantly to long-term quality of life and personal empowerment for individuals with disabilities (Spyridakou *et al.*, 2019; Batorowicz *et al.*, 2025).

Despite these international advances, implementing effective transition programs remains challenging in culturally and socially distinctive communities. One such context is the Bedouin community in southern Israel, where educational opportunities, vocational services, and community resources are influenced by geographical, socioeconomic, and cultural conditions. Women with disabilities, in particular, often experience multiple layers of disadvantage arising from the interaction between disability, gender, and conservative social norms (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2008; Azaiza & Cohen, 2010; Zoabi & Fuller, 2024).

Existing evidence suggests that individuals with disabilities within the Bedouin community continue to encounter barriers including limited rehabilitation services, inadequate vocational training opportunities, insufficient specialized institutions, transportation difficulties, and persistent social stigma surrounding disability. These challenges substantially reduce opportunities for independent living and successful

employment following graduation (Barlev *et al.*, 2021; Israeli Ministry of Education, 2020; Tirosh *et al.*, 2023).

The situation becomes even more complex for female students with physical disabilities accompanied by mild cognitive limitations. Their successful transition to adulthood requires educational and vocational programs that not only address functional and professional skills but also consider the cultural characteristics of the Bedouin community. Previous studies indicate that transition models developed in other social contexts may have limited effectiveness when cultural factors are not adequately incorporated into program design and implementation (Altory, 2017; Abu-Saad *et al.*, 2017).

Although transition programs have received considerable attention in international research, relatively few studies have explored the lived experiences of women with disabilities in Arab communities, and even fewer have focused specifically on the Bedouin community in southern Israel. Moreover, qualitative research investigating participants' own perspectives regarding transition experiences remains scarce. This lack of evidence represents an important research gap that limits understanding of how transition services function within culturally unique environments (Al-Quraini, 2013; Hanafi & Bin Hameed, 2021; Batorowicz *et al.*, 2025).

Accordingly, the present study aims to explore the impact of transition programs on developing independence and readiness for future life among female graduates with disabilities in the Bedouin community of southern Israel. By examining participants' lived experiences, the study seeks to identify both the facilitating factors and the barriers influencing successful transition to adulthood. The findings are expected to contribute to improving transition services, informing educational and rehabilitation policies, and supporting culturally responsive practices that promote greater independence and social inclusion for women with disabilities.

2. Research Questions

The present study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How do female graduates with disabilities perceive the contribution of transition programs to developing their independence and readiness for adult life?
- 2) What educational, vocational, and life skills were acquired through the transition programs offered in special education schools?
- 3) What barriers and facilitating factors influenced the effectiveness of transition programs within the Bedouin community?
- 4) How can transition programs be improved to better support the future independence and social inclusion of female students with disabilities?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Transition Programs in Special Education

Transition programs have become a central component of contemporary special education services, reflecting a global shift toward supporting students with disabilities beyond academic achievement and facilitating their successful transition into adulthood. Transition is defined as a coordinated, student-centered process that prepares individuals with disabilities for postsecondary education, vocational training, employment, independent living, and active participation in society through comprehensive and individualized planning (Morningstar & Clavenna-Deane, 2018).

The literature consistently emphasizes that effective transition planning extends beyond vocational preparation. Instead, it involves the development of individualized transition plans based on students' strengths, interests, preferences, and future aspirations while actively involving families, teachers, rehabilitation professionals, employers, and community organizations throughout the planning process. Such collaborative planning has been identified as one of the strongest predictors of successful transition outcomes (Department of Health, 2006; Bhatt, 2019).

According to Wehman *et al.* (2018), successful transition programs should begin several years before graduation rather than after students leave school. Early planning allows students to gradually develop vocational competencies, independent living skills, and social relationships while participating in authentic work experiences. Their findings demonstrate that students who receive community-based vocational training are more likely to obtain employment and maintain long-term workplace stability than those whose training is limited to classroom-based activities.

Similarly, Hanafi and Bin Hameed (2021) argue that transition programs serve as the bridge between formal education and vocational rehabilitation. Their effectiveness depends on individualized program design that considers disability type, personal abilities, family circumstances, and sociocultural context. The authors further emphasize that vocational preparation alone is insufficient if independent living and social participation skills are neglected.

Within the Arab context, Al-Quraini (2013) reports that transition services continue to face numerous challenges, including delayed transition planning, weak coordination among educational and rehabilitation institutions, limited vocational opportunities, and shortages of qualified professionals. These shortcomings reduce the likelihood of successful employment and independent living following graduation.

More recently, Batorowicz *et al.* (2025) emphasized that successful transition outcomes should not be measured solely by employment status but also by the development of self-determination, communication, problem-solving, daily living, and decision-making skills. Their review highlights the importance of recognizing individuals with disabilities as active participants in planning their own futures rather than passive recipients of educational services.

