A MFRM Study of Case Specificity and Intervening Variables Affecting Diagnostic performance

[1]Dr. Fadi Munshi, [2]Dr.Mohammed yunus

[1.] Assistant Professor, Medical Education Department,King Fahad Medical City,King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz University, KSA.

[2.] Department of Mechanical Engineering, College of Engineering and Islamic Architecture, Umm Alqura University, Makkah, KSA.

ABSTRACT

Many variables have been described in medical education literature that influences the generalizability of diagnostic performance.The objective of the present study was to model and determine the degree of impact on diagnostic performance by the independent variables such as disease difficulty, case typicality, type of Clinical Presentations (CP) and problem solving strategy using the many-faceted Rasch model (MFRM). MFRM was conducted using FACETS software. MFRM was computed with 175 candidates, 76 disease items, four typicality levels and problem solving strategy within and across cases from two similar clinical presentations (CP). Two types of data were analyzed, diagnostic performance scores obtained from written clinical vignettes and problem solving strategies abstracted from written think aloud exercises. Most of the diseases included in this study showed high correlation coefficients and high discriminating measures. This research provides evidence that the diagnostic strategy utilized can alter diagnostic performance. Further support was found for schema-based instruction in medical schools to enhance student diagnostic performance. The research model reveals the factors that influence diagnostic performance aredisease difficulty and type of CP. Thus, MFRM demonstrates a psychometrically appropriate technique for applying expert judgment in test development of diagnostic performance involved with many variables.

Key words: Clinical presentations, Diagnostic performance,Disease difficulty, FACETS software,Item response theory, Rasch model.

1. INTRODUCTION

Errors in healthcare are a leading cause of death and injury(Kohn, Corrigan, & Donaldson, 2000). Leape (1994) characterized the kinds of errors that resulted in medical injury as diagnostic, treatment, preventive, or other errors such as communication failure. Diagnostic errors are categorized into errors or delay in diagnosis, failure to employ indicated tests, use of outmoded tests of therapy, and failure to act on results of monitoring or testing. The focus of this study is to investigate factors that could contribute to diagnostic errors (i.e., factors that enhance diagnostic performance). This study also investigated the extent that performance generalizes/predicts diagnostic performance within cases from one clinical presentation (CP) to cases from another similar CP.Physicians must demonstrate medical knowledge, patient care, communication, practice-based learning, professionalism, and system-based practice competencies in their attainment of competency in diagnosis.Diagnostic performance of a physician is determined by the ability to diagnose a disease regardless of how it presents in terms of various combinations of signs and symptoms using a number of different case presentations for a specific disease, as success in diagnosing a clinical case is content/knowledge dependent and process dependent (Harasym et al., 2008; Papa, Oglesby, Aldrich, Schaller, & Cipher, 2007).

However, it is unknown whether the generalization in diagnostic performance will occur within a CP – that is, the predictability of performance above levels, across levels, and between CPs. Therefore, there is a need to investigate if generalization exists. With the content and case specificity in mind, we chose to study two similar CPs.

1.1. Multi-Facet Rasch Modelling (MFRM)

It is statistical analysis method that is based on Item Response Theory (IRT). MFRM generate a composite score based on the contribution of multiple facets and provides the percentage of variance removed from the true score (Bond & Fox, 2001).MFRM was computed to determine the degree of impact (i.e., variance accounted for) by each of the independent variables. The assumption of uni-dimensionality for this statistical procedure was determined by PCA and fit statistics. The data were analyzed by FACETS (version 3.71.0) (Linacre, 2013). The program used the scores of diagnostic performance to estimate the effect of disease difficulty, case typicality, and problem solving strategy on examinee abilities. FACETS calibrated onto the same equal-interval scale (Linacre, 2005). This generates a logit-based scale for interpreting the results of the analyses. IRT is a probabilistic psychometric measurement model used to estimate ability and item characteristics on the trait measured (Bond & Fox, 2001). IRT presumes some assumptions that when understood help explain the theory (Bechger, Maris, Verstralen, & Berguin, 2003; Morris et al., 2006; Schaefer, 2008). These assumptions are

a. One common factor accounts for all item co-variances and relations between them.
b. Theobserved response take a particular form called an item characteristic curve.
c. Allitems must contribute in a meaningful way to the attribute being investigated.

