Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 8 January 2007

Reviewer: Gerard Majoor

Reviewer's report:

General

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

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

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

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. It is clearly stated that - among others - the course was designed by the participants themselves. However, it remains enigmatic how this group of 15 participants, all without preceding research experience, within one year became able to develop a research proposal, write a dissertation on research performed, and acquired confidence and competence in doing research. Only in the paragraph on 'Reflective commentaries' the reader learns about 'peer review committees' and 'monthly peer support meetings'. I encourage the authors to early insert a paragraph with information on the eventual structure of the course, and specification of inputs by the facilitators.

2. The extensive evaluation using various tools creates confidence with respect to the validity of the results presented. With respect to the digestion of the participants' reflective commentaries, however, the authors erroneously refer to 'a grounded theory approach'. The method used is just a minor element of that approach. Furthermore, the text analysis method as applied by the authors seems to lack a mechanism to reduce subjectivity, e.g. by involving two or more independent analysts.

3. It would indeed be exciting if the process of social learning at work as developed in "wealthy" countries would also work in developing countries. This study contributes evidence that this might be the case, but a single study with one group of 15 participants in one developing country is still too meagre to claim big conclusions like 'evidence of the cross-cultural transferability of theories about the role of social interactions and institutional culture on improving effectiveness of learning'.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential 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