Author's response to reviews

Title: Scientific writing: A randomized controlled trial comparing standard and on-line instruction.

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Author's response to reviews: see over
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Title: Differences in outcomes of scientific writing among researchers using standard and online instruction - A randomized controlled trial (MS ID: 2009275192113625)

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Author's response to reviews: see over
April 08, 2009

To,
Natalie Pafitis,
Senior Scientific Editor BMC Series Journals
BioMed Central

Dear Natalie,

We thank you for doing a thorough review of the manuscript “Differences in outcomes of scientific writing among researchers using standard and online instruction - A randomized controlled trial.”

MS: 2009275192113625 and providing your esteemed comments. We have tried our best and revised the manuscript as per the reviewers’ comments.

Accompanying this letter, please find a revised version of our manuscript. Detailed responses to the reviewers are included following this page with the relevant modifications implemented in the text of the manuscript.

Best regards,

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Reviewer 2

General comment: All elements of the manuscript are greatly improved. The only section that needs significant revision is the abstract. Please revise this as this may be the only part of the manuscript that a reader reads.

Abstract Section

Comment: The first sentence of the abstract background could be stronger. “... of great importance” is too vague and should be more specific.

Response: We have modified the first sentence as follows”Writing plays a central role in the communication of scientific ideas and is therefore a key aspect in researcher education, ultimately determining the success and long-term sustainability of their careers”

Comment: In the abstract methods section, there should be mention of the two countries, and the types of students involved. It might also be nice to present Google Docs or other elements of the intervention. This could be mentioned in parentheses after “online writing workshop group”. Six subgroup analysis scale seems awkward for an abstract and no other context.

Response: We have added information on the type of students and two countries in the abstract. Elements of the intervention are also listed. As for the reviewers comment regarding the six sub group analysis scale, we feel it is important to include in the abstract as it is the primary outcome measure. However the sentence is now enhanced by addition "scores obtained" and hope it makes the sentence better now.

Comment: It is incorrect to say post hoc analysis measured… the analysis did not measure.

Response: We have taken note of this point and then changed this sentence “A post-hoc analysis comparing rates of communication between mentors and participants was performed.”
Comment: It is not enough to say which technique was used without saying which variables it was used on. Non-parametric tests were used for what reason?

Response: Nonparametric tests were used to assess intervention efficacy, this sentence is now modified.

Comment: The results section should include as a first some baseline characteristics in the first sentence.

Response: The result section is modified completely now. It looks this this now.

Excellent inter-observer reliability among three reviewers was found, with an Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) agreement = 0.931882 and ICC consistency = 0.932485. On-line group had better overall manuscript quality (p=0.0017, SSQSavg score 75.3 ± 14.21, ranging from 37 to 94) compared to the standard group (47.27 ± 14.64, ranging from 20 to 72). Participant satisfaction was higher in the on-line group (4.3 ± 0.73) compared to the standard group (3.09±1.11) (p=0.001). The standard group also had fewer communication events compared to the on-line group (0.91 ± 0.81 vs. 2.05 ± 1.23; p=0.0219).

Comment: In the abstract conclusion the only sentence is one of speculation. It does not summarize the findings in any way. The first one or two sentences of the conclusion should summarize the results of this study before moving on to speculation.

Response: We have modified the Conclusion paragraph like "Our protocol for online scientific writing instruction is better than standard face-to-face instruction in terms of writing quality and student satisfaction. Future studies should evaluate the protocol efficacy in larger longitudinal cohorts involving participants from different languages."

Results Section

Comment: I still cannot view the last table. The editors may have to help with formatting

Response: We have modified, hope its clear now.
Discussion Section

Comment: In the paragraph that begins “to be sure, studies favoring traditional teaching overall online methods do exist “, the authors cite a study where there were no significant differences between traditional teaching an online. While this reviewer agrees with the conclusion of the paragraph, the first sentence should be reworded.

Response: As per suggested we have modified the sentence now to “Although studies favoring traditional teaching over on-line methods do exist, studies yielding neutral results are more prevalent”