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Effective actions to support transition: exploring the experience of public schools in Chile

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This study aimed to explore the nature of the technical-pedagogical support provided by Public Education Local Services in Chile for implementing Decree 373, as perceived by school leaders and teachers. It examined how this collaboration facilitated the design and implementation of effective actions to support the successful progression of children from kindergarten to first grade. Previous work in the field of transition suggests that effective transition programmes consider the perspectives of all actors—children, families, and practitioners—and are more likely to succeed when there are positive leaders within both the management and pedagogical teams. This study focused on the perspectives of practitioners and management teams within five different public schools, employing a multiple case study design and a mixed-methods approach with a predominantly qualitative focus. Data was collected through a questionnaire comprising both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Findings show that the implementation of this Decree is still in its initial stages and faces challenges due to the new structure within the public education system. Furthermore, in terms of leadership, the study highlights the need to adopt more horizontal and democratic forms of leadership both within the system and in individual schools. Educators and teachers report being motivated to work collaboratively and wanting to be included in future initiatives. The experiences of these school staff members provide meaningful insights into how to advance the implementation of the public education system in partnership with schools.

KEYWORDS

early childhood education, transition to school, leadership, public education, transition strategy, Chile, Primary School Education

1 Introduction

This paper discusses the relationship between pedagogical leadership and the success of effective actions to support transition from early childhood education to primary school. The study took place in Chile, where educational policies are currently shifting and specifically focusing on this transition at the early levels. Moreover, there is a genuine concern about supporting children's educational trajectories throughout their school life.

In this paper we address the experience of 5 schools in two different regions of the country that serve as a good example on how these policies are being implemented by school leaders and practitioners, and their contribution to pedagogical practises focused on easing the transition process for young children.

2 Early transitions and educational trajectory

Transitions are ongoing and part of life for all human beings (Gallacher et al., 2009). In early childhood, some of the most significant transitions are associated with the commencement of formal education, which often begins at a very young age. In Chile, this begins with nursery care, and the policies that guide this care focus on setting children on positive early education trajectories that can potentially impact the lifespan (Ministerio de Educación, 2024).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) has been widely used to study early transitions due to its usefulness in providing an explanatory model to understand the various and complex levels of interaction that occur between the educational community, educational policy and culture, thereby influencing students' adaptation to different contexts (Fabian and Dunlop, 2007). However, Bronfenbrenner (2005) emphasised that the theory should serve to position the individual in an active role in their learning and development and proposed that the individual should be considered as another system within his theory, referred to as the Biological System. He then renamed his theory the "Bioecological" theory. He introduced the concept of "proximal processes," which are recurring and meaningful interactions between an individual and their environment that influence long-term development. According to Loizou (2011), this reformulation enables the study of educational transitions from the student's active perspective, through the activities they engage in, their interactions with peers and teachers, and their adaptation to new norms and expectations.

There is growing interest in understanding how younger children experience these transition processes, beginning with babies and toddlers transitioning from home to nursery school for the first time. The international empirical literature also reveals a trend towards studying transitions from early childhood education to the first year of primary education (Dockett and Perry, 2013; Peters, 2010). However, this interest has expanded to include essential elements in early transitions, for which increasing consensus exists.

Firstly, one key element are the interactions among educational stakeholders are crucial for fostering successful transitions—not only among teaching staff and families (Bohan-Baker and Little, 2002; Dockett and Perry, 2004, 2021c), but also with children and among peers (Corsaro and Molinari, 2005). Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) state that the transition quality depends on the coordination between families, teachers, and the school environment. Effective school-family partnerships build realistic and shared expectations, promoting continuity in implementing child learning and development approaches (Bohan-Baker and Little, 2002; Dunlop, 2003). Jiang et al. (2021) recommend that early childhood education programmes actively involve parents in the school environment to strengthen the child's autonomy

and sense of security during the transition process. Studies, such as those by Dockett and Perry (2020) and McIntyre et al. (2010) demonstrate how school-family collaborations contribute to children's confidence, reduce anxiety, and promote a smooth adaptation.

Secondly, another key area of interest is how children themselves experience this change, with various studies highlighting the importance of their perspectives in designing context-appropriate transition strategies (Dockett and Perry, 2021a; Broström, 2002). Einarsdottir (2010) highlights that children's perceptions of transition are fundamental to their school adaptation, influencing their engagement and wellbeing in the new environment. As a result, there has been increasing emphasis on including children's voices in transition research (Barblett et al., 2025; Loizou, 2020) considering their experiences and emotions as essential factors in evaluating the effectiveness of transition programmes (Dockett and Perry, 2021b). Child-friendly methodologies to support the child voice have been developed. For example, Clark (2005) and Clark and Moss (2011) have implemented visual and participatory methodologies to capture children's perspectives within their school environments.