Overall, previous research demonstrates that transition programs represent a continuous and comprehensive educational process that begins well before graduation and depends on coordinated efforts among schools, families, rehabilitation agencies, and employers. Successful programs promote independence, community participation, and sustainable employment opportunities, providing the conceptual foundation for the present study.

2.2 Independence and Empowerment in Transition Programs

Promoting independence and empowerment has become one of the primary objectives of transition programs for individuals with disabilities. Contemporary approaches recognize that successful transition extends beyond securing employment after graduation to include individuals' ability to manage daily life, make independent decisions, participate actively in their communities, and assume personal responsibility according to their abilities and aspirations. This perspective reflects a broader shift from deficit-oriented models of disability toward approaches that emphasize personal capabilities while addressing environmental and societal barriers that restrict participation (Bhatt, 2019; Batorowicz *et al.*, 2025).

The literature describes independence as a multidimensional construct encompassing a wide range of life and social skills rather than a single competency. These skills include time management, financial literacy, transportation use, interpersonal communication, problem-solving, decision-making, and self-care. Morningstar and Clavenna-Deane (2018) argue that effective transition planning should introduce these competencies early in students' educational experiences and integrate them into individualized transition plans rather than treating them as supplementary activities during the final years of schooling.

Research has consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between independent living skills and successful adult outcomes. Wehman *et al.* (2018) found that students who participated in transition programs incorporating practical training in daily living and workplace communication reported greater self-confidence, improved employment stability, and higher levels of social participation than those who received predominantly academic or classroom-based instruction.

Similarly, Spyridakou *et al.* (2019) emphasize that independence cannot be achieved solely through school-based interventions. Instead, meaningful development requires continuous practice across family, school, and community environments to ensure that acquired skills are generalized to real-life situations. Consequently, they recommend active family involvement and sustained collaboration between educational institutions and community agencies to support students beyond graduation.

From a rights-based perspective, empowerment is closely associated with self-determination and individuals' participation in decisions affecting their education, employment, and future life. Bhatt (2019) argues that involving students with disabilities

in designing their transition plans strengthens personal responsibility, increases motivation, and enhances long-term independence.

A systematic review conducted by Batorowicz *et al.* (2025) further revealed that individuals receiving structured instruction in independent living skills demonstrated stronger social relationships, better management of everyday responsibilities, and improved employment outcomes compared with peers whose transition experiences focused exclusively on vocational preparation. These findings suggest that successful transition requires a balanced combination of vocational, personal, and social skill development.

Within Arab educational systems, Hanafi and Bin Hameed (2021) note that transition services often prioritize academic achievement while giving comparatively less attention to independent living skills. Likewise, Al-Quraini (2013) identifies inadequate life-skills training as a major contributor to limited social and vocational integration among individuals with disabilities.

The importance of independence becomes even more pronounced within the Bedouin community, where cultural traditions and family expectations may influence the level of autonomy granted to women with disabilities. Some families may adopt highly protective attitudes that unintentionally restrict opportunities for community participation or vocational experiences despite the individual's capabilities (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2008; Zoabi & Fuller, 2024). Nevertheless, these studies also emphasize that positive family support represents one of the strongest facilitators of successful transition by encouraging confidence, self-determination, and independent functioning.

Taken together, the literature identifies independence as a primary outcome of successful transition programs and suggests that achieving this outcome requires integrated vocational preparation, life-skills development, family engagement, and community support. This perspective provides an important theoretical basis for interpreting the findings of the present study regarding the development of independence among female graduates with disabilities in the Bedouin community.

2.3 Transition Programs in the Bedouin Community: Current Context and Challenges

The Bedouin community in southern Israel possesses distinctive cultural, social, and economic characteristics that directly influence the availability and effectiveness of educational and rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities. In addition to disability-related challenges, students with disabilities frequently encounter structural barriers associated with limited resources, unequal distribution of services, inadequate infrastructure, and traditional social norms. These factors collectively complicate the transition from school to adulthood compared with other population groups (Azaiza & Cohen, 2010; Barlev *et al.*, 2021).

Recent reports indicate that although special education services within the Bedouin community have expanded over the past decade, this growth has not been accompanied by comparable improvements in transition and vocational rehabilitation

services. Data published by the Israeli Ministry of Education demonstrate increasing enrollment of students with disabilities in inclusive and special education settings; however, the availability of structured transition planning, vocational guidance, and post-school support remains insufficient to meet students' developmental needs (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2020).

One of the major challenges identified in previous studies is the limited availability of specialized educational and rehabilitation institutions capable of supporting students with mild intellectual disabilities or multiple disabilities. Consequently, many students are enrolled in educational programs that only partially address their academic, vocational, and functional needs. Researchers further argue that inadequate early identification of disabilities, limited public awareness, and fear of social stigma delay access to appropriate educational services and intervention programs (Barlev *et al.*, 2021). Geographical factors also constitute significant barriers to successful transition. Many Bedouin families reside in dispersed or unrecognized villages characterized by poor infrastructure, limited transportation, and restricted access to schools, vocational training centers, and rehabilitation services. Official reports indicate that dependence on school transportation services is substantially higher among Bedouin students than among other population groups, reflecting the considerable logistical challenges associated with accessing educational and rehabilitation opportunities (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2020; Barlev *et al.*, 2021).

Beyond geographical barriers, sociocultural factors play a crucial role in shaping transition outcomes. Within Bedouin society, families traditionally assume primary responsibility for educational and occupational decisions, particularly concerning daughters. Abu-Rabia-Queder (2008) notes that although women's educational participation has increased substantially during recent decades, many families continue to maintain traditional gender expectations that limit women's participation in employment outside the home. Such expectations may reduce the effectiveness of transition programs designed to promote vocational independence.

Similarly, Zoabi and Fuller (2024) argue that although the social status of Bedouin women has gradually improved through increased educational attainment, cultural expectations continue to influence women's autonomy in making decisions regarding employment and independent living. These challenges become even more pronounced for women with disabilities, whose experiences are shaped by the intersection of disability, gender, and cultural norms.

Institutional barriers further complicate the transition process. Social welfare and rehabilitation services within the Bedouin community continue to experience shortages of qualified professionals, limited vocational rehabilitation centers, and insufficient financial resources. According to the Israeli State Comptroller (2024), a considerable gap persists between the needs of individuals with disabilities and the services available to support independent living and vocational integration. These shortcomings significantly

reduce opportunities for successful social and economic participation following graduation.

Overall, the literature suggests that the effectiveness of transition programs within the Bedouin community depends not only on educational quality but also on the ability of governmental agencies, schools, families, and community organizations to address the unique geographical, cultural, and institutional barriers experienced by students with disabilities. Exploring graduates' lived experiences therefore provides valuable insight into the strengths and limitations of existing transition services within this distinctive sociocultural context.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

2.4.1 Ecological Systems Theory

The present study is informed by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), one of the most influential frameworks for understanding human development within multiple environmental contexts. The theory proposes that individuals develop through continuous interactions with interconnected environmental systems that range from immediate interpersonal relationships to broader cultural and societal influences. Consequently, development cannot be understood independently of the environments in which individuals live and interact.

Within special education, Ecological Systems Theory provides a valuable framework for explaining transition outcomes among students with disabilities. Successful transition is viewed as the product of interactions among individual characteristics, family support, educational services, vocational opportunities, governmental policies, and community attitudes toward disability (Morningstar & Clavenna-Deane, 2018).

The theory identifies four environmental systems that are particularly relevant to the present study. The **microsystem** encompasses the student's immediate surroundings, including family members, teachers, classmates, and school experiences, all of which directly influence daily learning and personal development. The **mesosystem** refers to the relationships between these environments, particularly collaboration among schools, families, and rehabilitation agencies. Previous research demonstrates that effective coordination among these stakeholders significantly improves transition outcomes (Department of Health, 2006).

The **exosystem** includes institutions and policies that indirectly affect students' opportunities, such as employment services, vocational rehabilitation agencies, transportation systems, and governmental support programs.

Finally, the **macrosystem** represents the broader cultural values, social norms, legislation, and societal attitudes that shape opportunities available to individuals with disabilities. Within the Bedouin community, these macro-level influences include traditional gender roles, cultural expectations, and public attitudes toward disability, all

of which substantially affect women's educational and vocational experiences (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2008; Zoabi & Fuller, 2024).

Accordingly, Ecological Systems Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how multiple environmental factors interact to facilitate or hinder successful transition among female students with disabilities.

2.4.2 Social Model of Disability

The Social Model of Disability represents a fundamental shift from traditional medical perspectives by conceptualizing disability primarily as a consequence of environmental and societal barriers rather than individual impairments. According to this model, disability arises when physical environments, institutional practices, and social attitudes restrict individuals' opportunities to participate fully in society (Azaiza & Cohen, 2010). The adoption of this perspective has significantly influenced contemporary educational and rehabilitation policies by emphasizing inclusive education, accessible environments, equal participation, and the removal of structural barriers rather than focusing exclusively on individuals' limitations (Bhatt, 2019).

Within the context of the present study, the Social Model suggests that many difficulties experienced by female graduates with disabilities should not be interpreted solely as consequences of their impairments. Instead, they reflect broader structural barriers, including limited rehabilitation services, inadequate transportation, insufficient vocational opportunities, restrictive gender expectations, and labor market inequalities. Therefore, improving transition outcomes requires both strengthening students' competencies and transforming the educational and social environments in which they live (Barlev *et al.*, 2021; Tirosh *et al.*, 2023).

