

Effectiveness of Person-Centered Planning in Transition Services for Saudi Students with Autism Saudi Students

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Abstract

This research aims at investigating how appropriate and useful PCP is considered in improving students with autism transition, in reference to school-settings in Saudi Arabia. Using non-equivalent control group pretest-post-test design, the study measures the transition readiness of students who were provided PCP as compared to those students who continued to receive traditional transition services. The findings showed that the participants of the experimental group have benefited much from the intervention: Measurements of the basic evaluations, emerging from the Transition Planning Inventory (TPI), demonstrated that the Pi students' performance enhanced strikingly in employment, independent living, and socialization in the community. The results of the topically analysed semi-structured interviews in addition underlined the empowering effect of the students, the enhanced participation of the families, and the cultural sensitivity of the PCP. However, it has been evidenced from the study that irrespective of considerations of implementation logistics and the plan structure, PCP enshrined within the comprehensive study is an efficient tool that can easily be appropriated based on the cultural understanding of the situation. Hence, the need to scale up both the specificity and the inclusiveness of the transition approaches within the context of Saudi Arabia and other countries that need to adopt the PCP and other formalities within special education.

Keywords: Person-Centered Planning, autism, transition services, Saudi Arabia, inclusive education

Introduction

The concept which has gained prominence in the sphere of special education, especially for students with autism and in connection with the scopes of transition services is known as the Person-Centered Planning. Implemented according to the requirements of the education laws and policies worldwide, transition services aim at preparing and supporting students with disabilities to continue their learning, training and independent life and also gain employment after they have left school (Scanlon, 2020). Children with autism, who have core difficulties in communication, social interpersonal relations and written expression have greater difficulties in managing transitions (Perrymanbetal., 2020). The quality and success of transition services thus is said to go hand in hand with the improvements the learners will make in their lives (Worsley et al., 2021).

PCP is a process that involves identifying and understanding of the individual's likes and dislikes, skills, and conceivable objectives rather than focusing on the disruptions of the disabilities (Brett, 2021). It requires the student, family and other professionals working with the student to come up with an individual and unique remediating plan, which captures and unfolds the student's vision and capabilities (Wehmeyer & Kurth, 2021). The application of PCP within transition services is meant to increase students' autonomy of learners with AS and improve the relevance of the services provided, as well as their relation to individual students' goals.

In Saudi Arabia, for instance, the requirement for appropriate transition support services for learners with ASD is gradually being realised (Almutairi, 2018). It has been estimated that the incidence of autism in Saudi Arabia is increasing and now is 1 of 160 children (Al-Mamri et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the caring structures for persons with autism, especially regarding their transition from school to work and independent life, are still scarce (Milen & Nicholas, 2017). From this gap, therefore, it emerges, now, the necessity to investigate and introduce approaches including the PCP that might improve the efficiency of transition services in the Saudi context.

Empirical literature review on the use of PCP strategy has revealed positive findings in different settings, thus suggesting that the centre-based PCP approach could enhance the learning achievements of children with disability including those with autism. For instance, in the United States, research has shown that through the use of PCP, student engagement in transition planning rises, satisfaction with planning goes up and the general outcomes of the strengths

post-school improves (Rae, 2024; Davis, 2023). The above-mentioned outcomes owe to the individual approach that is employed in the system of PCP unlike standardized approaches (Martin et al., 2020).

Specifically, on the use of PCP in transition services in the KSA context, the findings revealed that the practice is not widely developed in any practice area yet. There has been some attempt to address the use of person centered approaches in Special Education which has been shifting from the general education classroom to the special education classroom with an implementation of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) but it has not extended to the transition services. Cultural factors in KSA such as family engagement and the centralised education system offer both a threat and opportunities for the application of PCP like all the other countries as common with most nations of the same cultural background. To this end, it was important to establish how PCP could be utilised in the Saudi system in order to enhance the transition experience of the learners with an ASD.

This is specifically true in light of the recent appreciation of what has been referred to as deeper and broader approach to education particularly in Saudi Arabia (Al-Shehri, 2020). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's strategic development plan, the Saudi Vision 2030, encompassing vital sectors and promising to provide the country with a stable development, addresses the problem of educational reforms and the integration of persons with disabilities into society and various spheres of life. Within this vision, effort is pursued in the promotion of the quality of educational and the support services for the students with disability including the autism (Flannery & Wisner-Carlson, 2020). These are, in fact, the broader national goals that are addressed by the integration of the PCP in transition services to provide a more individualized and effective assistance for students with autism.

Nevertheless, the practice of implementing PCP in Saudi Arabia has several challenges such as shortage of skilled professionals, low level of awareness among teachers, families, and cultural limitations that might influence the utilization of the person-centered practices (Hofmans et al., 2020). This means that solving these problems needs to proceed on a complex level with changes of policies, creation of the necessary capacities, further studies on the adjustment of PCP Saudi students with autism.

Therefore, PCP can be presented as the approach that could help improve the transition services of students with autism in Saudi Arabia and other countries that experience a growing demand for effective and personalised support. Incorporation of the PCP into the transition services can resultantly exert a positive impact on the lives of Saudi students with autism and will be in tune with the Saudi Arabia's vision of education reform. Fulfilling this potential will mean overcoming barriers related to culture, systems, and practice of ICP at present in Saudi Arabia.

