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# Crucial aspects for the sense of school belonging: Educational transitions of children and adolescents with emotional or behavioural disorders. Results of a Systematic Review

## BACKGROUND

Educational transitions are crucial aspects for the feeling of school belonging. The transfer into a new educational context is characterized by the various stress factors, like becoming familiar with new peers, teachers and procedures, with altered behavioural expectations and with a changed school climate (Hildebrandt, 2016; Mays et al., 2018). Studies indicate that many children and adolescents successfully meet the challenges of educational transitions and show a positive development after the transfer (e.g. Lucey & Reay, 2000). However, children and adolescents with learning and adjustment difficulties (e.g. Forgan, & Vaughn, 2000) as well as with emotional or behavioural disorders (EBD) who have problems behaving “appropriately” in social situations and whose competences in emotion regulation have not yet developed in an age-appropriate manner (e.g. De Wit, Karioja, Rye & Shain, 2011) are at risk for negative transitional experiences. Empirical findings on children and adolescents with EBD could provide important information on special needs as well as similarities and differences to students without EBD.

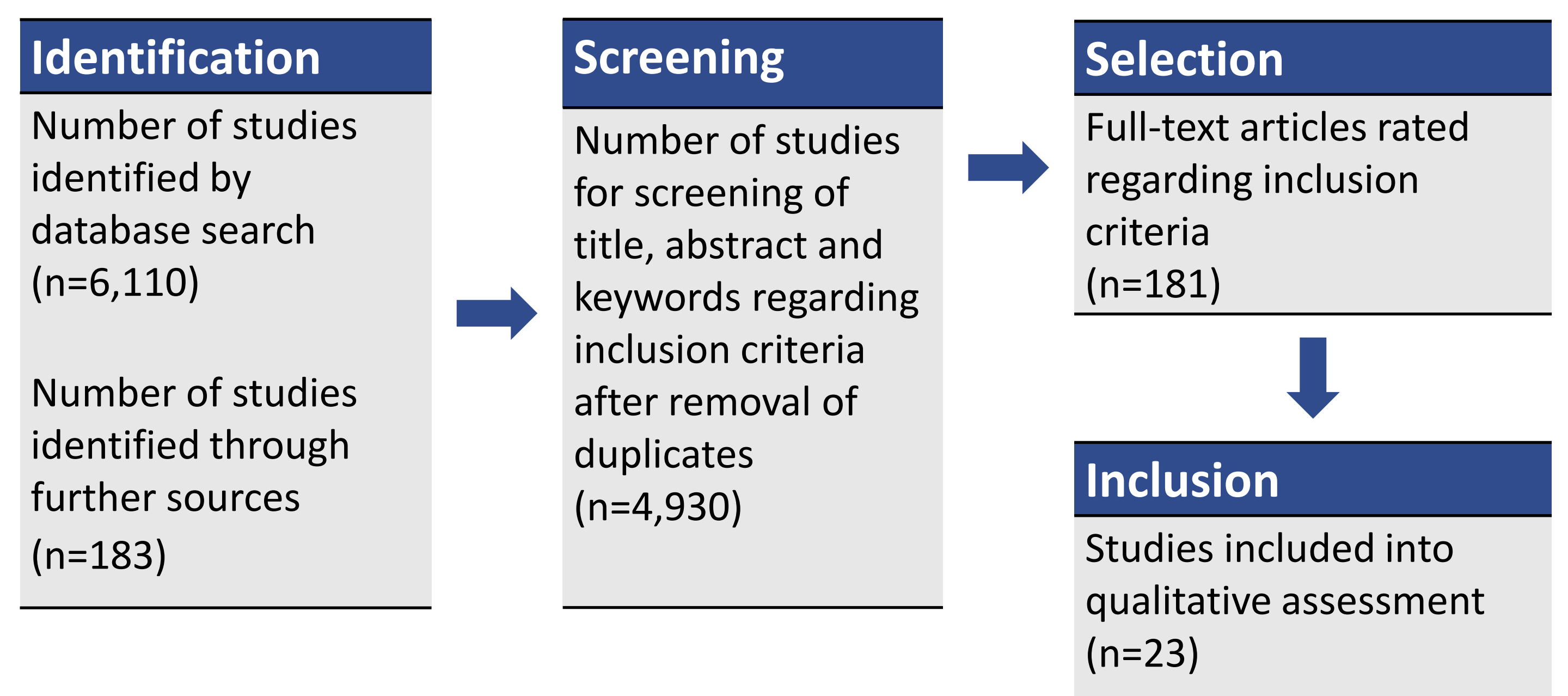
### Aim

The aim of this study is to provide an overview of empirical findings addressing the full range of emotional or behavioural disorders (EBD) and educational transitions with a focus on school belonging (Metzner, Wichmann & Mays, in review).