2.4.3 Integrating the Two Theoretical Perspectives

The integration of Ecological Systems Theory and the Social Model of Disability provides a comprehensive conceptual framework for interpreting the findings of the present study. While Bronfenbrenner's theory explains how multiple environmental systems shape students' transition experiences, the Social Model emphasizes that many transition barriers originate from social, cultural, and institutional structures rather than disability itself.

Together, these complementary perspectives enable a holistic understanding of how educational services, family support, community resources, cultural expectations, and public policies interact to influence independence, vocational readiness, and successful transition to adulthood among female graduates with disabilities in the Bedouin community.

2.5 Summary of the Literature Review

The reviewed literature demonstrates that transition programs constitute a fundamental component of contemporary special education services designed to facilitate successful transition to adulthood among individuals with disabilities. Previous research consistently highlights that effective transition outcomes depend upon individualized planning, early intervention, family involvement, vocational preparation, independent living skills, and strong collaboration among educational, rehabilitation, and community stakeholders.

The literature further emphasizes that independence and empowerment represent central indicators of successful transition, extending beyond employment outcomes to include decision-making, self-determination, community participation, and quality of life. However, the achievement of these outcomes remains strongly influenced by environmental, cultural, and institutional factors.

Within the Bedouin community of southern Israel, transition experiences are shaped by distinctive geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic conditions that influence access to educational services, vocational opportunities, and independent living. Female students with disabilities face additional challenges resulting from the interaction between disability, gender, and traditional social expectations, highlighting the importance of culturally responsive transition services.

Despite substantial international scholarship on transition programs, qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of female graduates with disabilities in the Bedouin community remains limited. This gap provides the rationale for the present study, which seeks to contribute to the literature by examining participants' experiences through the combined perspectives of Ecological Systems Theory and the Social Model of Disability.

2.6 Research Gap

Despite the growing international body of research on transition programs for individuals with disabilities, existing studies have predominantly evaluated program effectiveness from the perspectives of educators, rehabilitation professionals, or educational institutions. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to the lived experiences of program beneficiaries themselves, particularly women with disabilities living in culturally marginalized communities.

Within the context of the Bedouin community in southern Israel, previous research has primarily focused on the availability of special education services, disability-related challenges, or educational inequalities. However, limited research has examined how female graduates of special education perceive their transition from school to adulthood or how they evaluate the contribution of transition programs to their independence, vocational readiness, and future life preparation.

Furthermore, qualitative studies exploring participants' own perspectives regarding the effectiveness of educational and vocational transition programs remain

scarce. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how cultural, social, and environmental factors interact to influence transition experiences among women with disabilities in the Bedouin community.

To address this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the lived experiences of female graduates with disabilities who participated in transition programs in special education schools. By examining their personal narratives, the study seeks to understand the perceived impact of these programs on independence, vocational preparation, and future life readiness while identifying barriers and facilitators that may inform culturally responsive transition policies and practices.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design to explore the lived experiences of female graduates with disabilities regarding the impact of transition programs on their preparation for adult life. A qualitative methodology was considered appropriate because it facilitates an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions, experiences, and meanings within their natural social and cultural contexts rather than measuring predetermined variables quantitatively (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The case study design was selected because it enables comprehensive investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its surrounding environment are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018). This design is especially suitable for examining transition programs within the unique cultural and social context of the Bedouin community in southern Israel.

3.2 Research Paradigm

The study was guided by the **social constructivist paradigm**, which assumes that knowledge is socially constructed through individuals' experiences and interactions with their environments. From this perspective, understanding social phenomena requires exploring participants' own interpretations of their lived experiences within the cultural contexts in which those experiences occur (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In addition, the study was informed by principles of the **emancipatory paradigm**, which emphasizes amplifying the voices of marginalized populations and examining the structural and social barriers that influence their lives. This perspective is particularly relevant when investigating the experiences of women with disabilities in the Bedouin community, where disability intersects with gender and sociocultural factors to shape opportunities for education, employment, and independent living (Oliver, 1996; Shakespeare, 2018).

3.3 Participants and Study Setting

The study was conducted among female graduates with physical disabilities accompanied by mild cognitive limitations who had attended special education programs in secondary schools located within Bedouin communities in southern Israel. Participants ranged in age from **16 to 21 years** and had participated in school-based transition programs during the **2025–2026 academic year**. Their direct involvement in educational, vocational, and life-skills training provided rich experiential data regarding the effectiveness of transition services.

A total of **15 participants** were recruited through **purposive sampling**, followed by **snowball sampling** to identify additional participants who met the inclusion criteria. These sampling strategies were considered appropriate because they enabled the researcher to recruit information-rich participants capable of providing detailed insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015).