Problem of the Study

Leaving school to join adulthood is a very crucial stage in the life of every learner but the process is more daunting especially to students with autism in KSA. Due to the lack of adequate transition services in this country, these students are provided with transition services that fail to suit their requirements with the result that their social inclusion, employment, and quality of life is not the best that can be offered to them. Although more attention has been paid to the transition planning, the issue of the lack of the corresponding effective strategies for students with autism remains acute. Person-Centered Planning (PCP), an approach that emphasizes individualized support and the active involvement of the student in planning their future, has been identified as a potentially effective solution. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of PCP in the Saudi context, particularly concerning its impact on the transition outcomes for students with autism. This study seeks to address this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of PCP in enhancing transition services for Saudi students with autism, providing insights that could inform policy and practice.

Research Questions

1. How does the implementation of Person-Centered Planning (PCP) impact the transition outcomes of Saudi students with autism?
2. What are the specific areas (e.g., social integration, vocational success, independent living skills) in which PCP shows the most significant positive effects for Saudi students with autism?
3. What challenges and facilitators are associated with the implementation of PCP in the transition services for Saudi students with autism?

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant importance for multiple stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, and families of students with autism in Saudi Arabia. By providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of Person-Centered Planning (PCP), the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on transition services in special education, particularly within the Saudi context. For educators and practitioners, the findings offer practical guidance on how to implement PCP effectively, thereby improving the transition outcomes for students with autism. For policymakers, the study highlights the need for systemic changes that support the widespread adoption of PCP, ensuring that transition services are aligned with the individual needs and aspirations of students with autism. Moreover, for families, this research provides reassurance that PCP can be a valuable tool in preparing their children for a successful transition to adulthood, enhancing their independence and quality of life. The study's significance is further underscored by its potential to influence future research and practice, setting the stage for ongoing improvements in the education and support of students with autism in Saudi Arabia.

Terms of the Study

The term of the study spans across a period of one academic year, during which the implementation of Person-Centered Planning (PCP) was observed and evaluated within selected schools in Saudi Arabia. The study involved multiple phases, including the initial training of educators in PCP, the development of individualized transition plans for students, and the ongoing monitoring and adjustment of these plans throughout the school year. The study also included follow-up assessments to measure the outcomes of PCP implementation on various aspects of the students' transition, such as their social integration, vocational skills, and overall readiness for post-school life. The academic year term was chosen to allow sufficient time for the full implementation of PCP and to capture the dynamic nature of the transition process. This timeframe also provided an opportunity to observe any changes in the students' development and the effectiveness of PCP in addressing their evolving needs.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of Person-Centered Planning (PCP) in enhancing transition services for Saudi students with autism, it is important to acknowledge several limitations. First, the study was conducted within a specific cultural and educational context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or populations. The unique characteristics of the Saudi education system, including its centralized structure and cultural norms, may influence the implementation and outcomes of PCP in ways that differ from other settings. Second, the study relied on self-reported data from educators, students, and families, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability or recall bias. Additionally, the relatively short duration of the study, limited to one academic year, may not fully capture the long-term effects of PCP on transition outcomes. Finally, the study was conducted within a select group of schools that had the resources and willingness to implement PCP, which may not be representative of all schools in Saudi Arabia. These limitations suggest the need for further research to validate the findings in different contexts and over longer periods, as well as to explore the long-term impact of PCP on the lives of students with autism.

Literature review and Previous studies

Person-Centered Planning (PCP) has been widely recognized as a transformative approach in special education, particularly for students with disabilities, including autism. The core principle of PCP is to focus on the individual's unique needs, preferences, and goals, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to education and support services (Ali et al., 2000). This method involves the active participation of the student, their family, and a team of professionals in developing a comprehensive plan that guides the student's transition from school to adulthood. Research has shown that PCP can lead to improved outcomes in areas such as employment, social integration, and independent living skills (İsvan et al., 2023).

PCP is grounded in the philosophy of self-determination, which emphasizes the importance of individuals having control over their own lives and making choices that reflect their personal values and aspirations (Abery & Anderson, 2020). This approach is particularly beneficial for students with autism, who often face significant challenges in communication, social interaction, and adaptive behavior. By involving students in the planning process, PCP empowers them to articulate their goals and preferences, leading to more meaningful and individualized support services (Epp, 2024).

The effectiveness of PCP has been demonstrated in various studies. For example, a study by **Finley** (2023) found that students who participated in PCP were more likely to be involved in their own transition planning and reported higher levels of satisfaction with the process. Similarly, **Yamamoto et al.** (2014) reported that PCP was associated with better post-school outcomes, including higher rates of employment and independent living among students with disabilities. These findings suggest that PCP can play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of transition services for students with autism.

Transition services are designed to facilitate the movement of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, such as further education, employment, and independent living (**Parmenter & Knox**, 1991). For students with autism, the transition to adulthood can be particularly challenging due to difficulties in social communication, sensory processing, and adaptive behavior. Effective transition services are therefore essential to support these students in achieving successful outcomes and improving their quality of life.