Thirdly, one of the most significant changes children face is the physical and environmental shift, whether from home to nursery or from nursery to school (Dockett et al., 2024). In these settings, familiar figures (peers, teachers) and attachment objects become especially important in supporting transitions. There is now substantial evidence indicating the need to consider all these factors when implementing actions, strategies, or plans for early transition processes (Dockett and Perry, 2021b). Overall, transition is not a one-off event, but a continuous process throughout a child's school life (Dockett and Perry, 1999). Studies, such as those by Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (2003) have demonstrated that this process involves school, social, emotional, and pedagogical factors. Research argues that successful transitions are key to ongoing educational engagement and positive outcomes (Fabian and Dunlop, 2007). Overall, transition processes should consider how students shape their transition experience through their actions, perceptions, and adaptation strategies (Dockett and Perry, 2021c; Einarsdottir, 2010).

3 Pedagogical leadership—a key element to successful transition programmes

Within pedagogical leadership forms, traditional hierarchical leadership has long been the dominant model (Nicholson et al., 2020; Furman, 2012; Heikka and Waniganayake, 2011). However, Spillane (2005) introduced the concept of distributed leadership, which enables leadership to be shared among members of the education community based on their expertise. This approach ensures that decision-making is not concentrated in a single individual but instead emerges from a collective process (Harris, 2004). In response to the limitations of hierarchical structures, Furman (2012) and Nicholson et al. (2020) developed the concept of pedagogical leadership, emphasising educational leaders' role in creating learning environments that prioritise equity, critical

reflection, and social justice. Extending this argument, [Heikka and Waniganayake \(2011\)](#) assert that pedagogical leadership must go beyond traditional administrative functions to foster social relationships and encourage a democratic approach to education.

[Muijs et al. \(2004\)](#) argue that distributed leadership is functional in both Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Primary School Education (PSE), as it promotes shared responsibility in pedagogical management and strengthens collaboration between teachers and leadership teams. [Nicholson et al. \(2020\)](#) emphasise the importance of inclusive leadership that actively engages key stakeholders, underscoring the value of collaborative approaches. [Palaologou and Male \(2019\)](#) expand on this by arguing that leadership in the early years should not be limited to administrative management but should actively engage all participants in the teaching and learning process. Building on these perspectives, [Sisson et al. \(2024\)](#) further challenge traditional leadership models by advocating for co-constructed leadership in early education. This model emphasises the collective development of leadership through interactions between school leaders, teachers, families, and students, rather than imposing rigid, top-down structures.

The literature reflects a clear shift from hierarchical leadership towards more collaborative and participatory models. The progression from distributed leadership ([Spillane, 2005](#)) to pedagogical leadership ([Furman, 2012](#)) and, more recently, co-constructed leadership ([Sisson et al., 2024](#)) demonstrates an increasing recognition of the need for shared responsibility and collective decision-making in early education. Therefore, the research literature supports co-constructed and distributed pedagogical leadership as key strategies that enhance the quality of education. We argue that leadership should be considered a key component of an effective and positive transition process, ensuring continuity of learning across both levels. Effective leadership will enhance teacher support and engage the education community, establishing better communication between teachers, families, and children to foster improved articulation among different educational levels.

4 Educational trajectory in the Chilean school system

4.1 The Chilean public education system

The Chilean public education system is currently experiencing structural reform. In the previous structure, implemented since the 1980s, public schools depended administratively on municipalities (local governments). In the new structure, which will be progressively implemented from 2018 to 2028, public schools depend on a Directorate of Public Education within the Ministry of Education, through a set of new institutions called Public Education Local Services (SLEPs). SLEPs are decentralised institutions responsible for providing educational services to the public schools assigned to them. They bring together schools from several municipalities and oversee their administrative and pedagogical management ([Gobierno de Chile, 2020](#)). Each SLEP includes a Technical and Pedagogical Support Unit, which consults and assists schools with curriculum

implementation, leadership, school climate, and psychosocial support for students ([Ministerio de Educación, 2017](#), art. 25). Upon completion, 70 SLEPs will manage public education nationwide (15 of them already operational at the time of writing). For a comprehensive historical context of Chilean public education policy, we refer the reader to [Bellei Carvacho et al. \(2018\)](#).

Before the creation of the Public Education System, two key milestones shaped ECE. In 2015, the Undersecretariat of Early Childhood Education was established ([Chile, 2015](#)), followed by the publication of a new curriculum in 2018 ([Chile. Ministerio de Educación. Subsecretaría de Educación Parvularia, 2018](#)). Thus, SLEPs' work must align with the policies and guidance issued by the Ministry of Education. ECE and PSE fall under the responsibility of the Undersecretariat of Early Childhood Education and the Division of Curriculum and Evaluation, respectively. To manage the transition from ECE to PSE, the Undersecretariat of Early Childhood Education published Decree 373 ([Ministerio de Educación, 2017](#)), establishing principles and technical definitions for an Educational Transition Strategy (ETS). This policy provides guidelines for all key education stakeholders, defining the transition as a process that requires collaborative work and pedagogical planning. Moreover, this strategy must be integrated within each school's Institutional Educational Project, making the support of the SLEPs' Technical and Pedagogical Support Unit essential for schools developing an ETS. At this point, it is important to clarify that ECE serves children from early infancy up to 6 years of age, while PSE begins with First Grade at the age of six. Each level has its own curriculum document, developed by the respective divisions of the Ministry of Education. These documents differ in their guiding principles and in specific elements such as evaluation, interaction, and the organisation of learning environments. As a result, the ECE curriculum is explicitly child-oriented and play-based ([Ministerio de Educación, 2024](#)), whereas the PSE curriculum is more adult-centred and oriented towards academic learning ([Ministerio de Educación—Unidad de Currículum y Evaluación, 2024](#)). This contrast reflects the predominant pedagogical characteristics of each level and is also consistent with international research, which notes that play is central in early years but less prominent in primary education ([Parker et al., 2022](#); [O'Sullivan et al., 2025](#); [González-Moreira et al., 2023](#)).