3.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through **semi-structured, face-to-face interviews**, allowing participants to describe their educational experiences, perceptions of transition programs, and expectations for future employment and independent living. Semi-structured interviews provided sufficient flexibility to explore emerging topics while ensuring consistency across interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Each interview lasted approximately **45–60 minutes**, was conducted in Arabic, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using **Thematic Analysis** following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2021). The analysis involved repeated familiarization with the transcripts, systematic coding of meaningful data segments, identification of potential themes, review and refinement of themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the final analytical report.

Open coding was initially conducted to identify meaningful concepts expressed by participants before grouping similar codes into broader categories and overarching themes.

Table 1: Examples of Initial Open Codes Derived from Participants' Interviews

Participant Statement	Initial Open Code
"I liked the computer room."	Interest in computers
"I learned how to write letters."	Development of writing skills
"The teacher always sat with me."	Individualized support
"When I don't understand, I ask for help."	Help-seeking behavior
"I started organizing my room by myself."	Independent living skills
"I choose my own clothes."	Decision-making
"My mother helps me get dressed."	Family dependence
"I wish they had taught us reading and writing."	Need for academic skill development
"They didn't let me participate in activities."	Limited participation opportunities
"The computer brought me closer to my dream."	Increased aspirations
"I want to work."	Employment aspiration
"I want to become a teacher."	Career ambition
"Hebrew was difficult for me."	Learning difficulties
"My hand hurts when I work."	Physical limitations

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants, including age, type of disability, and current employment status. The diversity of participant characteristics contributed to capturing a broad range of experiences and perspectives regarding transition programs, thereby enriching the qualitative findings and supporting a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

3.4 Sampling Strategy

This study employed **purposive sampling** to select participants who met predefined inclusion criteria consistent with the research objectives. Participants were required to have participated in transition programs, possess the ability to describe their personal experiences, and belong to the Bedouin community in southern Israel. Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research because it enables researchers to recruit information-rich participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015).

To expand participant recruitment, **snowball sampling** was also utilized. Initial participants recommended additional graduates who met the study criteria and had similar educational experiences. This sampling approach is particularly appropriate when studying socially or culturally specific populations that are relatively difficult to access, such as women with disabilities in the Bedouin community (Noy, 2008).

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected primarily through **semi-structured interviews**, which provided sufficient flexibility for participants to describe their experiences while ensuring that all major research topics were consistently addressed (Kallio *et al.*, 2016).

Considering the participants' mild cognitive limitations, interview questions were carefully simplified and presented using clear language. Visual prompts and illustrative

materials were used whenever necessary to facilitate communication and ensure accurate understanding of the interview questions.

In addition, **field notes** were recorded throughout the interviews to document participants' non-verbal behaviors, emotional responses, and contextual observations that supported the interpretation of interview data. The use of field notes is recommended in qualitative research to enrich data interpretation and improve contextual understanding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

Following ethical approval and institutional permissions, the researcher contacted special education schools implementing transition programs within Bedouin communities in southern Israel. School administrators and participants' parents or legal guardians were approached to arrange suitable interview schedules.

All interviews were conducted individually in quiet rooms within the schools to ensure participants' comfort and confidentiality. Each interview lasted approximately **30–45 minutes** and was audio-recorded after obtaining informed consent from both participants and their parents or legal guardians. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim to facilitate qualitative analysis.

3.7 Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using **Thematic Analysis**, following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), one of the most widely adopted qualitative analytical methods in educational and social science research.

The analysis followed six sequential stages:

- 1) Familiarization with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts.
- 2) Generating initial codes (Open Coding).
- 3) Organizing codes into preliminary categories.
- 4) Reviewing and refining emerging themes.
- 5) Defining and naming the final themes.
- 6) Producing the final analytical report and linking the findings to previous literature.

This analytical approach enabled the researcher to identify recurring patterns across participants' narratives and develop overarching themes representing their experiences with transition programs.

Table 2: Examples of Initial Open Coding

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Initial Code
P1	"I didn't know how to use a computer before, but later I learned."	Developing computer skills
P1	"The most important thing I learned was writing letters."	Literacy skill development
P1	"I needed someone to sit with me individually."	Need for individualized instruction
P1	"My mother and sister help me."	Family support
P1	"I want to become a teacher."	Career aspiration
P2	"I ask my mother for help."	Family dependence in learning
P2	"She bathes by herself."	Independence in self-care
P2	"She does not have enough energy to work."	Difficulty performing vocational tasks
P2	"I want to work as a cleaner at school."	Desire for employment
P4	"I read by myself and depend on myself."	Self-reliance