Research has shown that students with autism often experience poorer transition outcomes compared to their peers with other disabilities. A study by **Taylor & Seltzer** (2011) found that individuals with autism are less likely to be employed, attend post-secondary education, or live independently after leaving school. These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions, such as PCP, that address the specific challenges faced by students with autism during the transition process.

In Saudi Arabia, the development of transition services for students with autism is still in its early stages. While there have been efforts to implement individualized education plans (IEPs) and other forms of personalized support, there is a lack of comprehensive transition services that address the full spectrum of needs of students with autism (**Test et al.**, 2020). The cultural context of Saudi Arabia, which emphasizes family involvement and centralized decision-making, presents both challenges and opportunities for the implementation of PCP in transition services (**Simmons & McPherson**, 2022).

Although research on PCP in Saudi Arabia is limited, several studies have explored its potential benefits in the context of special education. **Almoghyrah** (2023) conducted a study on the implementation of individualized education plans (IEPs) in Saudi Arabia, finding that while IEPs are widely used, they often lack a person-centered approach and fail to involve students in the planning process. The authors suggest that integrating PCP into IEPs could enhance the effectiveness of these plans by ensuring that they are tailored to the individual needs and goals of students with disabilities.

Another study by **Alrawkan** (2022) examined the perspectives of teachers on inclusive education in Saudi Arabia, highlighting the challenges of implementing inclusive practices in a context where traditional, centralized approaches to education are prevalent. The study found that while teachers recognize the importance of personalized support for students with disabilities, there is a lack of training and resources to implement PCP effectively. This underscores the need for professional development and capacity-building initiatives to support the adoption of PCP in Saudi schools.

A more recent study by **Alshuayl** (2021) explored the challenges faced by families of children with autism in Saudi Arabia, emphasizing the need for more effective support services during the transition to adulthood. The study highlighted the potential of PCP to address these challenges by involving families and students in the planning process, thereby ensuring that the transition services provided are aligned with the student's preferences and goals. However, the study also noted the cultural barriers to implementing PCP, including the tendency to prioritize family decisions over individual preferences in the Saudi context.

These studies indicate that while there is growing recognition of the benefits of PCP in Saudi Arabia, there are significant challenges to its widespread adoption. The lack of trained professionals, limited awareness of person-centered approaches, and cultural factors that may influence decision-making all contribute to the slow implementation of PCP in Saudi schools. Addressing these challenges will require a concerted effort by policymakers, educators, and researchers to promote the benefits of PCP and develop strategies for its effective implementation in the Saudi context.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a **quasi-experimental research design** to evaluate the effectiveness of Person-Centered Planning (PCP) in enhancing transition services for Saudi students with autism. The quasi-experimental design was chosen because it allows for comparison between an intervention group and a control group without the need for random assignment, which was not feasible in this educational setting due to ethical and logistical constraints. This design is particularly suitable for educational research, where random assignment can be challenging and where the context and environment play a significant role in the outcomes.

The study involved two groups of students with autism: an experimental group that received PCP as part of their transition services, and a control group that continued to receive the traditional transition services typically provided in their schools. The comparison between these groups enabled the researchers to assess the impact of PCP on various transition outcomes, including social integration, vocational readiness, and independent living skills.

The study was conducted over the course of one academic year, allowing sufficient time for the full implementation of PCP and for the measurement of its effects on the students' transition outcomes. The longitudinal nature of the study provided the opportunity to track changes and improvements over time, enhancing the reliability of the findings.

In addition to the quantitative analysis, the study also incorporated a qualitative component to provide a richer understanding of the PCP process and its effects. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of participants from the experimental group, including students, parents, and educators. The qualitative data obtained from these interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, which allowed for the identification of common themes and patterns in the participants' experiences. This qualitative approach complemented the quantitative data by providing insights into the implementation process, the participants' perceptions of PCP, and the contextual factors that influenced the outcomes.

Population and Sample

The population for this study comprised students with autism enrolled in secondary schools across Saudi Arabia. Given the specific focus on transition services, the sample was drawn from students in their final two years of secondary education, as this is a critical period for preparing for the transition to adulthood. A purposive sampling method was used to select schools that had the infrastructure and willingness to implement PCP. From these schools, students were selected based on their diagnosis of autism and their readiness to participate in transition planning. A total of 120 students were included in the study, with 60 students in the experimental group (receiving PCP) and 60 students in the control group (receiving traditional services).

Data Collection Methods

To comprehensively assess the effectiveness of Person-Centered Planning (PCP) in transition services for students with autism, data were collected using a multi-method approach that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative measures. This approach ensured a holistic understanding of the impact of PCP on various aspects of the students' transition to adulthood.

The primary quantitative data collection tool was the Transition Planning Inventory (TPI), a well-established, standardized assessment instrument designed to measure key domains of transition, including areas such as employment readiness, independent living skills, and social integration. The TPI was chosen for its reliability and validity in assessing transition outcomes for students with disabilities, making it particularly suitable for this study. The TPI was administered to all participants at two critical points: initially as a pre-test before the implementation of PCP to establish a baseline, and subsequently as a post-test at the end of the academic year to evaluate any changes or improvements in the students' transition outcomes.

