Author's response to reviews

Title: An exploration of student experiences of biology podcasts in pre-registration nursing.

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Version: 2 Date: 21 December 2012

Author's response to reviews: see over
Reviewer's report
Title: An exploration of student experiences of biology podcasts in pre-registration nursing.
Version: 1 Date: 11 October 2012
Reviewer: Deborah Stiffler
Reviewer's report:

1. I would like to have "pre-registration nursing students" defined (minor).

In order to avoid using confusing terminology, we have taken the term pre-registration out of the manuscript so the paper now refers simply to nursing students.

Response:

2. Please have your paper edited for punctuation (minor).

Response: The paper has now been reviewed and edited for punctuation errors.

3. You use the word "utilising" too frequently when "use" would work just as well (discretionary).

Response: The word ‘utilise’ has been replaced with ‘use’.

4. Under methodology, participants, you essentially used a "convenience" sample of persons at these two schools. (minor)

Response: The authors agree that this was a convenience sample. This has been clarified in ‘participants’ section of the method (page 7, lines 1-9).

5. On page 8, under "survey method," the first sentence does not make sense. I would say something like "A questionnaire, based on a tool that has been previously used by these authors" or whatever makes sense, but until I read further in the paper, I didn't understand that this was a different study that was done (minor).

Response: This sentence has been amended for clarity. See ‘survey method’, page 8, paragraph 2.

6. In the results section, I think a lot of the "numbers" could be put in a table format. It just makes it easier to read (Minor).

Response: To add clarity to this section, two further tables have been added to the paper. Table 1 now presents the response rate across study sites. Table 2 presents demographic data on participant characteristics (age, study site, internet access, internet technology comfort level).

7. Your focus groups were very small. There is nothing you can do about this
now, but besides sending an email to the students, did you do anything else to try to persuade the students to participate? Explain why the numbers were so small (if you know). (discretionary).

**Response:**
The number of participants who volunteered for the focus groups was low. We have added a note regarding this to the discussion to explain why we think the number of volunteers were so low. (Paragraph 2, p17)

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests
Reviewer's report
Title: An exploration of student experiences of biology podcasts in pre-registration nursing.
Version: 1 Date: 9 July 2012
Reviewer: Gig Wernbacher-Searle

Reviewer's report:
1. The abstract describes the study as "exploring student experiences of the availability of ..." and goes on to describe how the podcasts were made available. The title however, refers to the experiences made by the students. It appears unclear as to whether the study aimed to access whether the students were able and willing to learn the necessary technical skills to avail themselves of this supplementary learning tool, or whether the tool itself is being evaluated as to usefulness.

Response:
We have amended the abstract and title to clarify that the aim of the study was to evaluate student perceptions of the usefulness of the learning tool. We have also amended the last paragraph of the introduction, the second paragraph of the design section of the methodology and the first paragraph of the discussion to clarify these aims.

2. The methods used conform to standard evaluation procedures; however the results of the evaluation appear to concentrate on the students' evaluation of the tools. There is no conclusive evaluation of either the effectiveness (whether the students' results were improved) or record of the actual hours spent ("using them one to three times") during the testing period.

Response:
The purpose of the study was to assess student perceptions of the usefulness of the learning tool. Due to availability of podcasts in a downloadable format, it is difficult to track how many times a student actually uses a podcast. For example, one student may click on the podcast link once and then download it for repeating listening later. However another student may repeatedly listen to the podcast from the computer because they didn't download it. Therefore it is not possible to accurately or objectively track the length of time a student spends using the podcasts. This is coupled with the fact that as the survey collected recall information about podcast use. Therefore it was easier to ask students to recall how many times they used the podcasts rather than the number of hours.

The effectiveness of the podcasts in terms of improving student learning is difficult to measure due the number of confounding factors which may influence this learning, including the different staff members involved in teaching the subject to different groups of students.
3. Although the authors have provided reliable data, they appear to vacillate between analysis accessibility and usefulness. While it is unarguable that a podcast can only be useful if it is accessible, these are not identical evaluation factors.

Response
We agree that accessibility and usefulness are not identical evaluation factors and we have amended the manuscript as described in response one to clarify the aim of the study. Accessibility factors are however critical to students’ evaluations of the usefulness of the podcasts.

4. The authors used high standards of data collection and evaluation.

5. While the discussion is valid and relevant, it does not appear to provide any useful information not already explored in their previous paper – "Pharmacology podcasts: a qualitative study of non-medical prescribing students' use, perceptions and impact on learning"

Response
The new insights provided by this study relate to the critical nature of staff engagement with, and promotion of, learning technologies to enhance student learning experiences. Our previous data has demonstrated that most students used the available podcasts and found podcasts to be useful supplementary tools, impacting positively on knowledge levels. In our previous study, the main author was involved in developing and promoting podcast use to support their own teaching, and was therefore fully engaged with the project. This current study, however, involved making podcasts available to a wider student group who were taught by several different lecturers, the majority of whom were not involved in the production of podcasts themselves. Both the focus group and survey highlighted the lack of awareness some students had in relation to the availability of podcasts. The reduced uptake of podcasts could be explained by differences in staff engagement with, and promotion of, these learning tools.

We have edited the manuscript to clarify the new insights this study provides and have made suggestions for increasing staff awareness of, and engagement with learning technologies. The manuscript has been amended in the following areas to address these comments:

- Amended introduction - Page 5, paragraph 3-Page 6 paragraph
- Discussion – Page 15 – paragraph 2
- Discussion – Page 16 – paragraphs 1&2
- Discussion – Page 17 – paragraph 1
- Discussion – Page 18 – paragraph 1
- Conclusion – Page 19 – paragraph 1

6. The limitations of the work are clearly stated.
7. The authors are clearly building on previously published work.

8. The title and abstract appear at first glance to be at odds. It is unclear whether the authors wish to evaluate the students' experience, have the students evaluate the usefulness of the podcasts, or whether the availability or accessibility of the podcasts is in question.

Response:
We have amended the title and abstract to clarify the aims of the study. Please see discussion in response one.

9. The English is of a high standard, the writing is clear and well expressed. The failure of the authors to gain any definitive new insights, in comparison to the work already done, makes it impossible for me to recommend publication of the paper in its current form. However, I am convinced that supplementary tools are necessary in the current learning environment. Should the authors have sufficient data, I am sure they have sufficient experience to increase the knowledge of the community. The hypothesis needs to be more precise and the aim of the study more exactly described and followed. The conclusion fails to offer concrete suggestions to improving the situation, whether this is due to availability, accessibility, technical difficulties or the technological inexperience of the students.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest
Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.
Declaration of competing interests: I declare that I have no competing interests