Table 3: From Open Codes to Categories

Initial Codes	Category
Computer use, graphic design, writing, drawing	Educational and training programs
Individual instruction, teacher explanations, requesting help	Learning strategies and instructional support
Organizing the room, preparing food, choosing clothes	Independent living skills
Decision-making, assuming responsibility	Decision-making skills
Difficulties in writing, reading, Hebrew language	Educational challenges
Physical fatigue, mobility difficulties	Physical challenges
Family support, teacher assistance	Sources of support
Employment aspirations, teaching aspirations, photography aspirations	Future aspirations
Requests for more workshops, improved computer training, literacy instruction	Suggested program improvements

The transition from initial codes to broader categories enabled the researcher to organize conceptually related data into meaningful analytical units, facilitating the development of the final thematic structure.

Table 4: Final Themes

Main Theme	Subthemes
Transition programs and skill development	Computer skills, literacy, vocational skills, individualized training
Development of independence and self-reliance	Decision-making, responsibility, daily living skills, self-confidence
Challenges limiting program effectiveness	Insufficient practical training, limited educational activities, curriculum difficulties, lack of resources
Family support during transition	Family assistance, daily support, shared decision-making

The final themes emerged following the completion of all stages of thematic analysis. These themes served as the organizational framework for presenting the study findings and formed the basis for the discussion section by linking participants' experiences with existing literature.

3.8 Trustworthiness

To ensure the rigor and quality of the qualitative findings, this study adopted the trustworthiness criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants, conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews, and carefully verifying the interpretation of participants' narratives throughout the analytical process.

Dependability was ensured by maintaining comprehensive documentation of all research procedures, including data collection, coding, category development, and thematic analysis, thereby providing a transparent audit trail.

Confirmability was established by preserving detailed records of interview transcripts, coding decisions, analytical memos, and methodological reflections, minimizing the influence of researcher bias and ensuring that the findings were grounded in participants' accounts.

Transferability was supported by providing a rich description of the research context, participants' characteristics, and data collection procedures, enabling readers to evaluate the applicability of the findings to similar educational and cultural settings.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to internationally accepted ethical principles governing research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional authorities before commencing data collection.

Written **informed consent** was obtained from all participants and their parents or legal guardians after providing a clear explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and the participants' right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

To protect participants' privacy, confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process. Pseudonyms and participant identification codes (e.g., P1–P15) were used instead of real names in all transcripts, analyses, and reports. Audio recordings and research data were securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher and were used exclusively for academic research purposes.

4. Results

The thematic analysis of interviews conducted with the 15 participants generated a comprehensive understanding of their perceptions regarding the influence of transition programs on developing independence and preparing for adult life. Following the six phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006)—including familiarization with the data, open coding, category development, theme refinement, theme definition, and report production—five overarching themes emerged that captured the participants' shared experiences.

These themes reflect both the strengths and limitations of transition programs in special education schools and illustrate the complex interaction between educational experiences, family support, personal aspirations, and the social and cultural context of the Bedouin community. The findings are presented below according to the five major themes identified during the analysis.

Table 1: Final Themes Identified Through Thematic Analysis

Main Theme	Subthemes
Transition Programs and Skill Development	Computer skills, literacy, vocational skills, individualized instruction
Development of Independence and Self-Reliance	Decision-making, responsibility, daily living skills, self-confidence
Challenges Limiting Program Effectiveness	Limited vocational training, insufficient activities, curriculum difficulties, lack of resources
Family Support During the Transition Process	Family assistance, daily support, shared decision-making
Future Aspirations and Suggested Program Improvements	Employment aspirations, expanded vocational training, improved computer education, employment opportunities

4.1 Theme One: Transition Programs and Skill Development

The findings indicated that transition programs contributed to the development of several educational, vocational, and daily living skills among the participants. The most frequently reported gains included computer literacy, reading and writing skills, and basic vocational competencies.

One participant explained:

"I didn't know how to use a computer before, but later I learned, and now I have my own computer at home." (P3)

Another participant stated:

"The most important thing I learned was writing letters." (P7)

Participants also emphasized the importance of individualized instruction. As one participant noted:

"When the teacher sits with me individually, I understand much better." (P5)

Individualized training appeared to be particularly effective because it accommodated participants' varying cognitive and physical abilities. However, several participants believed that the available transition programs did not sufficiently prepare them for employment, as vocational activities were often limited and poorly connected to labor market requirements.

4.2 Theme Two: Development of Independence and Self-Reliance

Participants reported noticeable improvements in several aspects of personal independence following their participation in transition programs. These improvements included increased responsibility, greater confidence, and enhanced decision-making skills. Nevertheless, the extent of improvement varied depending on disability type, family support, and educational experiences.