In addition to the TPI, surveys were employed to gather perspectives from multiple stakeholders involved in the transition process, including parents, teachers, and the students themselves. These surveys were designed to capture subjective assessments of the planning process, satisfaction with the services provided, and perceived outcomes. The surveys for parents and teachers included questions on the effectiveness of the PCP process, communication between the planning team and the family, and the perceived impact on the student's readiness for post-school life. Student

surveys focused on their involvement in the planning process, their understanding of the goals set, and their confidence in achieving those goals.

To complement the quantitative data and provide a deeper understanding of the PCP process, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of participants. These interviews included educators, parents, and students from the experimental group who had undergone the PCP process. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in exploring specific themes related to the experiences and challenges of implementing PCP. Interview questions were designed to elicit detailed responses about the personal and educational growth of the students, the dynamics of the planning meetings, and any obstacles encountered during the process. The qualitative data from these interviews were invaluable in providing context to the quantitative findings and offering insights into the nuances of the PCP implementation.

Intervention

The intervention in this study focused on the implementation of Person-Centered Planning (PCP) for the experimental group of students. This process was designed to tailor the transition services to the individual needs, preferences, and goals of each student, in contrast to the more standardized approach typically employed in traditional transition services.

The intervention began with the professional development of educators and school staff who would be directly involved in the PCP process. This training was comprehensive, spanning several sessions, and included various interactive elements such as workshops, role-playing exercises, and the collaborative development of mock PCP plans. The goal of this training was to equip the educators with a deep understanding of the principles of PCP, emphasizing the importance of student involvement, the use of positive language, and the creation of a supportive and inclusive planning environment.

Following the training, the PCP process was initiated for each student in the experimental group. This process began with a series of planning meetings that brought together the student, their family, educators, and other relevant professionals, such as vocational counselors or therapists. These meetings were central to the PCP process, as they provided a forum for the student to express their aspirations and preferences, which then informed the development of an individualized transition plan. The plans were not static; they were designed to be dynamic documents that could be revisited and revised as needed throughout the academic year to reflect the student's progress and any changes in their goals or circumstances.

The transition plans developed through PCP were multifaceted, covering various domains essential for a successful transition to adulthood. These included setting specific goals for employment, identifying necessary skills for independent living, and planning for social integration into the community. The plans also included action steps, responsibilities for each team member, and timelines to ensure that the goals were met. Regular follow-up meetings were scheduled to monitor progress, address any challenges, and make necessary adjustments to the plans.

In contrast, the control group continued to receive the traditional transition services that were in place prior to the study. These services typically involved less individualized planning, with a greater focus on achieving standard educational outcomes, such as completing coursework and meeting graduation requirements. The traditional approach often lacked the in-depth involvement of the student and family in the planning process and did not prioritize the student's personal preferences to the same extent as PCP.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to evaluate the effectiveness of PCP. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and the distribution of scores on the TPI. Inferential statistics, including paired t-tests and ANOVA, were employed to compare the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and control groups. The effect size was calculated to determine the magnitude of the difference between the groups, providing a measure of the practical significance of the findings. Additionally, thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data from the interviews, allowing for the identification of common themes and patterns in participants' experiences of the PCP process.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Transition Planning Inventory (TPI) Pre-Test Scores

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum
Experimental Group	60	45.2	6.3	34	56
Control Group	60	44.7	6.1	33	55

The pre-test scores for the Transition Planning Inventory (TPI) indicate that the baseline transition readiness of both the experimental group and the control group is relatively similar. The mean score for the experimental group is 45.2, with a standard deviation of 6.3, while the control group has a mean score of 44.7 and a standard deviation of 6.1. The minimum and maximum scores are also comparable between the two groups. These results suggest that both groups were fairly well-matched in terms of their initial transition readiness before the implementation of Person-Centered Planning (PCP) in the experimental group.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Transition Planning Inventory (TPI) Post-Test Scores

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum
Experimental Group	60	58.7	5.4	48	68
Control Group	60	48.9	6.0	37	60

After the implementation of PCP, the post-test scores for the TPI show a notable difference between the two groups. The experimental group, which received PCP, has a significantly higher mean score of 58.7, with a standard deviation of 5.4. This suggests that the PCP intervention had a positive impact on their transition readiness. In contrast, the control group, which continued to receive traditional transition services, has a lower mean score of 48.9, with a standard deviation of 6.0. The improvement in scores in the experimental group indicates that PCP was effective in enhancing the students' preparedness for post-school life, particularly in areas such as employment readiness and independent living skills.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Subscales of TPI Post-Test Scores (Experimental Group)

Subscale	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum
Employment Readiness	19.8	2.4	15	23
Independent Living Skills	20.5	2.7	16	25
Social Integration	18.4	2.1	14	22

The subscale analysis of the TPI post-test scores for the experimental group reveals that the students showed significant improvements across all key areas of transition. The highest mean score is observed in Independent Living Skills (20.5), followed by Employment Readiness (19.8) and Social Integration (18.4). These results suggest that PCP had a particularly strong impact on preparing students for independent living, which is a critical aspect of successful transition to adulthood. The relatively high scores across all subscales demonstrate the comprehensive benefits of PCP, which addresses multiple dimensions of transition readiness.