In this scenario, the Decree serves as a guiding tool, providing each educational community with the framework to design their own ETS. Rather than prescribing detailed actions, it outlines key dimensions (leadership, pedagogical management, training and coexistence, and resource management) and principles that should be followed (flexibility, comprehensiveness, contextualisation, participation, and prioritisation). In sum, an ETS has been defined by Decree 373 ([Ministerio de Educación, 2017](#)) and the Undersecretariat of Early Childhood Education ([Ministerio de Educación, 2024](#)) as an action—or set of actions—designed and implemented to ensure continuity, coherence, and curricular progression across different educational cycles. This approach recognises children as rights-bearing individuals and is grounded in the principles of pedagogy that foster comprehensive, relevant, and meaningful learning experiences.

4.2 Policies and transition to school

Following the mandate of the law, the work of the SLEPs has focused on ensuring coherence within the education system through the Technical and Pedagogical Support Unit. This unit is responsible for providing support and assistance to educational institutions and centres, aligning with Institutional Educational Project and Education Improvement Plans while safeguarding local and regional relevance and the distinctive characteristics of different educational levels. It also promotes network-based collaboration to develop strategies and actions tailored to the educational trajectories of children (Congreso Nacional de Chile, 2017). At the ECE and PSE levels, the Technical and Pedagogical Support Unit has emphasised the principles established in Law 21040 (Ministerio de Educación, 2023). These principles include: (a) Comprehensive quality; (b) Continuous quality improvement; (c) Collaboration and network-based work; and (d) Local relevance, diversity of educational projects, and community participation. In the ECE sector, experiences have highlighted the crucial mediating role of SLEPs (as an intermediate level) in the continuous improvement processes of educational institutions. Currently, four SLEPs are directly implementing Decree 373 in nursery schools, childcare centres, and schools that incorporate transition levels (Chile, Ministerio de Educación, 2023). This work extends the application of the Decree's guidelines to the first 2 years of PSE, reinforcing the importance of children's educational trajectories for their learning outcomes. It is worth noting that Law 21040 explicitly states that both the Directorate of Public Education and SLEPs must safeguard the distinctive characteristics of the ECE level and ensure that proposed educational strategies align with its pedagogical paradigm.

In Chile, studies have shifted from focusing on curricular continuity (referred to as articulation) to considering the socioemotional impact of transitions, especially between ECE and PSE. Álvarez (1999) argued that positive transitions involve curricular continuity and must also encompass the child's holistic development and collaboration between teachers across different levels. More recently, research has systematically incorporated children's perspectives and the importance of socio-educational interactions in transition experiences. Jadue-Roa (2018, 2019) and Jadue-Roa and Knust (2019) has analysed how accompanying strategies and collaborative work across educational levels can improve children's educational trajectories, while Rupin et al. (2023) have explored the tension between play-based methodologies that have traditionally dominated ECE, and the increasing structuring of the curriculum in the early education cycle (from ECE to the second year of PSE). This tension is also reflected in international studies that highlight the challenge of sustaining play-based pedagogical practises as developmentally appropriate approaches (Parker et al., 2022; O'Sullivan et al., 2025), and point to the need for policies that ensure respectful and coherent transition processes (OECD, 2020).

Currently, Chile is focusing on improving articulation processes within ECE and between ECE and PSE, shifting from a solely curricular focus to a more holistic one. This shift aims to strengthen the role of families and children themselves in the transition process, ensuring that teachers have the necessary

pedagogical tools to support children effectively. Although there have been significant advances in educational policies, challenges persist in implementing strategies that recognise children's experiences and promote transitions that support wellbeing and learning.

Regarding the evidence on leadership in ECE in Chile, it demonstrates its central role in educational quality, while also highlighting various limitations. Opazo et al. (2023) focus their study on municipal establishments, such as the National Board of Early Childhood Centres (JUNJI), and Integra Foundation (Fundación Integra), where headteachers face an administrative burden that hinders the effective execution of pedagogical leadership, preventing them from providing meaningful support to teaching teams. Similarly, Cabrera-Murcia (2021) notes that headteachers balance their pedagogical role with the supervision of pedagogical practises and administrative functions, which limits the focus on improving learning outcomes. Falabella et al. (2022) mention that "wellbeing leadership" centres on empathy and emotional support; although essential in this educational phase, it may generate gender stereotypes and limit the recognition of leadership in institutional management. Poblete Núñez and Falabella (2020) emphasise that clear and effective leadership in early childhood education is affected by the fact that this phase has historically been marginalised within the Chilean educational system, strained by welfare-oriented models and early schooling approaches.

