

Resolving non-completion in higher (online) education

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RESOLVING NON-COMPLETION IN HIGHER (ONLINE) EDUCATION

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Keywords: Higher education, Design-based research, Non-completion, Predictors, Interventions, Review

1. BACKGROUND & RESEARCH QUESTION

The non-completion problem:

- A considerable number of students in higher (online) education do not complete a study course or program.
- Next to financial consequences, this also has consequences for students' confidence and reputation of educational institutions.

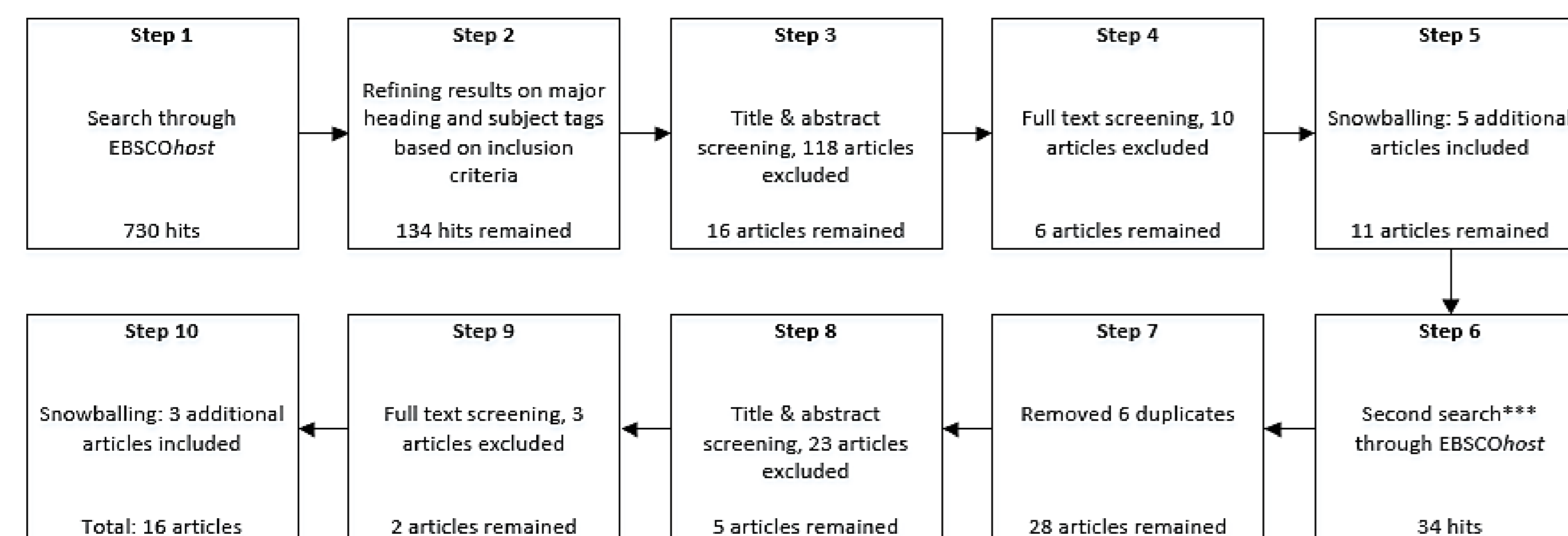
The present study:

- To our best knowledge, there is not yet an overview of characteristics of interventions raising completion rates.
- A literature review on modifiable predictors of (non-)completion (part a, not presented here) and interventions to raise completion rates (part b) in higher (online) education was performed as a first step of a four-year design-based research project.

Research question:

- What are the key characteristics of effective and efficient interventions to raise completion rates in higher (online) education?

2. METHOD



*Search terms: "higher education" or "university" or "distance" and "dropout" or "non-completion" and "intervention" or "prevention" or "program".

**8 inclusion criteria were taken into account for screening articles.

***Additional search for interventions prior to enrolment, search terms: "matching" or "selection" or "study choice" or "study decision".

3. RESULTS

| Characteristics | Interventions | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Coaching & Remedial teaching (K**=6) | Peer mentoring (K=3) | Motivational contact (K=3) | Academic dismissal policies (K=3) | Interventions on instruction (K=1) |
| Impact on completion rates | ↑ Increasing | ↑ Increasing | ↕ Inconsistent | ↓ Decreasing | ↑ Increasing |
| Effect size (Cohen's d) | ? Unknown | ? Unknown | ? Unknown | 0.07 | ? Unknown |
| Effect (min. and max. difference between groups or cohorts) | 6% 54% | 10% 48% | 2% 25% | 7% 8% | 7% 22% |
| Duration (min. to max.) | One session One year | One semester One year | One course One semester | One year | One course One semester |
| Mode of intervention (online, face-to-face or blended) | Face-to-face Online | Blended Online | Online | Blended Online | Online |
| Educational context (online or face-to-face educational context) | Face-to-face | Face-to-face | Face-to-face Online | Face-to-face | Online |
| Target factor(s)* | 🧠 ❤️ 🔄 | ❤️ 🧠 | ❤️ | 🧠 ❤️ 🏛️ | ❤️ |

*Target factor(s) are based on the categories of the part a of this literature review.

**K is the number of intervention studies included in the corresponding category.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- Interventions raising completion rates significantly are coaching or remedial teaching and peer mentoring. Academic dismissal policies decrease completion rates in the first year, but thereby raise graduation rates.
- Interventions raising completion rates significantly focus on dispositional cognitive (knowledge and skills, e.g., self-regulation skills) and non-cognitive (affective, e.g., social integration), as well as situational (e.g., social support) factors.
- More systematic and aligned (i.e., to research on predictors) research on interventions is needed, which advocates for a design-based research approach.
- More scientific publications on interventions to raise completion rates are needed, in order to build a knowledge base on how to increase completion rates in higher (online) education.
- This especially counts for interventions prior to student enrolment.