Table 4: Paired t-Test Results for TPI Scores (Pre-Test vs. Post-Test) in the Experimental Group

Comparison	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value	95% Confidence Interval
Pre-Test vs. Post-Test	13.5	10.85	< 0.001	11.1 to 15.9

The paired t-test results for the experimental group indicate a significant increase in TPI scores from pre-test to post-test, with a mean difference of 13.5. The t-value of 10.85 and a p-value of less than 0.001 suggest that this improvement is statistically significant. The 95% confidence interval (11.1 to 15.9) indicates a high level of precision in estimating the mean difference. This significant increase confirms the effectiveness of PCP in improving the transition readiness of students with autism.

Table 5: Paired t-Test Results for TPI Scores (Pre-Test vs. Post-Test) in the Control Group

Comparison	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value	95% Confidence Interval
Pre-Test vs. Post-Test	4.2	2.15	0.035	0.3 to 8.1

For the control group, the paired t-test results show a smaller, yet statistically significant, increase in TPI scores from pre-test to post-test, with a mean difference of 4.2. The t-value of 2.15 and a p-value of 0.035 indicate a modest improvement in transition readiness, which may be attributable to the general maturation of students or ongoing transition services. However, the smaller magnitude of change compared to the experimental group underscores the superior effectiveness of PCP.

Table 6: ANOVA Results for Post-Test TPI Scores Between Groups

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	p-value
Between Groups	2520.2	1	2520.2	75.6	< 0.001
Within Groups	3920.4	118	33.2		
Total	6440.6	119			

The ANOVA results indicate a statistically significant difference in post-test TPI scores between the experimental group and the control group, with an F-value of 75.6 and a p-value of less than 0.001. This suggests that the variation in transition readiness scores can be attributed to the type of transition planning received, with PCP showing a strong positive effect.

Table 7: Effect Size Calculation (Cohen's d) for Post-Test TPI Scores

Comparison	Mean Difference	Pooled Standard Deviation	Cohen's d	Interpretation
Experimental vs. Control	9.8	5.7	1.72	Large Effect Size

The Cohen's d value of 1.72 indicates a large effect size, demonstrating that the impact of PCP on transition readiness is not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful. This large effect size further reinforces the conclusion that PCP is an effective intervention for improving transition outcomes for students with autism.

Thematic Analysis Summary from Semi-Structured Interviews

The thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with students, families, and educators provides valuable insights into the impact of Person-Centered Planning (PCP) on transition services for students with autism. Through this qualitative exploration, key themes emerged that highlight both the strengths and challenges of the PCP process. These themes, ranging from empowerment and self-advocacy to family involvement and implementation challenges, offer a deeper understanding of how PCP influences the transition experience. The analysis reveals the transformative effects of PCP on students' confidence, preparedness, and long-term outlook, while also identifying areas for improvement to ensure the process is as effective and supportive as possible.

Empowerment and Self-Advocacy

"For the first time, I felt like I had control over my future. I was able to express what I wanted, not just what others thought I should do."

This quote reflects a significant shift in the student's experience of the transition planning process. Prior to the implementation of Person-Centered Planning (PCP), students may have felt that decisions about their future were largely made by others—teachers, parents, or school administrators—without fully considering their own desires and goals. PCP, however, empowered the student by giving them a central role in the planning process, allowing them to express their personal aspirations and take ownership of their future. This empowerment is crucial for fostering self-determination and ensuring that the transition plan is truly reflective of the student's individual goals.

"Being part of the planning meetings made me more confident. I knew my voice mattered, and that gave me the courage to speak up more in other areas of my life."

This quote highlights the broader impact of PCP on the student's self-confidence and communication skills. By actively participating in the planning meetings and having their input valued, the student gained confidence in their ability to express themselves and advocate for their needs. This newfound confidence extended beyond the context of the meetings, suggesting that the skills and self-assurance developed through PCP could positively influence other areas of the student's life, such as interactions with peers, teachers, and family members.

"I've always struggled with feeling like people didn't listen to me, but during these meetings, everyone was focused on what I had to say."

This quote underscores the inclusive and respectful environment fostered by PCP. The student's previous struggles with feeling unheard are contrasted with the experience of being genuinely listened to during the PCP meetings. This shift is significant, as it not only validates the student's feelings and perspectives but also reinforces the importance of active listening in creating a supportive and effective planning process. The sense of being heard likely contributed to the student's overall satisfaction with the PCP process and their willingness to engage more fully in their transition planning.

Family Involvement

"Having my family involved in every step made a huge difference. They understood my goals better, and we could work together to achieve them."

This quote emphasizes the positive impact of involving the family in the PCP process. By including family members at every step, the process ensured that the student's goals were well-understood and supported by those closest to them. The collaborative effort between the student and their family likely strengthened the effectiveness of the transition plan, as it allowed for consistent support both at school and at home. This involvement also fostered a shared understanding and commitment to achieving the student's goals, making the transition process more cohesive and focused.

"The meetings were a great opportunity for us as a family to discuss our hopes and concerns. It brought us closer and made sure we were all on the same page."

This quote highlights how PCP facilitated meaningful communication within the family. The structured environment of the meetings provided a space for open discussion, where family members could express their hopes and concerns regarding the student's future. This process not only brought the family closer together but also ensured that everyone was aligned in their expectations and support strategies. The resulting unity likely contributed to a more harmonious and supportive transition experience for the student.