Research in PSE on leadership has analysed the transformation from traditional models to distributed and collaborative approaches. Sepúlveda-López and Molina (2017) examine how headteachers have transitioned from instructional leadership to distributed leadership, enabling them to delegate responsibilities and strengthen pedagogical management. Leiva et al. (2016) highlight that in PSE, pedagogical leadership is often hindered by a lack of training in practises such as class observation and teacher feedback, which limits its impact on student learning. Cueto et al. (2020) suggests that learning communities are key to strengthening pedagogical leadership in 21st-century schools. However, Villagra Bravo et al. (2023) emphasise that leadership training models must be student-oriented to ensure that pedagogical management has a significant impact on educational outcomes.

This article focuses primarily on the management of transition processes through exploring the implementation of Decree 373, and how Chile aims to foster positive and respectful transitions through public policy that recognises the holistic nature of educational trajectories and the relevance of collaborative curricular management to enhance the wellbeing and learning of children. Decree 373 aims to consolidate pedagogical leadership that extends beyond administrative management, with a focus on the holistic development of children. However, studies show that administrative overload, a lack of training in pedagogical leadership, and a disconnection between ECE and PSE education hinder effective leadership development. For the purposes of this study, the paper focuses on the relevance of the leadership dimension, as Decree 373 states that the management team is responsible for creating environments that promote learning development through joint reflection and shared responsibility with teaching teams. Within this dimension, the collaborative work

between the school and the SLEP becomes crucial for effectively managing an ETS in each context. In the discussion section, we argue that if this relationship is well-established, the dimension of pedagogical management can develop smoothly, facilitating positive interactions, play, and exploration as forms of meaningful learning within pedagogical practises.

5 The study

This project aimed to investigate the nature of technical-pedagogical support provided by SLEPs in Chile to implement Decree 373, as perceived by school leaders and teachers. It examined how this collaboration facilitated the design and implementation of transition strategies that support the successful progression of children from ECE to PSE. A multiple case study design (focusing on different SLEPs) was employed, using a mixed-methods approach with a predominantly qualitative focus (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017; Yin, 2009). Data were collected through a questionnaire that comprised both closed-ended and open-ended questions.

Our research question was: *How are the guidelines of Decree 373 being implemented in the design and execution of an ETS in educational institutions receiving technical-pedagogical support from a SLEP?*

5.1 Description of the participants

Three SLEPs from different regions in the country were contacted and invited to participate in this research. Two of them agreed, SLEP A is in northern Chile, whereas SLEP B is in central-south Chile. They are part of the second and third cohorts of SLEPs, having been fully operational since 2021. They oversaw approximately 80 educational institutions and between 10,000 and 20,000 students each. According to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics for 2025 [Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (INE), 2019], both serve a territory composed of a larger municipality with a rural population of approximately 10% and some smaller municipalities with rural populations ranging from 20% to 100%. In total, school workers from five schools agreed to participate, conforming two cohorts:

Cohort 1. School leaders from management teams, principals and coordinators or in-school technical-pedagogical support staff.

Cohort 2. Early Childhood Educators and Primary School Teachers.

In total, 18 school workers, including 13 women and five men, completed the online survey. They were, on average, 49 years old at the time of participation (range: 33–65) and had an average of 21 years of experience working in schools (range: 5–40), of which approximately 16 years were specifically spent working in their institutions, in both management and pedagogical teams (Table 1).

The participants held a range of diverse roles within their school communities. The directors had experience in both teaching and management, leading specific projects. Members of the in-school technical-pedagogical support staff possessed expertise in pedagogical planning and teacher evaluation, supporting strategic

educational processes. The School Welfare Coordinator, a history and geography teacher with 3 years of experience in the role, oversaw issues related to school welfare.

5.2 Methodology: online survey

Our survey drew upon two research instruments designed by Dockett and Perry (2006) to gather data on transition experiences and processes: “Survey of Current Transition Programs” and “Overview of Current Transition Practises.” These questionnaires measure elements central to the design and implementation of an ETS (as specified in Decree 373), such as having a transition programme, securing the participation of children and their families, and gathering the perspectives of the educational team. The questionnaires contain multiple-choice questions, rating scales, and open-ended questions. Based on these instruments, we developed an online survey comprising both closed and open-ended questions to collect quantitative and qualitative data on school workers’ experiences and impressions of educational transition strategies. This online survey was administered using SurveyMonkey.

After a welcome page and an informed consent page, the survey presented the definition of an ETS, which was previously included in the context section. Subsequently, participants answered questions divided into three sections: (a) general characterisation of each participant, including demographic data and information about their academic and work experience; (b) the planning and implementation of educational transition strategies and actions in their institution; and (c) their participation in, and perceived helpfulness of, a series of transition actions. For each transition action, participants answered two questions: (1) whether they had taken part in the action, and (2) whether they considered it very helpful, somewhat helpful, or not helpful. Due to an error in the survey’s logical structure, participants who declared they had not taken part in a given action could still rate its helpfulness. For our analysis, we discarded the helpfulness ratings of those who had not participated in each action.

The survey was open between October 15 and November 30, 2024.