## METHOD

### Search strategy and data coding

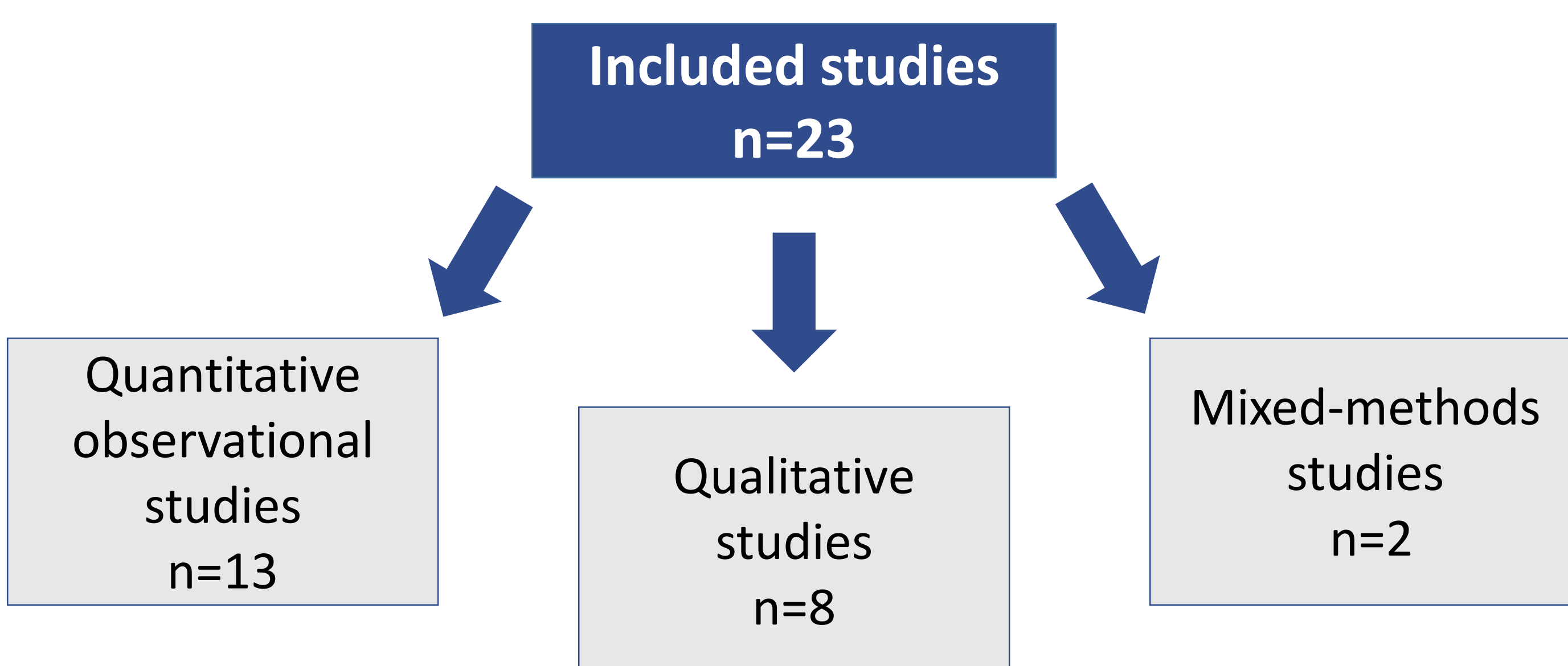
- In consideration of the guidelines for the implementation and analysis of systematic reviews (e.g. Cochrane Collaboration, 2008),
- Electronic search in 8 scientific data bases: Medline, PsycInfo, CINAHL, BIOSIS, ERIC, ASSIA, Fachportal Pädagogik, Psyn dex,
- Truncated search terms in English and German related to transition, education and EBD (e.g. „transition\*“, „school\*“, „disorder\*“),
- Screening and selection carried out by two independent reviewers with almost perfect agreement (Cohen's kappa coefficient  $\kappa=0.92$ ),
- Quality assessment according to 3 quality criteria.



### Limitations

- Possible publication bias, culture bias, or reviewer bias
- Content related limitation due to search terms and inclusion criteria

## RESULTS



- Focus on students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (n=15) and on educational transitions out of secondary school (n=13)
- School belonging being addressed directly (n=1) or indirectly examining the development of wellbeing, social participation and achievements
- Students with EBD had lower postsecondary outcomes compared to peers
- Initial lower school belonging for students with EBD after transition improved over time

## DISCUSSION

The early professional support of developing a sense of belonging possibly should be an absolute priority for the group of students with EBD. Further information should be gained regarding whether cross-system employees ("transition managers") can support a positive transition process, especially for students with EBD, as they already know the students well and can directly support the new system. In addition, there are far too few studies with a systemic and ecological view on transitions. Perhaps it is necessary, in addition to the students with EBD, to prepare the parents for a pending transition (Mays, 2014). Limitations for the implementation of this review must be considered i.a. regarding a publication bias due to preferred publication e.g. of significant results, the language restriction to German and English publications, content-related restrictions due to the selected search terms and inclusion criteria as well as the individual reviewer bias during screening and inclusion.

Conclusively, despite empirical research on school belonging being sparse, the review emphasizes the importance of professional mentoring throughout transitional phases for vulnerable students to prevent or buffer developmental regression.

De Wit, D. J., Karioja, K., Rye, B. J. & Shain, M. (2011). Perceptions of Declining Classmate and Teacher Support Following the Transition to High School: Potential Correlates of Increasing Student Mental Health Difficulties. *Psychology in the Schools*, 48(6), 556-572.  
 Forgan, J. W. & Vaughn, S. (2000). Adolescents with and without LD make the transition to middle school. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 33(1), 33-43.  
 Hildebrandt, J. (2016). *Das Erleben von Herausforderung und Bedrohung am Grundschulübergang. Analysen zu Validität, Leistungsentwicklung und Ressourcen*. Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin.  
 Lucey, H. & Reay, D. (2000). Identities in transition: anxiety and excitement in the move to secondary school. *Oxford review of education*, 26(2), 191-205.  
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 Mays, D., Franke, S., Metzner, F., Boyle, C., Jindal-Snape, D., Schneider, L., ... Wichmann, M. (2018). *School belonging and successful transition practice - academic self-concept, belonging and achievement motivation in primary school students*. In: K. Allen & C. Boyle (Ed.). *Pathways to school belonging. Contemporary Research in School Belonging*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 168-187.  
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