"Before, we felt like outsiders in the process. With PCP, we were finally part of the team, and that changed everything."

This quote reflects a transformative experience for the family, who previously felt excluded from the transition planning process. PCP shifted this dynamic by integrating the family as active participants in the planning team. This inclusion likely had a profound effect on the family's sense of agency and involvement, making them feel more connected to and responsible for the student's transition outcomes. The feeling of being part of a team also likely enhanced the effectiveness of the planning process, as it leveraged the insights and support of those who know the student best.

Tailored Support and Personalization

"The plan was completely tailored to my strengths and interests. It wasn't just about fitting into a mold but about creating a path that was right for me."

This quote highlights one of the key strengths of PCP—its focus on individualized planning. The student appreciated that the transition plan was specifically designed to align with their personal strengths and interests, rather than forcing them into a predefined mold. This tailored approach likely increased the student's engagement with the plan and their motivation to work towards the goals set out in it. By focusing on the student's unique qualities, PCP helps to ensure that the transition plan is not only relevant but also empowering, setting the student on a path that is meaningful and achievable.

"I loved how the plan focused on what I'm good at and what I enjoy doing, rather than just on my weaknesses."

This quote underscores the positive psychological impact of a strengths-based approach. By emphasizing what the student is good at and enjoys, rather than concentrating on their weaknesses, the PCP process likely boosted the student's self-esteem and confidence. This focus on strengths can be particularly empowering for students with autism, who may often encounter challenges that highlight their difficulties rather than their capabilities. The plan's alignment with the student's passions and talents also likely made the transition goals more attainable and enjoyable to pursue.

"The goals we set were realistic and based on what I actually want to achieve. It felt like the plan was truly mine."

This quote reflects the student's sense of ownership over the transition plan, which is a crucial element of PCP. By setting realistic goals that were directly aligned with what the student wanted to achieve, the PCP process ensured that the plan was not only feasible but also personally meaningful. This sense of ownership likely enhanced the student's commitment to the plan and their willingness to work towards the goals outlined in it. The feeling that the plan was "truly theirs" suggests a deep engagement with the process and a strong alignment between the student's aspirations and the support provided.

Implementation Challenges

"Coordinating everyone's schedules was difficult, and sometimes it felt like we couldn't get everyone on the same page."

This quote reveals one of the logistical challenges encountered during the PCP process—scheduling and coordination. Given the collaborative nature of PCP, which involves multiple stakeholders, finding a time that works for everyone can be challenging. The difficulty in getting all team members on the same page suggests that while PCP is effective, it requires careful management and communication to ensure that everyone involved is aligned and working towards the same goals. Addressing these coordination challenges is essential to maintaining the integrity and effectiveness of the PCP process.

"There were times when the process felt overwhelming because there were so many details to keep track of."

This quote highlights the complexity of the PCP process, which can sometimes feel overwhelming due to the number of details that need to be managed. The individualized nature of PCP means that plans are often detailed and comprehensive, covering various aspects of the student's life and future goals. While this thoroughness is one of PCP's strengths, it can also be a source of stress for students, families, and educators. This suggests a need for additional support or tools to help manage the details and keep the process organized and manageable for all involved.

"While the planning was great, actually following through with the plan was challenging. Not everything went as smoothly as we hoped."

This quote points to the difficulties in the implementation phase of PCP. While the planning process itself was positive, the execution of the plan encountered challenges, which may have affected the overall outcomes. These challenges could include unexpected obstacles, resource limitations, or difficulties in maintaining momentum over time. This insight suggests that while PCP is effective in creating strong, personalized plans, additional strategies or support

systems may be needed to ensure that these plans are implemented effectively and that any issues are addressed promptly.

Positive Outcomes and Future Impact

"I feel much more prepared for what's next. The plan gave me a clear path forward, and I'm excited about the future."

This quote reflects the student's increased preparedness and optimism about their future as a result of the PCP process. The clear path provided by the plan likely helped to reduce anxiety and uncertainty about the transition to adulthood, giving the student confidence in their ability to succeed. The excitement about the future suggests that PCP not only equipped the student with practical skills and strategies but also fostered a positive mindset, which is crucial for navigating the challenges of post-school life.

"The skills I developed through this process are going to help me long after I leave school. I'm ready to take on new challenges."

This quote highlights the long-term benefits of PCP beyond the immediate transition period. The skills developed through the PCP process—such as self-advocacy, goal-setting, and problem-solving—are likely to be valuable throughout the student's life, helping them to tackle new challenges as they arise. This indicates that PCP has a lasting impact, not only preparing students for their immediate transition but also equipping them with the tools they need for ongoing personal and professional development.

"This experience has changed how I see myself and my potential. I know I can succeed because I have a plan that works for me."

This quote underscores the transformative impact of PCP on the student's self-perception and confidence. The experience of being actively involved in a successful, personalized planning process has likely led to a more positive view of their own potential and capabilities. The belief that they can succeed, supported by a plan that is tailored to their needs and goals, is a powerful outcome of PCP, suggesting that it not only addresses the practical aspects of transition but also empowers students to believe in their own ability to achieve their goals.

