Reviewer’s report

Title: Tutoring in problem-based learning medical curricula: the influence of tutor background and style on effectiveness

Version: 3 Date: 15 February 2005

Reviewer: Samy Azer

Reviewer’s report:

BMC TUTORING IN PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING MEDICAL CURRICULA: THE INFLUENCE OF TUTOR BACKGROUND AND STYLE ON EFFECTIVENESS

The authors have addressed most of the points raised in my review/comments on their paper. The paper looks much better.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

However, they did not answer these points.
1. Point 4 (a): The statement mentioned addresses the features of PBL rather than the definition of an 'effective tutor'. The statements mentioned by authors describe the PBL process and the role of the PBL tutor but not the definition and qualities of an 'effective tutor'.
2. Point 4 (a): The authors state in their response 'the last item was thus considered to be a measure of the tutor’s overall effectiveness'. My question is, were the students in the groups aware of the fact that ‘the last item is a measure of the tutor’s overall effectiveness’? If the answer is ‘NO’, this point should be stated in the discussion and the authors need to provide a justification for their views.
3. Point 7: The authors responded that 'the group was used as an experimental unit because students were allocated to groups in such a way to ensure minimum variation between groups with regard to age, gender, academic background and nationality. That was a legitimate way to analyse the data born out in the standard deviation for each scale'. Although this system of allocating students in groups may be used for educational purposes, it will be of limited value in research purposes. For example, the information collected from each group will be affected by several biases such as: Who completed the survey? Is he/she a dominant student? What is the academic background of the student who completed the survey? And several other factors. I understand that students will be discussing their views as they complete each question. However, you can not ignore these biases and you need to discuss these limitations in the discussion.
4. Point 7 and 8: The tables are difficult to understand and are not easy to read.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

none

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes