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A four-stage longitudinal study exploring pupils' experiences, preparation and support systems during primary-secondary school transitions

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Table 1: Timeline and sample

Stage	Pupils	Parents	Primary School Professionals	Secondary School Professionals
1: Three months to the end of P7	78	6	-	-
2: End of first term in S1	61	21	6	7
3: End of S1	64	-	-	3
4: End of S2	41	-	-	-

Table 2: Examples of questionnaire content and reasons

Pupil questionnaires		
Stage	Questions	Reason for asking those questions
Stage 1 (14 questions, seven closed questions but one asked for reasons and seven open ended questions)	Demographic information (school and gender)	To be able to look for trends based on demographics.
	<p>Statements about whether or not the primary and secondary schools had prepared them (Yes/No/Don't Know and space for reasons for their views).</p> <p>They were also asked whether they were moving with friends and their attitude to starting secondary school</p> <p>This was followed by open ended questions about the most useful things their primary school has done to help them with the move to S1 and what could be improved.</p> <p>Same for secondary school</p>	<p>To understand whether they felt prepared and to understand their perspective of the effectiveness of planning and preparation.</p> <p>There are contradictions in research about the importance of moving with friends.</p>
	What they were looking forward to about moving to secondary school (multiple options along with 'other' to capture their excitement and expectations). They could choose as many options as they wanted.	The discourse about transitions is negative and this was to understand what children were excited about; moving towards a positive discourse.
	What if any concerns they had about moving to secondary school (multiple options along with 'other' to capture their concerns and expectations). They could choose as many options as they wanted.	As above, to ensure a balanced discourse.

	Yes/No question about whether they were speaking with anyone about moving to secondary school. If they said 'yes', there was a filter question listing potential options (e.g., parent/grandparents, brother/sister/cousin, P7 teacher) and 'other'. They were asked to share examples of what they had discussed.	This was to ascertain their support networks as other research including the first author's looks at the role of support systems in resilience during change.
	They were asked in an open ended question what their family and friends were doing to prepare them for the move.	To ascertain the type of support provided outside the school context.
	Their advice for other children moving to secondary school.	This was important for the participating schools as they could provide this advice to next cohort of P7 pupils.
Stage 2 (16 questions, seven closed and nine open ended)	The same as above but asking to respond based on experience of moving to S1. Additional questions confirmed what the reality was in the context of aspects they were excited or concerned about. Additional open ended questions asked for more information about the preparation by secondary school in S1 and what stood out for them.	Same as above but with a change in what was expected to what was the reality.
Stage 3 (16 questions, seven closed and nine open ended)	Same as above with change in language in line with the stage and time. They were asked to reflect back as well. Some questions were asked for continuity, for example what was still good or what preparation from school was still helping them at the end of S1).	Same as above, gauging their perception and experience at that stage and in hindsight.
Stage 4 (16 questions, seven closed and nine open ended)	Same as above with change in language in line with the stage and time. They were asked to reflect back as well.	Same as above, gauging their perception and experience at that stage and in hindsight.

Parent questionnaires		
Stage 1 (18 questions, six closed and 12 open ended)	Four demographic questions about them including relationship with the child and school the child attended. They were also asked if this would be their first child to move to secondary school.	To provide a context to understand their perspectives. This was to gain an insight into previous experience of primary-secondary transitions.
	Statements about whether or not the primary and secondary schools had prepared their child and them (Yes/No/Don't Know and space for reasons for their views). They were also asked about their own and their child's transition experience. This was followed by open ended questions about the most useful things their primary and secondary school had done to help them and their child with the move to S1 and what could be improved.	This was to gain another perspective about their child's transition experiences and planning and preparation. Very little research has been undertaken with parents and children in this area. This also helped crystallise the findings. In line with MMT Theory they were asked about their transitions but that data have not been presented in this paper.
	They were asked what, if anything, they were doing to prepare their child.	This was to understand parental role in supporting transitions.
Stage 2 (19 questions, seven closed and 12 open ended)	Same as above with change in tense as required and an additional question about and whether they had another child in the primary or secondary school..	Same as above.
Professionals' Questionnaire: Primary school		
Stage 2 (20 questions, five closed and 15 open ended)	Demographic information (school, gender, experience, role)	To see any trends related to their demographics
	Conceptualisation of transitions	This was important as it is major gap in literature. Also, to understand their practice it was important to find out more about the conceptual basis of it

	Pupils' transition experience and support	To find out their perspective on whether pupil transitions had gone/were going well; issues they might have faced and whether and how they had been resolved. Also, to find out what planning and preparation, and its effectiveness was taking place from their perspective
	Parents' transition experience and support	To find out their view on whether parents were experiencing transitions and how they were supported. This is based on the Multiple and Multi-dimensional transitions (MMT) Theory.
	Their transition experience and the support, if any, they were receiving	To find out their view on whether they were experiencing transitions and how they were supported. This is based on the Multiple and Multi-dimensional transitions (MMT) Theory.
Professionals' Questionnaire: Secondary school		
Stage 2 (19 questions, six closed and 13 open ended)	Similar themes as above apart from the question about which school they were from and one question about communication with different primary schools.	Same as above
Stage 3 (23 questions, 13 closed- some with follow up open ended question; 10 open ended questions)	Similar themes with focus on transition during first year and transition through second year of secondary school	Same as above

Table 3: Cross-tabulation of responses with transition experiences

Experience	No problems during transition experience (n=40)			Problems during transitions (n=16)			Don't know (n=5)		
	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know
Moved with friends	34	6	0	15	1		5	0	0
Anticipated problems	11	22	7	4	7	5	1	0	4
Siblings/Cousins in the same secondary school	15	20	5	3	12	1	1	4	0
Helpfulness of preparation by primary school	30	8	2	8	4	4	2	1	2
Helpfulness of preparation by secondary school	31	5	4	10	0	6	5	0	0

Table 4: Pupils' perspective of who supported them with transition over time

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
My parents/grandparents	86	80	69	51
My brother/sister/cousin	50.00	48	31	27
My classmates in P7/S1/S2	77	48	50	24
My other friends who are not my classmates	35	44	33	27
My P7 teacher	35	20	11	5
My primary school head teacher	9	13	6	7
My S1 teachers/guidance teacher	33	20	31	22
My secondary school head teacher	27	7	2	2