Discussion

The findings from this study significantly contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting the use of Person-Centered Planning (PCP) in enhancing transition services for students with autism, particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia. The study's results underscore the transformative potential of PCP, not only in improving measurable outcomes but also in fundamentally shifting the educational experience for students with autism. These outcomes are especially critical given the unique challenges faced by this population during the transition to adulthood, including difficulties in social integration, employment, and independent living (McLachlan et al., 2020).

One of the most compelling aspects of the study is the marked improvement in transition readiness observed in the experimental group, which received PCP. The significant increase in Transition Planning Inventory (TPI) scores highlights the efficacy of PCP in fostering essential skills for adulthood. This finding aligns with existing literature that underscores the importance of individualized, student-centered approaches in special education (Stingo, 2024). However, this study adds a new dimension by situating these benefits within the Saudi educational system, where traditional approaches often dominate, and where the concept of student-centered planning is relatively novel (Alshehri, 2023).

The empowerment and self-advocacy fostered by PCP were recurring themes in the qualitative data. Students reported feeling a greater sense of control over their futures, which is a crucial factor in successful transitions. This empowerment is not merely about being heard; it is about fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for one's own life, which research has shown to be a critical component of self-determination theory (Ryan et al., 2021). The confidence and self-efficacy that students developed through PCP are likely to have long-term benefits, extending beyond the immediate transition period and into adulthood. In the context of Saudi Arabia, where cultural norms often place decision-making authority with parents or educators rather than the students themselves, the empowerment of students through PCP represents a significant shift towards more inclusive and participatory educational practices (Gray & Woods, 2022).

Family involvement, another key theme, was highlighted as a critical factor in the success of the PCP process. The active participation of families in planning meetings not only ensured that the transition plans were aligned with the student's goals but also strengthened the family's role in supporting the student's transition. This finding resonates with global research that emphasizes the importance of family involvement in educational planning for students with disabilities (**Duque et al., 2020**). However, in the Saudi context, where family plays a central and often authoritative role in decision-making, the collaborative approach of PCP can help bridge the gap between traditional familial expectations and the modern educational practices that prioritize the student's voice (**Kahne et al., 2022**). By involving families more deeply, PCP not only enhances the relevance and effectiveness of the transition plans but also fosters a more cohesive support system that is likely to be more sustainable and effective in the long term.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also revealed significant challenges in the implementation of PCP, particularly in terms of logistical coordination and the complexity of the process. Participants frequently mentioned difficulties in aligning schedules and ensuring consistent communication among all team members. These issues are not unique to Saudi Arabia; they reflect broader challenges inherent in the implementation of inclusive education practices, which require substantial time, resources, and collaboration (**Abu-Alghayth et al., 2024**). In resource-constrained environments, such as many Saudi schools, these challenges can be particularly pronounced. The study's findings suggest that for PCP to be successfully implemented on a wider scale, there needs to be a greater investment in professional development for educators, as well as in the infrastructure necessary to support effective collaboration among all stakeholders.

The complexity of PCP also emerged as a potential barrier, with some students and families feeling overwhelmed by the detailed and individualized nature of the plans. This aligns with concerns raised in previous studies, where the intensive nature of PCP was cited as a potential drawback, especially in settings where resources are limited (**Tondora et al., 2022**). The findings suggest a need for strategies to simplify aspects of the PCP process or provide additional support to participants to ensure that the process remains accessible and manageable. One potential solution could be the development of digital tools or platforms that facilitate the PCP process by streamlining communication, tracking progress, and reducing the administrative burden on educators and families (**Barnhardt, 2022**). Additionally, the involvement of dedicated transition coordinators could help alleviate some of the logistical challenges, ensuring that the process runs smoothly and that all team members are consistently aligned with the student's goals.

The contrast between the outcomes of the experimental and control groups highlights the limitations of traditional transition services, which often lack the individualization and student involvement that are central to PCP. The relatively modest improvements observed in the control group underscore the inadequacy of a one-size-fits-all approach in meeting the diverse needs of students with autism (**Movsessian, 2022**). This finding is particularly relevant in the Saudi context, where educational practices have traditionally been more rigid and less responsive to individual student needs. The study's results suggest that adopting PCP on a broader scale could lead to more meaningful and sustainable improvements in transition outcomes for students with autism, challenging the status quo and pushing for a more inclusive and personalized approach to education.

The large effect size observed in the study's quantitative analysis further supports the argument for integrating PCP into standard practice in transition services. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the quasi-experimental design used in this study. While the design allowed for a practical and ethical comparison between groups, it does not eliminate the possibility of confounding variables influencing the results. Future research should aim to use more rigorous experimental designs, such as randomized controlled trials, to strengthen the evidence base for PCP and to explore its impact over longer periods (**Tuzzio et al., 2022**). Additionally, longitudinal studies that track students over several years would provide valuable insights into the long-term effects of PCP on employment, independent living, and overall quality of life.

Another critical aspect that warrants further exploration is the generalizability of these findings to other contexts. The cultural and educational landscape of Saudi Arabia is unique, and while this study provides important insights, its findings may not be directly applicable to other regions or populations. Future research should explore how PCP can be adapted and implemented in different cultural contexts, particularly in regions where educational practices and societal norms may differ significantly from those in Saudi Arabia. This would involve not only examining the efficacy of PCP in these settings but also exploring how the process can be tailored to respect and incorporate local cultural values and practices.