There are three main approaches in assessing the dimensionality of an examination: 1) using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) only, 2) using fit statistics only, and 3) using fit statistics, then exposing the residuals to a PCA (Tennant & Pallant, 2006). For a 1-parameter IRT model, which includes difficulty only, a sample size of 30 for robust decision making is required (Linacre, 1994). Rasch modelling is considered a 1-parameter IRT model. In the current study, a form of Rasch modelling, MFRM, is computed therefore the sample size of 175 participants was deemed sufficient.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present study uses MFRM to detect the degree of impacton diagnostic performance by the independent variables such as disease difficulty, case typicality, type of Clinical Presentations (CP) and problem solving strategy.Itincorporates 175 candidates, 76 disease items, four typicality levels, two CPs, and problem solving strategies.

Two types of data were collected; diagnostic performance from clinical vignettes and abstracted clinical problem solving strategies from written think aloud (WTA) exercises. All participants from the four universities were invited to voluntarily participate in a 5 hour session in which medical clerks responded to 76 clinical vignettes and 4 WTA exercises. In return, each participant received feedback on diagnostic performance categorized by disease and CP. Chest Discomfort and Dyspnea schemes were used to investigate diagnostic performance generalizability within and across CPs. Table 1 below shows the cardiac causes of chest discomfort.

Table 1. Diseases Included in the Study sorted by Clinical Presentation

Dyspnea	***Chest Discomfort***
Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome	*Acute Coronary Syndrome*
Anemia	*Anxiety/Panic disorder*
Asthma	*Constrictive Pericarditis*
Cardiac Tamponade	*Lung Cancer*
Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease	*Peptic Ulcer Disease*
Congestive Heart Failure	*Pneumonia*
Pulmonary Embolism	*Pneumothorax*
Pulmonary Hypertension	*Stable Angina*
Sarcoidosis	*Valvular Regurgitation*
	Valvular Stenosis

MFRM was computed to determine the degree of impact (i.e., variance accounted for) by each of the independent variables. The assumption of uni-dimensionality for this statistical procedure was determined by PCA and fit statistics. The data were analyzed by FACETS (version 3.71.0) (Linacre, 2013). The program used the scores of diagnostic performance to estimate the effect disease difficulty, case typicality, and problem solving strategy on examinee abilities. FACETS calibrated diagnostic performance scores, disease difficulty, CP, case typicality, and problem solving strategies onto the same equal-interval scale (Linacre, 2005). This generated a logit-based scale for interpreting the results of the analyses.

3. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

To study the effect of disease difficulty, case typicality, type of CP, and problem solving strategy on diagnostic performance - that is, candidate ability, MFRM was conducted using FACETS software. MFRM was computed with 175 candidates, 76 disease items, four typicality levels, two CPs, and three problem solving strategies. The variance explained by the Rasch measures was only 24.15%. This variance-explained is dependent on the variances by the measures of the elements in the facets.
All the facets have variances smaller than one logit because the standard deviations were low.
Therefore, variance explained by Rasch measures can only be small (Linacre, 2005). This finding of low

standard deviations was attributed to the fact that the 76 cases were assigned scores ranging from zero to one. To adjust for this low variance, the observed scores were re-grouped. Performance scores on the four clinical vignettes that represent each disease were summed. This led to observed scores ranging from zero to four for each of the 19 diseases. In addition, the scores for typicality and diagnostic strategy were summed to reflect a total score for each of the 19 diseases.

3.1. Model Fit and Uni-Dimensionality

MFRM analysis was run and nine disjoint subsets in the CP facet were detected and found when the elements of the facets are not sufficiently crossed. In the current data, to resolve diseases are nested within case typicality and CP were converted into “demographic" facetsand are not included in the measurement model. After the adjustment of the model, subset connection in the data was achieved with the measurement model including candidates, disease, and problem solving approach. Thus, the estimates of typicality and CP were excluded from the analysis.

