

# The many reasons of poor performance/more pertinent reasons for poor student performance

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Dear editor,

In the March 2022 issue of MJM, Puthiaparampil et al (2022) published a paper titled: 'Dropping the non-core subjects from undergraduate final professional examination: How it would impact the results'. In that paper, the authors presented the results of a retrospective analysis of Multiple True False (MTF) and Best Answer Questions (BAQ) of Final Professional Examinations (FPE) of past 4 years. The article showed that the student's performance in 'non-core subjects' was significantly lower compared to that in 'core subjects'. It concluded with the suggestion that 'including the non-core subjects in the FPE overburdens the students, impedes adequate revision of the subjects, and lowers their scores in the final professional examination' and that 'dropping the non-core subjects from MTF and BAQ would improve the students' final scores and would help more students to attain distinction status.'

While the paper highlighted one pertinent issue, upon deeper consideration, we realized that there could be other reasons also why students would perform poorly in examinations. These reasons could be the difficulty level of the questions as well as the validity of the questions (i.e. whether the student is being tested on what he or she is supposed to be tested based on the prescribed curriculum for undergraduate level). Another pertinent issue that should be explored is the inadvertent inclusion of non-core topics in the assessments.

The key to minimize the risk of inclusion of non-core topics is to have a vigorous examination blueprint and to diligently stick to the plan. One of the practical blueprinting techniques is the two-dimensional technique by Coderre et al.<sup>1</sup> recommended two criteria for evaluating the importance of a topic: (1) the impact of the condition and (2) the frequency of the condition. A condition such as cardiac arrest in emergency medicine would be weighted as highly impactful (due to the time-sensitive need for prompt recognition and prompt initiation of chest compression) and highly frequent (as cardiac arrest can occur in any ward, be it in internal medicine, general surgery, obstetric wards, etc.).

In conclusion, as the primary goal of assessment is to ensure that a student has been adequately equipped to function as a safe and competent house officer, the assessment rendered must be a valid one. The key to improving the validity of an assessment is to have a blueprint.

## REFERENCES

1. Coderre S, Woloschuk W, McLaughlin K. Twelve tips for blueprinting. *Med Teacher*. 2009; 31(4): 322-4.