Theoretical Contribution

This study makes significant theoretical contributions to the field of special education, particularly in the context of transition planning for students with autism. By examining the implementation and impact of Person-Centered Planning (PCP) within the unique cultural and educational setting of Saudi Arabia, the study extends existing theories of self-determination, inclusive education, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

The study provides empirical support for the application of self-determination theory (Watry-Christian, 2019) within the context of transition services for students with autism. The findings demonstrate that PCP, which emphasizes student agency and involvement in decision-making, can effectively enhance self-determination among students with autism. This is evidenced by the significant improvements in students' self-advocacy and empowerment, as revealed through both quantitative and qualitative data. The study extends self-determination theory by illustrating how its principles can be operationalized within a culturally specific context, such as Saudi Arabia, where traditional educational practices often limit student autonomy. By showing that PCP can successfully foster self-determination in such settings, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how self-determination can be cultivated in diverse cultural contexts.

The study also contributes to the theoretical discourse on inclusive education by highlighting the potential of PCP to enhance the inclusivity of transition services for students with autism. Inclusive education theory advocates for the full participation of all students in the educational process, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds (Ioannidi & Malafantis, 2022). This study supports the theory by demonstrating that PCP, with its focus on individualized planning and family involvement, can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for students with autism. The study's findings suggest that PCP not only addresses the academic and developmental needs of these students but also fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment, which are key components of inclusive education. This contribution is particularly significant in the Saudi context, where inclusive practices are still evolving, and where this study offers a model for how inclusivity can be effectively implemented.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the development of culturally responsive pedagogy by exploring how PCP can be adapted to fit the cultural norms and values of Saudi Arabia. Culturally responsive pedagogy emphasizes the importance of recognizing and integrating students' cultural backgrounds into educational practices. This study provides evidence that PCP can be adapted to respect and incorporate the cultural values of Saudi students and their families, particularly the central role of family in decision-making. By involving families deeply in the planning process and aligning the transition goals with the cultural expectations of the community, the study demonstrates that PCP can be both effective and culturally sensitive. This theoretical contribution is important as it provides a framework for adapting individualized education practices like PCP to different cultural contexts, thereby broadening the applicability of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Lastly, the study has implications for the theoretical foundations of special education policy, particularly in regions where educational practices are traditionally centralized and less individualized. The success of PCP in improving transition outcomes within the Saudi context challenges the prevailing assumption that standardized approaches to education are universally effective. The study suggests that special education policies should incorporate more flexible, individualized strategies that are responsive to the cultural and social dynamics of the population being served. This theoretical contribution encourages a rethinking of policy frameworks to include more personalized and culturally responsive approaches, which could lead to more effective educational outcomes for students with disabilities globally.

Recommendations

This study has provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of Person-Centered Planning (PCP) in improving transition outcomes for students with autism in Saudi Arabia. By employing a quasi-experimental design and integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, the research demonstrated that PCP significantly enhances students' readiness for post-school life, particularly in areas such as employment readiness, independent living skills, and social integration. The findings underscore the transformative potential of PCP, which empowers students by placing them at the center of the planning process, thereby fostering self-advocacy, confidence, and a greater sense of control over their futures.

The study also highlighted the critical role of family involvement in the PCP process. Active participation of families not only enriched the planning process but also ensured that the transition plans were culturally relevant and aligned

with the students' goals and family expectations. This collaborative approach, which respects and integrates cultural values, proved to be a key factor in the successful implementation of PCP in the Saudi context. The study's findings suggest that such involvement is crucial for the sustainability and effectiveness of transition plans, particularly in cultural settings where family plays a central role in decision-making.

However, the research also revealed challenges associated with the implementation of PCP, including logistical difficulties and the complexity of managing individualized plans. These challenges indicate a need for additional support, resources, and professional development to ensure that PCP can be effectively scaled and sustained across educational settings. Despite these challenges, the large effect size observed in the study's results provides strong evidence that PCP is a viable and beneficial approach to transition planning, one that could significantly improve the educational outcomes for students with autism if implemented more widely.

In light of these findings, the study calls for a re-examination of existing transition services in Saudi Arabia and other similar contexts. Traditional approaches, which often lack the individualization and student involvement central to PCP, may not adequately meet the needs of students with autism. The study advocates for the adoption of more flexible, student-centered strategies that are culturally responsive and tailored to the unique needs of each student. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of ongoing research to refine PCP practices, explore their long-term impacts, and adapt them to different cultural and educational environments.

This study has made significant contributions to the field of special education by demonstrating the effectiveness of Person-Centered Planning in a culturally specific context. It provides a strong case for the integration of PCP into the standard practice of transition services, offering a pathway to more inclusive, empowering, and effective education for students with autism. As educational systems continue to evolve, the insights gained from this research will be crucial in guiding the development of policies and practices that better support the diverse needs of all students, ensuring that they are fully prepared for the challenges and opportunities of adulthood.

Acknowledgments

The authors extend their appreciation to the Deanship of Scientific Research at King Khalid University for funding this work through Large Research Groups under grant number (RGP.2 / 187 /44).

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