Reviewer’s report

Title: Implementation of Integrated Learning Program in the first year of medical course under a conventional curriculum: Perception of students and faculty

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Reviewer: Mark Albanese

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Biomed Central: Implementation of Integrated Learning Program in the first year of medical course under a conventional curriculum…

General

This is an evaluation of using graduating students to serve as facilitators for PBL compared to faculty in a Biological and Biomedical Sciences department at Aga Khan U. Med College. A lack of faculty to serve all the facilitating needs prompted this experiment. The study examines a retrospective set of evaluation data collected from 2002-5, involving 178 facilitators (89 faculty, 89 non-faculty) over 32 modules.

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

14 faculty and 98 students answered the questionnaires. What is not clear is what percentage of the potential respondents that reflects. It is hard to interpret the results without this information.

With no control group, it is hard to make meaning out of ratings that are not all the top category. In this case, for several of the formats, the ratings are relatively poor (table 4). This is especially true for case based learning where 65% of the respondents chose the two lowest categories. A general rule is that if the over 50% of the ratings are not in the highest two categories, there is substantial dissatisfaction with the activities. Only the methods 5 and 6 met this criterion. Unless the authors have a stronger reason for interpreting the results otherwise, it appears that the 5/7 integrative methods were not well-received by students.

The results section reads more like a preliminary discussion because very little numerical data are cited. It would be better to include more specific references to the data and more explanation as to why the findings were considered positive.

The question that asked students about their future performance offers some interpretive challenges. Because students have never experienced the examination it is pure conjecture based upon little to no experience. If this is a surrogate for asking them how much they learned, this needs to be explained in more detail as well as what the expectations were. A similar situation exists for
the faculty answers to the questions. I would suppose they would always respond that the students should do better on the exam with a new method because they put so much work into it to try to make it so. However, reality can be otherwise. It would be very helpful to have data to back the projections.

This appears to have been done during the first implementation of the new course. There are almost always things that do not work as expected in a first time through. Some of the problems may resolve themselves in subsequent implementations. Right now it is difficult to know what to make of the results because of the issues noted above.

Minor

p. 4 “earning objectives” should probably be “learning objectives”

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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'