5.3 Data analyses

Quantitative data analysis focused on the survey’s closed questions. We asked school workers: (a) whether their institution had a written policy regarding the educational transition from kindergarten to first grade, (b) whether their institution’s educational improvement plan included actions to support this transition, and (c) whether their SLEP’s support helped implement actions to support this transition. These three questions had binary yes/no answers, and we calculated the percentage of participants who responded positively to each of them. In addition, we presented school workers with a list of 15 transition actions, many of which were described in the literature (Dockett and Perry, 2007; Peters, 2010). We asked them to indicate whether they had taken part in each of these actions and, if so, how helpful they

TABLE 1 Description of participants' roles in their educational institutions.

Participant roles		Number of participants from SLEP A	Number of participants from SLEP B	Total
Management teams	Director	1	3	4
	Leader of technical-pedagogical units	1	3	4
	School welfare coordinator	1	0	1
	Total	3	6	9
Pedagogical teams	Early childhood educator	1	4	5
	Primary school teacher	3	0	3
	Special education teacher	0	1	1
	Total	4	5	9
Total		7	11	18

considered each action to be. Regarding participation, we reported the percentage of participants who declared having taken part in each transition action. Regarding helpfulness, we noted that no participant declared any action as “not helpful.” Therefore, we reported the percentage of participants who declared each action to be “Very helpful” (vs “Somewhat helpful”), considering only those who had stated that they had taken part in each corresponding action. Whenever relevant, we examined the responses of each SLEP and/or compared those of management and pedagogical teams separately.

The qualitative analysis procedure was developed according to the three phases proposed by Schreier (2014): the construction of a coding framework, segmentation, and the analysis presentation. In this process, the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti (2025) was used, facilitating data visualisation, content segment selection, and the creation of conceptual maps. Through thoroughly reading the questionnaires, three main categories were identified, as summarised in Table 2. In this process, the questionnaire questions served as guiding elements to structure the analysis's development and define codes through memos.

Not all participants provided detailed answers to every question. Given the place-specific focus of our recruitment strategy, this analysis offers insight rather than generalisable facts applicable to all schools and SLEPs.

6 Results

Relevant findings are reported by first providing an overview of the quantitative analysis within each category identified in the qualitative analysis, and then illustrating the quantitative findings with specific accounts provided by the qualitative analysis.

6.1 Category: relationship with SLEP

Twelve participants (67%)—seven from management teams and five from pedagogical teams—were aware that their educational institution had a written policy for supporting the transition process between kindergarten and first grade. Furthermore,

thirteen participants (72%)—eight from management teams and five from pedagogical teams—indicated that their institution's Education Improvement Plans described actions for supporting transition.

Regarding support from SLEPs, eight participants (44%)—six from management teams and two from pedagogical teams—considered that this support had helped implement transition actions (a figure similar across both SLEPs: SLEP A 43%, SLEP B 45%). Additionally, 15 participants (83%) reported that their institution had developed education transition initiatives independently of their SLEP. The qualitative analysis shows mixed results in this matter. In SLEP A, only coordinators reported receiving support from the SLEP, and in SLEP B, both directors and coordinators indicated that they had received support from the SLEP. The practitioners of the pedagogical teams for both SLEP A and SLEP B indicated that they had not received any support from the SLEP.

Regarding coordinated actions with the SLEPs, Directors from SLEP B and in-school technical-pedagogical support staff members from both SLEPs reported implementing initiatives aimed at coordinating educational processes across levels, acknowledging the existence of practises that facilitate educational transitions. In SLEP B institutions, strategies supporting integrated pedagogical practises within Education Improvement Plans stand out, such as the implementation of a foundation-led early childhood teacher professional development programme focused on supporting children's early reading and writing acquisition. Meanwhile, SLEP A institutions emphasised “teacher collaboration,” providing spaces for reflection to strengthen collaborative work.

“It is carried out through in-school technical-pedagogical support staff and during the SLEP network meetings.” (SLEP B, Principal)

“Teacher collaboration, spaces for reflection to develop collaborative work.” (SLEP A, Technical and Pedagogical support staff member)

On the other hand, participants who reported not receiving support from the SLEP stated that their schools implemented independent initiatives separate from the SLEP to support

TABLE 2 Coding scheme.

Category	Description
Relationship with SLEP	This category explored the coordinated actions between the SLEP and the schools, their helpfulness, and suggestions for improvement as reported by the participants. It also captured independent initiatives carried out by the schools.
Role and leadership	Each participant provided details about their responsibilities in implementing the ETS, their role, and the pedagogical team’s communication mechanisms.
Transition policies	This category examined each participant’s knowledge of their school’s ETS policy, ETS timeline and purpose, ETS target audience, ETS actions, ETS strengths, ETS community improvement, and projections of experiences and actions.

educational transitions and articulation between levels. These actions tended to be isolated rather than part of comprehensive strategic plans, such as student and teacher visits, which were primarily aimed at facilitating adaptation to the dynamics of first grade. However, in SLEP A, a more comprehensive initiative was described, aligned with Decree 373, in the form of a collaborative project between early childhood educators and first-grade primary school teachers. This initiative was funded through a competitive grant from the Ministry of Education, making it a particularly significant achievement for the school team.

