Author's response to reviews

Title: Perceptions of graduating students from eight medical schools in Vietnam on acquisition of key skills identified by teachers

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Responses to the comments of Enoch Kwizera:

2.8.(under "Methods"): I am not convinced by the argument advanced for retaining under "Methods", material meant for "Discussion"; especially when the said material is actually repeated, nearly verbatim, under "Discussion". (i.e. Paragraph 2 under "Data collection" cf. Paragraph 3 under "Discussion"). Even in research publication, nothing is 'cast in stone', but authors are expected to conform to conventional practices (or norms) of communicating research findings to their peers; and pre-emptying "Discussion" for whatever reason is not part of such practices.

As we said, we know from experience that it is necessary to explain (not discuss) this issue in the methods section; the other reviewers did not object to that. We have now removed the second, somewhat more discussion related, sentence from the methods but we feel strongly that the first sentence is necessary for the reader to keep in mind before reading the results.

3.6. (under "Are the data sound and well-controlled"?): My concern about the legends to tables and figures was not about where they were placed in the manuscript, but was about their brevity, such that they did not help the reader get the gist of what the table or figure was depicting, without the reader having to resort to (re-)reading the manuscript or parts thereof.

It is true that the legends of some tables and figures, such as the Figure 3 and 4 are not directly explained the data in those figures, but they are necessary for the readers to understand that the data summarized in the figures just the data from some departments that we can group for analyzing, not all. However, from the comments of the reviewer, we improved the legends of those two figures to make them clearer.

5.3 and 5.7 (under "Discussions and Conclusions"): My use of "assessment" in the review was in the same context that the authors used the term in the abstract ("self assessed achievement", "self-assessed scores", and "self-assessed skills acquisition") as well as in paragraph 3 under "Discussion". Thus clarified, I still expect the authors to respond to my specific concerns raised in 5.3 and 5.7 under "Discussions and Conclusions".

We have reformulated the sentence that the reviewer referred to in 5.7 to make it clearer. We thought that if the students overestimated their competency, but they still give low score for some skills, the need for review and revision of those skills would be even greater. For the questions from 5.3, we think that it have been sufficiently addressed, as apparently did the other reviewers.
Under 7 ("Is the writing acceptable")?

a. A new reference (#4) has been added. As this is an online reference, authors should state when (dd/mm/yyyy) they last accessed this link.

When making this reference, we thought that the date of accessing the link is only required for websites that are continuously updated. Since the reference given is not only to the website but to a PDF document accessed through the website and it is not continuously updated, we did not give the date of access to the website. However, after checking the format of Reference Manager, we found that there is a requirement for the Date assessed in the format of electronic citation; therefore we added that in the reference.

b. Is Reference # 6 a one-page publication? If not, then range of page numbers should be indicated as has been done with the other hard copy references (e.g. #1, 2, etc). On the other hand, BMC is an online publication and articles printed from BMC journals carry the advice (bottom right hand) that "(page number not for citation purposes)" -in which case the BMC article should perhaps be cited as the online publication that it is, along the lines of ref # 4 (including date when last accessed)

This reference was downloaded by Reference Manager and formatted for BMC Medical Education as shown, and we assumed that it would be presented in the correct way. Anyway we added the date assessed as the reviewer suggested.

c. Ref #12 is the same as ref #8, and bits of the former are (still) garbled. Therefore, delete ref #12.

Reference 12 has been deleted. Thank you for this identification.