



# The learning environment in the first year of HE – a scoping review

Taiga Brahm, Franziska Zellweger & Mikaël De Clercq

University of Tübingen, Zurich University of Teacher Education, UCLouvain

## Problem statement

- The question of students' successful transition to Higher Education has been largely investigated for many years (e.g. Coertjens et al., 2017).
- The contribution of the learning environment (on the level of the institution, program, course) in the transition process needs further clarification.
- This scoping review investigated recent studies on learning environments supporting students' integration and learning during the first-year in HE.

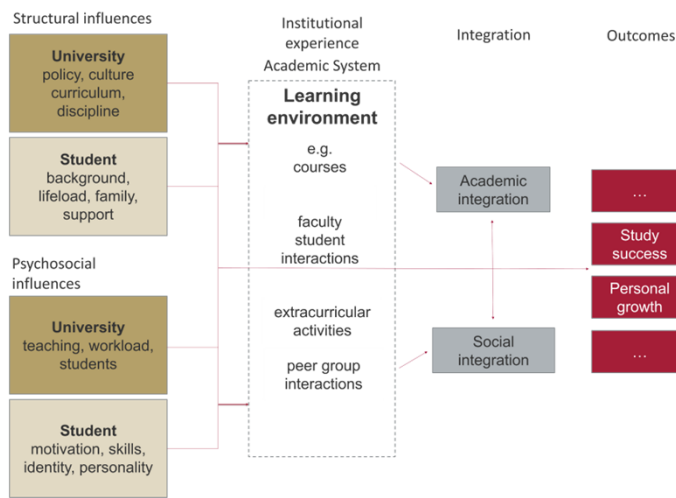


Figure 1: A potential transition model (adapted from Tinto, 1975; Kahu & Nelson, 2018)

## Research questions:

- What kind of learning environment supports students in their transition to Higher Education?
- Which configuration of the learning environment are addressed in the empirical studies focusing on first-year students' transition processes?

## Research methods

### Scoping review

#### Exclusion criteria

- No clear focus on either transition or learning environment
- Emergency remote teaching
- Clinical Learning Environment
- No empirical studies

#### Current status

- initial screening: each article by 2 raters (reliability: 83,5 – 84,2%)
- quality appraisal

#### Still to do

- Qualitative content analysis

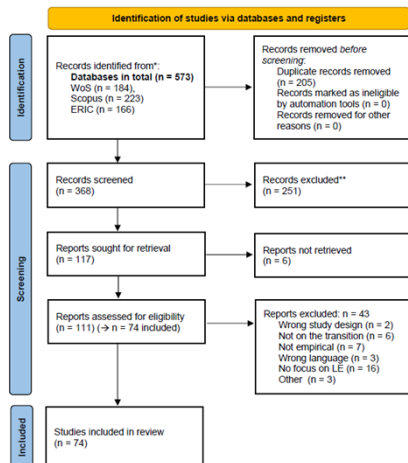


Figure 7: PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for reviews (based on Page et al., 2021).

## Learning environment – a working definition

- Learning environment as a **multi-layers context** composed of virtual and physical spaces and components → shapes students' learning experience
- With the notion of the learning environment, we aim to study the **collective impact on students' experience** to bridge the focus on the individual student in their transition into HE and the different contextual influences.

Author(s) / Year	HE system	institutional level	subject area / department	course level	individual level
Dippelhof-Stiem (1986)	HE system	institutional level	subject area / department	course level	individual level
Wronitz (2007)	outside HE system*	HE institution	field of study / degree program	course level	
DeClercq et al. (2021)		institution	course + study programme		students
Entwistle et al. (2002)		institutional and departmental context	teaching & assessment 1) course contents 2) teaching & assessment 3) staff – student relationships	teaching & assessment 1) organization + structure of the course 2) teaching practices 3) assessment + assignments 4) supportive climate	4) students and their culture 5) interest
Schaefer & Weis (2016)		5 structural opportunities + resources	1b structure of study program 4 orientation	1a structure on micro level 2 support 3 challenge	
Abuhab et al. (2013)	network perspective	organizational perspective		pedagogical perspective	
Proposal for the scoping review	HE system	Macro level: higher education institution	Meso level: disciplinal study program	Micro level: course	Individual perspective

Figure 2: Different conceptions of the notion 'learning environment' (Brahm, De Clercq & Zellweger, 2023). Note: Most of these conceptions are based on Bronfenbrenner (1979)

## First results of the scoping review

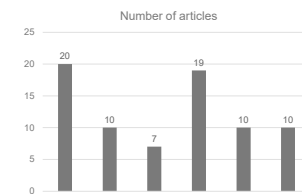


Figure 3: Number of articles per year

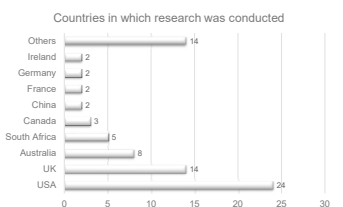


Figure 4: Countries in which research was conducted

### What "level" of the learning environment is investigated?

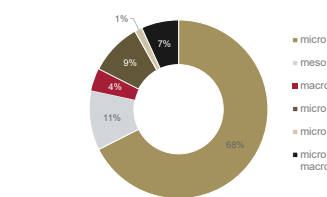


Figure 5: Level of the learning environment investigated in articles

### Research approach

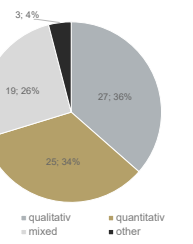


Figure 6: Research methodology used

## First conclusions

- Very scattered picture of the research on the learning environment in the transition to Higher Education
- Minority based on transition theories (very diverse theoretical underpinning if any at all)

