Reviewer’s report

Title: Evaluation of a learner-designed course for teaching health research skills in Ghana

Version: 1 Date: 29 December 2006

Reviewer: Cindy L Lam

Reviewer’s report:

General

This paper describes an evaluation on a research training course that a UK University delivered in the KATH of Ghana, Africa. The topic is important and the experience will be of interest to medical educators. However, there is a lack of details about the course content and method to allow the interpretation of the results in context and for readers to benefit from the experience. The outcome measures and data analysis need more clarification. It would be useful if the discussion can be more specific.

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

Introduction

1. Please provide more details on the content, teaching method and assessments of the course.
2. Please explain more clearly what educational theories were applied to the design of the course in order to support the conclusion that "Educational theories emanating from wealthy countries..... transferable to developing countries."
3. Please elaborate on what and how "the role of social interaction and institutional culture" could affect postgraduate medical education in general and specially courses such as the one described in the paper.

Methods

1. Please state whether the authors were involved in the assessment of the students.
2. Please provide more information on the application of RSES. It is not sufficient for a psychometric measure to have only face validity and internal reliability. Is there any data on construct validity and the scores obtained by students of similar courses?
3. Why was pre-course test with the RSES not done? The interpretation on the scores of a single post-course measurement needs to be discussed.
4. Please explain more clearly the scoring method, if any, of the SOC. Are the items to be interpreted individually or are the scores of the items under the same category to be summated to give a scale score on each of the domains(categories)?
5. I am not sure using the "median frequency of the learners'responses'of the items of the each category or overall of SOC is meaningful. It may be better to use the median frequency of subjects for each item and if the SOC is designed for summation of item scores to domain (category) score then it is better compare the pre and post mean domain scores. The same principles should also apply to the analysis of the change in responses of individual students.
4. The methods of the qualitatitve analysis of the commentaries need to be explained more clearly, e.g. how themes/categories were identified, who did the analysis, how were data coded.

Results

1. The results on the changes in SOC ratings should be revised according to the revision of the outcome measures and data analysis describe above.
2. The results on the "median number of stages" is hard to interpret. It is clearer to show the actual number of subjects who had improved or regressed for each item.

Discussion

1. For the section on 'Social Outcomes in the context of theories and social learning' Please elaborate on how the results of this study supported the statements that ".... educational research should be located within a theoretical framework...", "confirmed ... that learner outcomes are influenced by the social and professional diversity of students", ".... new evidence of cross-cultural transferability of theories and role of social interaction .....".
2. For the section on 'Implication for educators and future research'. Please explain what 'practical tools' the authors were referring to.
3. For the section on 'Strengths and weakness'. Please elaborate on the theory of social learning that was applied. More data are required to support the claim that the RSES and SOC models were useful.

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

1. Please describe clearly the proportion of missing data for the RSES and SOC assessments. Please explain why there were more responses in the post-course evaluation than the pre-course evaluation.
2. Please add the number and percentage of missing data to Table 1.

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**Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)**

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

**Declaration of competing interests**:

I declare that I have no competing interests.