“I have not received any workshop or training from the SLEP that would strengthen the implementation of an ETS in the school.” (SLEP A, Teacher)

“As an educational community, we recognised that we lacked institutionalised strategies for educational transition, which has now become a necessity. However, this idea emerged from within our own team—from the Early Childhood Educators, the leadership team, the Year 1 teacher, and the special education teacher.” (SLEP B, Educator)

Regarding the perceived usefulness of the actions undertaken with the SLEPs, some participants from management teams appreciated the tools provided by both SLEPs to assess transition practises and leadership within collaborative networks. In SLEP B, participants highlighted the SLEP’s leadership in these networks, whereas in SLEP A, educators and teachers gave greater emphasis to the need to address the lack of specific training and workshops to strengthen educational transitions. Positive perceptions regarding SLEP support tended to come from management teams, while teaching staff raised suggestions for improvement, such as:

“Workshops with concrete proposals and training on the topic.” (SLEP B, Educator)

“That they get involved in the process, that they are more present.” (SLEP B, Educator)

“There is no protocol or implementation by the SLEP regarding transition management.” (SLEP B, Teacher)

“Encouraging meetings that help strengthen these practises.” (SLEP A, Educator)

“More training and the creation of additional opportunities.” (SLEP A, Educator)

6.2 Category: school leadership

As discussed in the theoretical framework, leadership and coordination are essential for the design and implementation of an ETS. Notable differences emerged between the schools within

the two SLEPs in this category. In SLEP B schools, leadership was clearly defined and assigned to school management teams and, in one case, to an early childhood educator serving as an articulation coordinator between levels. Leadership roles were less clearly established in SLEP A schools, where it remained uncertain whether ETS’s were undertaken by the in-school technical-pedagogical support staff or by teachers. Nevertheless, a positive aspect was that for the schools in both SLEPs, the essential functions of this role were recognised as planning, monitoring, and providing feedback on ETS actions to ensure an effective educational transition. Likewise, school leadership within these schools saw their role as fostering collaboration between pedagogical teams and ensuring that strategies were responsive to their students’ needs. Finally, all participating schools from across both SLEPs valued open and collaborative communication among pedagogical teams as key to the planning and implementation of an ETS. However, in SLEP B schools, protected time was allocated for regular meetings to align pedagogical strategies across educational levels, whereas in some SLEP A schools, establishing structured spaces for dialogue to evaluate and refine implemented strategies remained an ongoing challenge.

“There is no established communication with protected times and spaces. It is necessary to formalise and schedule it on a semesterly basis.” (SLEP A, School Welfare Coordinator)

“There is excellent communication between the first and second transition levels and first grade.” (SLEP B, Special Needs Teacher)

6.3 Category: transition policies

This category examines the transition policies developed by schools to support children in the move from kindergarten to first grade. Firstly, it was observed that nearly all schools within SLEP B reported having a transition policy in place to facilitate this process. For SLEP A, this remained a work in progress, with some schools lacking such a policy. All existing policies were implemented within a limited timeframe across all participating schools, with a focus on the second half of the school year to support a smooth transition to first grade. In all schools, it was explicitly stated that the ETS primarily targeted children. However, in schools under SLEP B, greater emphasis was placed on involving all members of the school community. Regarding the ETS, while the holistic development of children remained a focus, the ultimate goal appeared to be ensuring a successful adaptation to first grade as a transition completion point, rather than seeing transition as

ongoing across the school experience and one key part of a broader educational trajectory:

“Holistic development: During this stage, the aim is to promote the comprehensive development of students, considering not only their cognitive abilities but also their socio-emotional, physical, and creative growth.” (SLEP A, Teacher)

“A structured and planned educational transition helps students gradually adapt to the demands, dynamics, and strategies of early childhood and primary education.” (SLEP A, Teacher)

“To foster children’s autonomy and socio-emotional development.” (SLEP B, Principal)

“To facilitate students’ adaptation process as they transition to a new educational level.” (SLEP B, Technical and Pedagogical Support staff member)

We explored whether participants were aware of the ETS actions included in each educational centre’s Institutional Educational Project and/or Education Improvement Plans. First, participants freely shared what they considered important about these actions. We then surveyed specific actions based on transition literature and the adapted instrument presented in Figure 1. Regarding the actions reported by schools in both SLEPs, we observed a notable difference. In schools that had an ETS in SLEP A, there was an emphasis on communication between levels, play as a strategy, and engagement with families and other schools. In contrast, in SLEP B-run schools, leaders primarily emphasised articulation between levels through the implementation of literacy strategies provided by a foundation-led early childhood teacher professional development programme, while teachers focused on recreational and cultural activities.

“Active participation through free play. Collaborative work and creating an environment conducive to text production.” (SLEP A, Technical and Pedagogical support staff member)

“Organising workshops on effective literacy teaching strategies for Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, and first-grade teachers.” (SLEP B, Principal)

“Team meetings to develop strategies. Implementing (a foundation-led early childhood teacher professional development programme) strategies (transition levels) to be used in first grade alongside the Primero Lee strategy.” (SLEP B, Principal)

“Promoting recreational, cultural, and sports activities between levels.” (SLEP B, Educator)

When asked about additional activities, participants from SLEP B-run schools described play-based literacy activities. They also placed greater emphasis on establishing shared literacy guidelines.

“For World Book Day, first-grade and early childhood education students worked together to prepare materials, which were displayed in a stand in the school courtyard.” (SLEP B, Educator)

“Establishing shared guidelines for literacy ensures high-quality instruction, preparing students for a successful educational journey.” (SLEP B, Educator)

In contrast, participants from SLEP A-run schools emphasised the importance of networking with communities and families. They focused on creating unstructured, pressure-free spaces that helped familiarise students with their new school environment.

“We will establish connections with the nursery schools in the (...) area through contact and networking commitments between the school leadership and the pedagogical technical unit. We will then plan joint activities incorporating the participation of families and students from middle, Pre-Kindergarten, and Kindergarten levels in each early childhood education school.” (SLEP A, School Welfare Coordinator)

“Creating unstructured, pressure-free spaces so that kindergarten students can familiarise themselves with the teacher who will accompany them in first grade, ensuring a natural transition.” (SLEP A, Principal)

Across all schools, continuous articulation between educational levels, teamwork, and ongoing monitoring of pedagogical strategies were considered key strengths.

We then explored a set of 15 transition actions included in the survey. The results, in terms of participation rates and perceived helpfulness, are presented in Figure 1. In addition to open-ended questions, participants were asked whether they had engaged in a set of 15 well-documented transition actions (Dockett and Perry, 2007; Peters, 2010) and to rate their perceived helpfulness of these actions. Table 3 outlines the surveyed actions alongside the reported degrees of participation and helpfulness.

Regarding participation, we report the percentage of participants who indicated involvement in each transition action. As for helpfulness, no participant rated any action as “Not helpful.” Therefore, we present the percentage of participants who considered each action “Very helpful” (as opposed to “Somewhat helpful”). Participation rates averaged 73% across actions, ranging from 22% to 100%. The three actions with the lowest participation rates were:

#12: Meetings between kindergarten parents and the first-grade teacher.

#11: Shared playtimes between kindergarten and first-grade children.

#14: Inclusion of families in educational transition experiences.

Conversely, the three actions with the highest participation rates were:

#13: Co-designing educational transition actions between the early childhood educator and the first-grade teacher.

#7: Sharing pedagogical strategies between the early childhood educator and the first-grade teacher.

#15: Reflection meetings among pedagogical teams.

A closer analysis of the three least frequently implemented actions revealed that participation in action #11 was equally common among directing and pedagogical teams ($n=4$ each), participation in action #12 was more frequent among directing teams ($n=3$ vs. $n=1$), and participation in action #14 was more common among pedagogical teams ($n=5$ vs. $n=3$).

Helpfulness ratings were generally high, with twelve transition actions rated as “Very helpful” by all participants who engaged in them. The three actions with the lowest helpfulness ratings were:

#10 and #11: Sharing play spaces and playtimes between kindergarten and first-grade children.

#8: Joint activities, such as field trips and projects, involving both kindergarten and first-grade children.

To conclude, all schools agreed on the need to allocate more resources and time for the design and implementation of an ETS,

Transition action	Participation	Helpfulness
1. Kindergarten children visit first-grade classrooms before finishing their educational year.	89%	100%
2. First-grade children visit kindergarten children to share their experiences.	89%	100%
3. The first-grade teacher visits kindergarten children during the educational year.	83%	100%
4. The early childhood educator visits first-grade children during the first months of the educational year.	72%	100%
5. During the educational year, the teacher and educator maintain joint planning spaces, sharing strategies to give curricular continuity to children's educational trajectories.	78%	100%
6. The teacher has written records prepared by the educator that account for the comprehensive evaluation processes of each child.	71%	100%
7. The educator and teacher share pedagogical strategies specific to each level to support the transition process (e.g., playful environments, reading stories).	94%	100%
8. During the educational year, activities are planned and carried out jointly with both levels (e.g., field trips, projects).	72%	92%
9. At the school, children from kindergarten and first grade share classroom spaces.	72%	100%
10. At the school, children from kindergarten and first grade share play spaces.	65%	82%
11. At the school, children from kindergarten and first grade share playtimes (e.g., recess).	44%	88%
12. At the end of the educational year, meetings are held for kindergarten parents in conjunction with the first-grade teacher.	22%	100%
13. The educator and the teacher jointly design actions for the ETS in accordance with the educational context.	100%	100%
14. Families participate in educational transition experiences during the formative process.	44%	100%
15. The pedagogical teams meet to reflect on the proposed strategies.	94%	100%

FIGURE 1

Participation and helpfulness percentages for each of the 15 educational transition actions surveyed.

as well as the importance of involving families in joint activities and the pedagogical processes that shape children's educational trajectories. Additionally, the use of play as a strategy for interactive educational transitions is valued, and the systematic evaluation of an ETS is considered a shared priority. Regarding future plans, schools in SLEP B emphasised the programming of cultural activities and workshops for parents. In contrast, schools in SLEP A emphasised the implementation of project-based learning as a tool to connect subjects and promote collaboration. Some reflective quotes regarding this discussion are shown in [Table 3](#).

