Author’s response to reviews

Title: Student motivation to learn: Is self-belief the key to transition and first year performance in an undergraduate health professions program?

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Dear Editor BMC Med Ed

Thank you for the second review of this manuscript. Responses to feedback are detailed point by point below with changes also marked in text in red:

1. Chris Roberts, PhD (Reviewer 2): The authors have made several changes that make the most of the data that they have. The two research questions have been more clearly defined, and the claims of the associations in the predictive validity student appropriately toned down. In terms of the research questions both are phrased in line 125-132 p 5 as closed yes/no questions. Response: The research questions have been edited to ensure they are not closed questions

Specifically, the following research questions were addressed:
1. What is the relationship between educational score on entry, background (school leaver versus mature age), admissions interview score and a student’s motivation to learn on entry into an undergraduate physiotherapy program, as determined by the MES-UC?
2. What is the relationship between a student’s motivation to learn on entry, as determined by the MES-UC, and subsequent first year performance? Which dimensions of motivation, as measured by the MES-UC, may enhance or negatively impact academic performance in the first year of a physiotherapy program?
2. Question one needed a bit more work, to define the cognitive/non cognitive nature of the educational score. The interview is described adequately. This is would be in line with much of admissions research (Patterson et al Med Teacher 2018).
Response: Clarity has now been provided on how the educational score is calculated, in Procedures, as per the interview score
The educational score on entry is calculated from either an applicant’s ATAR, for school leavers, or their GPA of previous undergraduate studies, for mature age applicants. The interview score is calculated from performance at a semi-structured admissions interview, with questioning including aspects of an applicant’s motivation to study physiotherapy. It is an integral component within the selection process, accounting for 40% of overall admissions scoring once applicants pass initial academic screening.

3. The authors need to just check, that consistency has been used throughout included in the tables.
Response: The manuscript has been checked for consistency with capitals removed from ‘interview’ and ‘educational score’ throughout the text and tables as appropriate, as well as ‘physiotherapy’

4. In the intro p3 line 70, the reference in perhaps not so recent given it is 2019.
Response: ‘recently released’ has been removed from the manuscript and the sentence edited appropriately

5. In the Discussion line 248, which researchers are the authors referring to. Those in reference 27 or themselves?
Response: ‘researchers’ has been replaced by ‘authors’ for improved clarity

6. In the discussion line 244-- it states "there was no relationship between academic entry scores... is this the combined educational/interview score?"
Response: ‘Academic entry scores’ has been extrapolated to clarify that this is referring to educational and interview scores individually
The first aim of this research was to determine the relationship between students’ background and educational and interview scores on entry

7. I remain unconvinced that the final conclusion is complete... "Consideration of individualised follow-up for students with lowered levels may be appropriate, to facilitate improved student motivation and subsequent study success." It seems equally plausible that some of the first year courses are demotivating, and need improving to be appealing to high and low performing students?
Response: As per the conclusion in the abstract, consideration of both student follow-up as well as the role of the MES-UC in curriculum review is now included in the concluding sentences.
Consideration of individualised follow-up for students with lowered motivation levels on entry, may be appropriate. Motivation measures, such as the MES-UC, may be pertinent to determine student engagement with curriculum, ensuring that experiences in first year programs foster student self-efficacy with learning.