Table 2. Forced 2-Factor Solution Principal Component Analysis

Item	*Disease*	*Communality*	*Rotated Components*	
			CP	*DifficultDiseases1*
Pepulc	*Peptic ulcer*	*0.58*	*0.76*	*0.02*
Anx	*Anxiety*	*0.37*	*0.54*	*0.27*
Chf	*Chronicheart failure*	*0.48*	*0.64*	*0.27*
Valvreg	*Valvular regurgitation*	*0.38*	*0.36*	*0.50*
Acs	*Acute coronarysyndrome*	*0.58*	*0.75*	*0.13*
Stabangi	*Stable angina*	*0.35*	*0.56*	*0.17*
Pneumonia	*Pneumonia*	*0.61*	*0.75*	*0.20*
Pneumotharax	*Pneumothorax*	*0.57*	*0.52*	*0.54*
Constperi	*Constrictive pericarditis*	*0.44*	*0.16*	*0.64*
copd	*chronic obstructive pulmonary disease*	*0.42*	*0.59*	*0.26*
pulmembo	*pulmonary embolism*	*0.67*	*0.77*	*0.27*
anemia	*anemia*	*0.41*	*0.51*	*0.38*
sarcoid	*sarcoidosis*	*0.51*	*0.59*	*0.39*
lungcan	*lung cancer*	*0.55*	*0.73*	*0.08*
cardtamp	*cardiac tamponade*	*0.42*	*0.01*	*0.65*
ards	*acute respiratorydistress syndrome*	*0.43*	*0.18*	*0.62*
pulmhyp	*pulmonary hypertension*	*0.46*	*0.23*	*0.64*
valvsten	*valvular stenosis*	*0.63*	*0.74*	*0.14*
asthma	*asthma*	*0.18*	*0.39*	*0.18*

# of Diseases	*19*	*Cross Loading*	*13*	*4*
Cronbach's α	*0.91*			*2*
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	*0.92*			
Bartlett's test of Sphericity	*0.000*		*32.84%*	*14.88%*
Total varianceexplained	*47.71%*	*Eigenvalue*	*6.242.83*	

*Diseases1 = 4 difficult diseases clustered together likely due to reduced variance in clerks' diagnostic scores.
Upper Case: Chest Discomfort Cases Lower Case: Dyspnea Cases

Model fit and uni-dimensionality were estimated using standard residuals and infit-outfit indices. Standardized residuals mean was 0.01 and the sample standard deviation was 1.00. These results indicate that the data fit the Rasch model.

Uni-dimensionality of data is a MFRM assumption. Fit statistics revealed four candidates (2.28%) out of 175 with infit Z standardized statistics (Zstd) that were less than the critical value of -2 and ten (5.71%) with outfit Zstd statistics that were greater than the critical criteria of +2.0 (Bond & Fox, 2001). Of the 19 disease items, one (5.26%) had infit Zstd statistics less than -2 and one (5.26%) had Zstd statistics greater than the criterion of +2.0. The percentage of candidates and diseases showing acceptable fit statistics did not fall below 90%. These findings with the PCA conducted in research question one support the uni-dimensionality of the data as shown in table 2.

3.2. Effect of Facets

Reliability estimates were estimated for each facet and the gold standard was set at 0.80. The estimated reliabilities for the facets candidates, diseases, and problem solving approach are 0.86; 0.99; and 0.99, respectively. This indicates high reliability.
MFRM analysis revealed that 56.80% of the main effects variance was explained by Rasch-measures. Of the total systematic variance, candidate ability accounted for 17.74.8%, differences in disease difficulty resulted in 29.71% variance, and 9.34% was due to problem solving strategy.

3.3. Candidate Ability

The abilities of 175 clinical clerks ranged from +192 till -131 logits. According to Rasch estimated true diagnostic ability, candidate 102 had the highest ability of +192 logits. The raw score of this candidate was 68 out of 76. In contrast, candidate 111 had a raw score 15 out of 76, and had an ability Rasch true measure of -131.

3.4. Difficulty and Discrimination Indices of Diseases

Disease difficulties are listed in Appendix A. Diseases varied in difficulty with a range of +148 to -91 logits. The most difficult disease to diagnose was acute respiratory distress (total score 202 and logit score of +147) while the easiest was peptic ulcer disease (total score 589 and logit score of -91). Without altering other estimates, an estimate of item discrimination is computed in MFRM (Linacre, 2013). Disease discrimination indices for 14 out of 19 items were equal or close to the desired Rasch expectation of *di* = 1.