7 Discussion and conclusion

The study described in this paper explored how the guidelines of Decree 373 were being implemented in the design and

execution of education transition strategies (ETS's) in two different regions that were both receiving technical-pedagogical support from an SLEP. The findings demonstrate the variations that can occur in the nature of SLEP support from one region to another. While most participants reported receiving support from the SLEP, the intensity and impact of this support varied according to the participant's role. Those in management positions had a more positive perception of the SLEP's contributions to their community, as this explicitly related to the design and implementation of an ETS. Those in pedagogical teams were less likely to have visibility of the role that the SLEP was playing. Through the lens of the leadership literature, it was clear that a hierarchical model of leadership exists within the system, whereby the Technical and Pedagogical Support Unit located in the SLEPs primarily contacts and works closely with management teams rather than directly with the schools'

TABLE 3 Participants' reflective quotes.

SLEP A	SLEP B
"I would like for an ETS to be created or updated in the school." (Educator)	"It is essential to improve the evaluation of the ETS, measuring its impact more systematically." (Technical and Pedagogical staff member)
"There should be a detailed schedule (Gantt chart) that ensures monitoring and consolidates it as a relevant action in the school's pedagogical management." (Technical and Pedagogical staff member)	"I would like to have more time to design, implement, and provide feedback on the ETS." (Teacher)
"Interaction between parents from different levels, more joint activities between the educator, teacher, and students." (Educator)	"That first grade teachers continue to use play as a strategy and that the process be more playful and interactive." (Teacher)
"Project-based learning in the ETS, where students work collaboratively on a common goal, integrating subjects." (Educator)	"Work in workshops with families and students, involving them in this process." (Educator)

pedagogical teams involved in the transition process. On the other hand, within the schools, we identified a different type of leadership, where communities share roles and responsibilities, working collaboratively and more effectively in the design and implementation of an ETS. The findings from this study suggest the absence of a comprehensive approach to planning and support within each SLEP, which would permeate across professional levels and support all educational communities equally. We may infer that SLEPs are still in an emergent stage and must evolve from a predominantly managerial role to a pedagogical one in order to support public education and influence teaching practises within schools.

Regarding collaborative work within pedagogical teams, we found that the participants' actions were consistent with the purpose of designing an ETS, and that this work provided opportunities to support the development of leadership skills in collaboration with management teams, such as valuing play and undertaking joint projects. The results indicated that educators and teachers were motivated and interested in working collaboratively on the design and implementation of an ETS, with the sharing of pedagogical strategies and participation in joint reflective spaces being the most valued aspects among participants. Therefore, creating opportunities for educators and teachers to engage in collaborative work within each school could have a significant impact on supporting transitions between ECE and PSE for children and their families. When planning their support strategies, SLEPs are likely to have a greater impact if pedagogical teams are actively included in their initiatives. Furthermore, concerning the effectiveness of leadership within schools, the findings in this study suggest the need to explore less hierarchical and more distributed or democratic approaches to collaboration and the relationships between all actors.

This study is timely because the education and early childhood context in Chile is currently undergoing a period of system change, with the establishment of a national "hub and spoke" model of support and regulation being rolled out in phases across the country. A critical purpose for this systemic change is to redress inequities and provide a mechanism through which high-quality practise can be supported, shared and sustained. The international research literature on the transition to school argues for an approach that engages all stakeholders, including policymakers, principals, teachers, families, and children, as partners in ensuring the best possible outcomes for children. This is particularly

important in the early years, when developmental trajectories are being established. A hierarchical approach, or inconsistent levels of support, are incompatible with what we know to be most positively impactful for children in their school transitions. There is an opportunity in Chile to develop new ways of working. The findings of this study suggest that there is room for growth, particularly in terms of meaningful community and family engagement, as well as the value placed on play-based methods. Play-based and child-centred approaches have great potential to address current inequities and support the development of a contextually responsive and meaningful ETS tailored to each school community.

As noted above, this study focused on only two SLEP areas and reflects the views of only those who responded to the invitation to complete the survey. These findings, therefore, cannot be generalised to all areas in which SLEPs are operating. However, the study "takes the pulse" in terms of how SLEPs are operating and their perceived impact on the school transition process. A further limitation of this study is that it does not incorporate the voices of all actors. As articulated in Decree 373, the perspectives of families and children are essential for the design and implementation of effective transition strategies. Research in the field also shows that the most effective transition practises include the perspectives of all educational stakeholders. Consequently, we intend to explore the interrelation among all actors in future research.

Overall, we hope that the paper contributes to ongoing dialogue, and in particular prompts reflection on: how leadership within the SLEPs is developing, and how can this leadership become more responsive to the realities and needs of each educational community under their remit; how Technical and Pedagogical Support Unit strategies can get the balance right between the implementation of protocols and engaging with pedagogical teams; and how existing local professional and community knowledge could be better incorporated within strategic planning and development.

Data availability statement

The data sets presented in this article are not readily available because of concerns regarding participant anonymity. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to the corresponding author, daniela.jadue@uoh.cl.

Author contributions

DJ-R: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Methodology, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. DG: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. MS-S: Formal analysis, Writing – original draft. TA-L: Formal analysis, Writing – original draft. RG: Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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