One participant commented:

"I choose my own clothes." (P2)

Another explained:

"If I want to buy something, I go and buy it myself." (P9)

A third participant added:

"I have become more responsible." (P11)

Despite these positive experiences, several participants continued to rely heavily on family members for transportation, household tasks, and other daily activities. Participants who received more practical training opportunities demonstrated higher levels of confidence and independence than those whose experiences were mainly classroom-based.

4.3 Theme Three: Challenges Limiting Program Effectiveness

Participants identified several barriers that reduced the effectiveness of transition programs. The most frequently mentioned challenges included limited vocational training opportunities, insufficient computer resources, exclusion from school activities, difficult academic curricula, and inadequate individualized support.

One participant explained:

"There were activities, but they didn't let me participate." (P6)

Another stated:

"Schools focus more on the stronger students." (P8)

One mother commented:

"There aren't enough computers." (Parent 2)

Another participant added:

"Mathematics and Arabic were difficult for me." (P10)

These findings suggest that participants' difficulties were not solely associated with their disabilities but also reflected organizational and institutional limitations within the educational system.

4.4 Theme Four: Family Support During the Transition Process

Family support emerged as one of the strongest themes across participants' narratives. Most participants described their families as their primary source of emotional and practical support throughout the transition process.

One participant stated:

"My mother and my sister help me." (P1)

Another explained:

"I ask my mother for help." (P4)

One mother commented:

"She bathes independently, but sometimes she still needs assistance." (Parent 4)

Although families played an essential supportive role, several parents emphasized that educational programs had helped their daughters acquire valuable new skills. Nevertheless, continued family assistance remained necessary because of disability-related needs and the limited availability of post-school community services.

These findings indicate that while family support facilitates successful transition experiences, excessive dependence on family members may restrict opportunities for developing full independence unless accompanied by gradual independence training.

4.5 Theme Five: Future Aspirations and Suggested Program Improvements

Despite the challenges they encountered, participants expressed clear professional aspirations and optimism regarding their future employment opportunities.

One participant stated:

"I want to become a teacher." (P5)

Another said:

"I want to work as a secretary." (P12)

A third participant added:

"I want to work at a school." (P9)

Participants and their families also proposed several recommendations for improving transition programs. Their suggestions focused primarily on expanding practical vocational training, increasing the number of teachers, improving computer education, and providing greater access to employment opportunities.

One mother explained:

"There should be more teachers to help them learn computer skills." (Parent 1)

Another participant suggested:

"There should be more practical workshops." (P13)

These findings demonstrate considerable agreement between participants and their families regarding the need to shift from predominantly theoretical instruction toward practical, employment-oriented transition services.

5. Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings suggest that transition programs contributed positively to the development of educational, vocational, and independent living skills among graduates with disabilities in the Bedouin community. Participants reported improvements in self-confidence, responsibility, and everyday functioning. However, the effectiveness of these programs remained constrained by limited resources, insufficient vocational training opportunities, and inadequate post-school support services. Family support emerged as a critical factor facilitating successful transitions, while participants' strong employment aspirations highlighted the need for more comprehensive, culturally responsive, and

labor market-oriented transition programs that better prepare young women with disabilities for independent adult life.

6. Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the impact of transition programs on developing independence and vocational readiness among female graduates with disabilities from special education schools in the Bedouin community in southern Israel. The findings indicated that these programs provided tangible benefits for the participants; however, they did not achieve full vocational empowerment due to the interaction of educational, familial, institutional, and geographical factors. The following sections discuss the findings according to the major themes that emerged from the interviews.

6.1 Transition Programs and Skills Development

The findings revealed that the most significant skills acquired by the participants were computer literacy, reading and writing skills, and basic vocational competencies. These findings are consistent with Morningstar and Clavenna-Deane (2018), who argued that transition programs are most effective when they emphasize functional skills that can be applied in everyday life and future employment. Similarly, the findings support Hanafi and Bin Hameed (2021), who emphasized that vocational and technological training constitutes a fundamental component in preparing individuals with disabilities for post-school life.

The participants' strong emphasis on computer skills may be explained by their perception that these skills are closely linked to modern employment opportunities and greater independence. Several participants expressed increased confidence after learning typing, internet searching, and the use of basic computer applications. Nevertheless, the findings also indicated that computer training remained at an introductory level and was rarely developed into advanced vocational preparation. This suggests a gap between acquiring basic technical skills and transforming them into realistic employment opportunities.

6.2 Independence and Decision-Making

One of the most important findings of this study was the improvement in several participants' ability to make simple daily decisions, such as choosing their clothes, purchasing personal items, and organizing aspects of their daily lives. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that independence develops gradually through continuous practice of daily living skills rather than through theoretical instruction alone (Bhatt, 2019; Batorowicz *et al.*, 2025).

