Letter

Linguistic Validity: The Missing Link in the Evolution of Iranian Undergraduate Medical Education Accreditation Standards

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Dear Editor,

Linguistic validity is essential when the primary instrument is not in the native language of the country. When developing, adopting, or adapting an instrument, various forms of validity and reliability should be considered. For an instrument intended for undergraduate medical education accreditation, it must be designed to include a set of standards. WFME standards were selected as the basis for developing medical school standards in Iran. These standards were contextualized and translated from English to Persian to ensure ease of understanding. While content validity and related indices were addressed in Gandomkar et al. (1), linguistic validity was not considered, which is critical to ensuring language clarity and consistent understanding among those involved in internal and external assessment processes. Collecting evidence for response process validity is thus essential (2).

In retrospect, following the first round of accreditation, the accreditation committee was asked to reflect on the findings. During these reflection sessions, one agenda item involved critically reviewing the WFME certificate. This review highlighted the need for post-accreditation monitoring. An extensive literature review was conducted to identify an effective and feasible protocol for post-accreditation monitoring. Since WFME does not provide guidelines for post-accreditation monitoring, each country or agent is free to select its own approach based on the local context. In Iran, a post-accreditation monitoring protocol was designed in

three phases and subsequently approved by the National Commission of Evaluation and Accreditation (NCEA) for implementation. Throughout these phases, the protocol's mixed-method approach was used to evaluate the agreement between external and internal assessors regarding their decisions on the status of medical schools in relation to standards. In some instances, inter-rater agreement among internal and external assessors was satisfactory; however, in others, it was problematic. To understand the reasons behind this discrepancy, Gadamer's hermeneutic phenomenology from Truth and Method (3) was applied to reconstruct the scenario.

To investigate the underlying causes of these errors, fifteen focus group sessions were held with NCEA members. At the conclusion of these sessions, a lack of attention to linguistic validity in the development and translation process was identified as the primary cause of the inconsistencies. To enhance linguistic validity and thereby improve the instrument and the overall accreditation process, the post-accreditation monitoring committee made several recommendations, as follows:

(1) The number of standards should be minimized as much as possible.

- Logic: Reducing the number of standards allows for a smaller pool of external assessors, enabling the selection of more qualified individuals.

(2) All standards and sub-standards should begin

with a focal term.

- Logic: Some standards are lengthy, making it difficult for assessors to identify the main point. Conducting a theme and rheme analysis of the standards would clarify the focal terms.

(3) Set a word limit for each standard and sub-standard.

- Logic: This helps enhance clarity and consistency in understanding the standards.

(4) Define key terminologies for each area based on contextual relevance.

- Logic: This approach mitigates misunderstandings and biases in standard interpretation.

(5) Develop key questions for each standard and sub-standard to ensure coherent interpretation.

- Logic: These questions help guide the assessment process and ensure consistent interpretation by all involved.

(6) Use two methods—cognitive interviewing or cognitive pre-testing—to gather the best evidence for response process validity during the development of assessment tools.

- Logic: Cognitive interviewing allows for an evaluation of how well assessors' interpretations align with the developers' intentions, addressing any ambiguities that may arise.

In summary, when developing an instrument in a language different from the native language of the users, ensuring linguistic validity is essential. Without careful consideration of linguistic validity, consistent interpretation and understanding of standards among internal and external assessors cannot be assured.

Acknowledgements

Footnotes

References

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