

## Call for papers – Special issue

### *Effectiveness of instructional interventions in higher education*

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## Introduction

In ample institutions for higher education, attempts are made to innovate or renovate teaching. In response to a growingly diverse student population, changed requirements from society, the introduction of continuously evolving educational technologies, changes in our understanding of what matters in learning and teaching, ... new educational practices, approaches, and/or methods are advocated for and initiatives for broad-scale implementation are taken.

While the innovations, changes and/or adjustments seem in most cases well-justified, it is not always clear in what sense and to what extent the introduced interventions are effective, i.e. whether they achieve the intended outcomes (for the target population). Neither is it always clear how results from effectiveness studies are to be interpreted and how they can be used in policy-making.

All this is far from surprising for at least five sets of reasons. First of all, the notion of 'effectiveness' is far from self-evident as rather often the intended outcomes remain underspecified. Moreover, very different indicators can be used to investigate effectiveness (e.g. Scheerens, 2016). Furthermore, for each of the indicators, different approaches might be used to 'assess' them (see for instance the distinction between learning outcomes as measured through means of a test versus through means of self-reported progress by students). Second, what the specific instructional intervention entails often remains underspecified (e.g. for interventions to stimulate critical thinking: TIRUNEH, VERBURGH & ELEN, 2014). Despite repeated calls, very general denominators remain to be used to refer to newly implemented educational approaches. For instance, although seemingly clear, the notion 'lecture' may refer to very different educational practices. Third, once effectiveness (or the lack of it) has been established, the reasons for the results remain to be explained. The implementation of an instructional intervention may or may not and for a multitude of reasons, comply with the intervention as planned. The target group may be appropriate or might have changed dramatically (e.g. more culturally diverse: YAMAUCHI, TAIRA & TREVORROW, 2016). The assessment methods may or may not be valid ones. Fourth, in most cases the 'effectiveness' of instructional interventions is not absolute. An intervention may or may not be effective for students with different characteristics (e.g. expertise reversal effect: RICHTER, SCHEITER & EITEL, 2018). An intervention may or may not be effective in the short run but may have long-term unobserved effects. An intervention may be effective for cognitive but not for motivational outcomes (or vice versa). Fifth, once outcomes of intervention research are established, strategies are needed for a more broad-scale implementation of the successful ones (e.g. for the case of blended approaches: GRAHAM, WOODFIELD & HARRISON, 2009).

Despite all the difficulties, scholars continue to look for answers and try to handle these challenges. Even more so different decision-makers and practitioners urge for very different reasons for more research of -in their terms- what works.

This special issue offers a nice opportunity to make a state-of-affairs in view of priorities in a future research agenda. These will be discussed in a concluding discussion to the special issue.

## Call

For the special issue on 'effectiveness of instructional interventions in higher education', anybody working on effectiveness is invited to contribute. We see at least the following four categories of contributions related to higher education:

- Conceptual contributions that discuss different meanings of 'effectiveness' in higher education, the origins of these conceptualizations and the conditions that make different ideas about what constitutes 'effectiveness' more or less relevant.
- Methodological contribution in which different approaches to establishing effectiveness in higher education are explored and discussed
- Reports on higher education research that has aimed at investigating the effectiveness of particular interventions. These reports might pertain to single studies as well as narrative reviews or meta-analyses
- Policy-oriented studies in which the use of effectiveness studies for policy-making in higher education is investigated.

## References

**Graham, C. R., Woodfield, W., & Harrison, J. B.** (2013). A framework for institutional adoption and implementation of blended learning in higher education. *Computer Science*, 18, 4-14.

**Richter, J., Scheiter, K., & Eitel, A.** (2018). Signaling text–picture relations in multimedia learning: The influence of prior knowledge. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 110(4), 544-560.

**Scheerens, J.** (2016). *Educational effectiveness and ineffectiveness. A critical review of the knowledge base*. Dordrecht: Springer.

**Tiruneh, D. T., Verburch, A., & Elen, J.** (2014). Effectiveness of critical thinking instruction in higher education: A systematic review of intervention studies. *Higher Education Studies*, 4(1), 1-17.

**Yamauchi, L. A., Taira, K., & Trevorrow, T.** (2016). Effective instruction for engaging culturally diverse students in higher education. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 28(3), 460-470.

## Guidelines regarding the journal

The ZFHE is a peer-reviewed online journal that publishes scientific contributions of practical relevance concerning current higher education development issues. The focus is on didactical, structural, and cultural developments in teaching and learning. Topics that are innovative and still regarded as open in respect of their design options are preferred.

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## Submission information

English or German contributions may be submitted in the following format:

**Scientific contributions** within the main theme should comply with the following criteria:  
The contribution...

- presents innovative perspectives, arguments, problem analyses etc. on the key topic;
- focuses on essential aspects of the key topic;
- is theoretically supported (i.e. it offers a clear connection to the scientific discourse of the topic under discussion);
- provides scientific insights with added value at least in some parts;
- clearly elucidates the methodology used to acquire knowledge;
- follows the relevant citation rules consistently (APA style, 6<sup>th</sup> edition);
- comprises up to 33,600 characters (incl. spaces, as well as cover page, bibliography and author information)

## Submission and review schedule

### October 16, 2020 – Submission deadline for complete articles:

Please upload your contribution(s) to the ZFHE journal system (<https://www.zfhe.at>) in the corresponding section (scientific contribution) of ZFHE 14/1 issue in anonymous format. To do so, you must first register as an author in the system.

**January 15, 2021 – Feedback / Reviews:** Scientific contributions are evaluated in a double-blind process (see below).

**February 12, 2021 – Revision deadline:** Where necessary, contributions may be revised according to feedback and recommendations from the reviews.

**March 2021 – Online publication:** In March 2021, the finalized contributions are published under <https://www.zfhe.at> and also made available in print.

## **Review Process**

All submitted contributions will be examined in a double-blind peer review process to guarantee scientific quality. The editors of the current issue propose the reviewers for the respective theme and allocate individual contributions to the reviewers; they also determine which contributions will be accepted. The selection of reviewers and the review process for each thematic issue are always supervised by a member of the editorial board.

## **Formatting and submission**

In order to save valuable time with the formatting of the contributions, we kindly ask that all authors work with the template from the beginning. The template can be downloaded from the ZFHE website under the following link:

[https://www.zfhe.at/userupload/ZFHE\\_16-1\\_TEMPLATE.docx](https://www.zfhe.at/userupload/ZFHE_16-1_TEMPLATE.docx)

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Since we must be able to edit the texts, they must be submitted unlocked/unprotected in in Microsoft Word (.doc), Office Open XML (.docx), Open Document Text (.odt) or Plain Text (.txt) format. Please do not submit any PDF files! Submissions must first be made in anonymous format in order to guarantee the double-blind review process. Please remove all references to the author(s) of the document (including in the document properties!). Upon a positive review result, this information will be re-inserted.

## **Questions?**

If you have any questions regarding the content of the issue, please contact the editors ([manfred.prenzel@univie.ac.at](mailto:manfred.prenzel@univie.ac.at) or [jan.elen@kuleuven.be](mailto:jan.elen@kuleuven.be)).

For technical and organizational questions, please contact Michael Raunig ([office@zfhe.at](mailto:office@zfhe.at)).

**We look forward to your submissions!**

**Manfred Prenzel & Jan Elen**