The current study, however, adds an important cultural dimension to this understanding. Participants' independence was not solely an individual characteristic but was strongly influenced by the degree of autonomy permitted by their families.

Although some participants demonstrated the ability to make decisions, these decisions often occurred within boundaries established by parents or other family members. This finding aligns with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which explains individual behavior through the interaction between individuals and their surrounding environments. It suggests that promoting independence among young women with disabilities in the Bedouin community requires working with families alongside supporting the students themselves.

6.3 Institutional and Environmental Challenges

The findings identified several recurring challenges that limited the effectiveness of transition programs, including shortages of computers, insufficient individualized instruction, unequal participation in school activities, and difficulties with certain academic subjects. These findings correspond with the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (2021) report, which highlighted disparities in educational and rehabilitation services available to individuals with disabilities in the Bedouin community compared to other sectors.

The results are also consistent with the findings of Tirosh *et al.* (2023) regarding the influence of geographical conditions and inadequate infrastructure on vocational rehabilitation and employment opportunities in the Negev region. Several participants reported that their greatest difficulties were not related to learning itself but rather to limited access to appropriate educational opportunities and the inability to continue practical training due to inadequate resources.

An important contribution of the current study is its demonstration that these challenges extend beyond resource shortages and reflect issues of equity in access to educational opportunities. Some participants perceived that practical activities and vocational opportunities were primarily offered to academically stronger students, while others remained marginalized within the transition programs.

5.4 The Role of the Family in the Transition Process

The interviews confirmed that families represented the primary source of support for participants after graduation. Family members played a crucial role in transportation, daily living assistance, and decision-making. These findings are consistent with Neikrug *et al.* (2014), who identified the family as the principal source of psychological and social support for individuals with disabilities in Arab communities.

However, the findings also revealed a more complex relationship between family support and independence. While family assistance often facilitated participants' development, in some cases it resulted in overprotection that restricted opportunities for independent experiences, learning through trial and error, and self-development. These findings suggest that successful transition programs should not focus exclusively on students but should also include family guidance components that help parents gradually shift from providing complete care toward promoting greater independence.

5.5 Career Aspirations and the Reality Gap

One of the most notable findings was that nearly all participants expressed clear vocational aspirations, including careers in teaching, secretarial work, photography, and artistic professions, despite being fully aware of the challenges they would likely encounter. This finding supports previous research demonstrating that low employment rates among individuals with disabilities are not necessarily associated with low motivation but rather with environmental and societal barriers (Wehman *et al.*, 2018; Gadot, 2019).

The current study further suggests that the primary gap lies between career aspirations and the actual transition pathway. Although participants possessed meaningful occupational goals, transition programs did not consistently provide practical training experiences or employment partnerships capable of transforming these aspirations into realistic employment opportunities. Consequently, improving transition programs requires moving beyond limited school-based activities toward establishing genuine employment pathways through collaboration with community organizations, vocational rehabilitation agencies, and local employers.

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the impact of transition programs implemented in special education schools on the development of independence and vocational readiness among female graduates with disabilities in the Bedouin community in southern Israel. Using a qualitative research approach, the study examined the lived experiences of the participants to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of these programs. The findings indicated that transition programs contributed to the development of several fundamental skills, including computer literacy, reading and writing abilities, self-reliance, and everyday decision-making. However, their impact remained limited in facilitating successful transitions into employment or fully independent living.

The findings further demonstrated that the effectiveness of transition programs depends not only on the educational activities provided within schools but also on a range of environmental, social, and cultural factors surrounding the students. Family support emerged as a central component of the transition process; however, in some cases, excessive protection and low expectations regarding the capabilities of young women with disabilities limited opportunities for developing independence. In addition, the study identified several institutional barriers, including limited technological resources, insufficient individualized training opportunities, and unequal access to transition activities among students.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding the experiences of female graduates with disabilities within the Bedouin community, a social and cultural context that has received limited attention in qualitative research, particularly regarding post-school transition programs. The findings suggest that

successful transition cannot be achieved through school-based training alone but requires coordinated collaboration among schools, families, community organizations, and employers to ensure continuous support beyond graduation.

Based on the study findings, the researcher recommends redesigning transition programs to better align with the demands of the local labor market by strengthening vocational and technological training and expanding opportunities for community-based work experiences. The study also recommends developing family guidance programs that encourage greater independence among young women with disabilities and promoting stronger partnerships between schools, the Ministries of Education and Social Welfare, vocational rehabilitation services, and employers to establish sustainable transition pathways that facilitate graduates' successful integration into society and employment.

Finally, this study highlights several directions for future research. Further qualitative and comparative studies are needed to examine the effectiveness of transition programs among other disability groups and across different social and cultural contexts within Arab communities. Such research would contribute to the development of more equitable, inclusive, and culturally responsive educational and transition policies for individuals with disabilities.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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