Reviewer’s report

Title: Tutor Assessment of PBL Process: Does tutor variability affect objectivity and reliability?

Version: 0 Date: 07 Nov 2018

Reviewer: Judith Strawbridge

Reviewer’s report:

Many thanks for the opportunity to review your paper on assessment of Problem-Based Learning by Tutors. It is always interesting to explore assessment data and reflect on the challenges of ensuring that assessments are fair and reliable. I have some comments which are intended be helpful and assist in strengthening your paper.

Abstract

It would be really helpful to the reader if the abstract contained sufficient information to orientate the reader to the full paper. The method section of the paper gives no indication of the number of students and tutors, and it is difficult to determine exactly what was done. Without the groups, it reads a little like only three tutors were involved. It may also be worth considering if your conclusion matches your study, in that you conclude that more rigorous training is required, yet in the body of the text you state that all the tutors received the necessary structured training in PBL delivery and assessment (P5 L38-39)

Background

P3 L22-26 You might consider the strength of your argument for the superiority of PBL over traditional approaches. Perhaps this might be a little overstated for the evidence provided.

P3 L49-54 I'm afraid I am not familiar with tripartite, triple jump assessment and patchwork tests. I'm sure I should be, and must look it up. You might consider if it is worth a line or two about more novel forms of assessment in PBL, particularly if they are of relevance to the way you have assessed in this study or if there are similar challenges?

P4 L5 - 6 You might consider rephrasing re hawks having a tendency to fail most candidates - perhaps it should be "more". Similarly with doves.

P2 2nd paragraph Feedback from students rating tutors is interesting, but you might consider if this is relevant to your study.

Methods
It would be really helpful if this section was clearer, as it is difficult to follow e.g. tutors were assigned to their groups for a period of 6 weeks, during which they rotated to different groups of students. I am not quite sure which groups were taught by which tutors, and this makes reading the results difficult to follow.

P5 L37-38 As mentioned earlier, you state that all tutors received the necessary structured training. I would be very interesting for the reader if this training was described, and given that the experience ranged from 1 - 20 years, is training repeated for tutors at regular intervals?

Results & discussion

I suspect the results would be clearer if I was better able to follow the methods. It seems a shame that there wasn't some detail on the years of experience with PBL of the tutors in the results, particularly as this is a comment in the discussion (P9 L4). Some of the results referred to in the discussion e.g. students getting high scores and then lower scores in subsequent ratings (P8 L56-59), don't seem to be in the results. The final point in the discussion is that robust faculty development may minimise the effect of individual differences in tutor rating - but do we have any context regarding expectations that student performance would change between ratings?

Limitations

The limitations are acknowledged. One which might have been possible to address is No 3 - the exploration of PBL experience of each tutor. It might be worth considering if this could be addressed. Perhaps limitation No 5 is overstated - I'm not sure students assessments of tutors was necessary, unless you specifically were to address student perceptions of their tendency to be lenient or otherwise.

Conclusion

As above, a main conclusion is that more rigorous training is required, but from the data do we know this will help given that all tutors were trained? There could be other important conclusions to draw, such as raising the awareness of inevitability of differences in marking and that these need to be taken into account in assessment strategies.

Finally a couple of typographical edits for consideration. P4 33 The explanations supplemented by authors "were" rather than "was". Page 10 Limitation 4 - extra "at"

I hope this is helpful, and all the very best for your research

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No
Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

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