3.5. Clinical Problem Solving Approach

Clinical problem solving approach MFRM measurements are reported. SI reasoning was the most discriminating with a of *di* = 1.14. Clerks who used guessing had a total score of 637 (+56 logits), those who used HD reasoning had a total score of 6288 (-1 84
logits), and students who used scheme induction had a total score of 1492 (-34 logits). This finding indicates that clerks who tended to use guessing as a diagnostic strategy were least likely to obtain the correct diagnosis (mean score of 26.64), clerks who tended to use HD reasoning were more likely to get the correct diagnosis (mean score of 50.31), and clerks who used scheme induction were most likely to answer correctly (mean score of 62.38). In both CPs, there was a statistically significant difference among the three strategy groups as determined by one-way ANOVA, F (2,172) = 85.19, $p < 0.001$ for chest discomfort cases and, F (2, 172) = 84.87, $p < 0.001$ for dyspnea cases.

3.6. Contributions to Medical Education Literature

This study debates the “all or none” notion of case specificity. The findings of this study indicate that a degree of diagnostic performance predictability exists in the context of cases that are conceptually linked together in a CP and across two similar CPs.

3.7. Implications for Testing Agencies

Testing agencies can benefit from the findings of this research in reducing the number of items needed to evaluate competency. In assessment, greater generalizability means fewer items required to test competency. In our current study we found a high degree of predictability of diagnostic performance between cases within and across two similar CPs. Using the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula, which is a formula used to predict the reliability of a test after changing the test length, the items can be reduced.

In this study, as shown is table 3, results showed that it would take around 20-40 cases within a CP to reliably estimate diagnostic performance. If there is a limited amount of testing time, the measure is uni-dimensional, diagnostic performance is analyzed using MFRM, and there is a reduced need to ensure a representative sampling of items within a CP given the generalizability of performance from one case to another, the reduction in cases may be possible This proposition is theoretical and would require further investigation.

Table 3: Number of items required for each CP to obtain an estimated 0.80 reliability.

Study	*CP*	*# of Items*	*Reliability*	*Target Reliability*	*Spearman Brown # of Items*
Current Finding MFRM	*Chest Pain*	*36*	*0.81*	*-*	*36**
Current Finding MFRM	*Dyspnea*	*40*	*0.83*	*0.80*	*33*

*Not computed by Spearman-Brown prediction formula.

4. CONCLUSION

This study answered found effective in studying the intervening variables that contribute to diagnostic accuracy. Most of the diseases chosen in this study showed high correlation coefficients and high discriminating measures. These estimated measures from two different measurement theories support predictability of performance from one case to another within two similar CPs.The research model illuminates some factors that influence diagnostic performance. Disease difficulty and diagnostic strategy were two variables found to impact diagnostic performance. Further research is required to identify other influencing variables.This study also provides evidence that the direction of clinical

reasoning utilized enhances diagnostic performance. Schema-based instruction is a recommendation for medical schools to apply as the empirical evidence provided in this study linked better diagnostic accuracy with forward reasoning. Finally, study findings showed consistent use of the same problem solving strategy within and across two similar CP cases. Generalizability of diagnostic performance and problem solving strategy within and across cases from two CPs are main contributions to the medical education literature that provide ample opportunities for further research.

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Appendix A: MFRM Disease Measurement Report

Total Score	Total Count	Obsvd Average	Fair(M) Average	Model Measure	Model S.E.	Infit MnSq	Infit ZStd	Outfit MnSq	Outfit ZStd	Estim. Discrm	Corr. PtBis	Nu	Disease
202	175	1.15	1.02	147	7	1.19	1.7	1.16	1.4	.79	.28	10	Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome
254	175	1.45	1.33	115	6	1.06	.6	1.05	.5	.91	.30	12	Pulmonary Hypertension
304	175	1.74	1.62	88	6	1.03	.2	1.10	.9	.88	.25	1	Constrictive Pericarditis
311	175	1.78	1.66	84	6	1.23	2.1	1.32	2.8	.58	.20	6	Cardiac Tamponade
315	175	1.80	1.68	82	6	1.03	.3	1.00	.0	.99	.39	13	Valvular Regurgitation
396	175	2.26	2.19	38	6	.54	-5.5	.56	-5.3	1.44	.39	11	Congestive Heart Failure
427	175	2.44	2.41	19	6	1.06	.6	1.15	1.4	.76	.27	3	Asthma
448	175	2.56	2.53	8	6	1.08	.8	1.03	.3	1.00	.44	14	Valvular Stenosis
467	175	2.67	2.66	-3	6	1.13	1.2	1.08	.7	.84	.34	16	Stable Angina
481	175	2.75	2.76	-12	7	1.09	.9	1.06	.6	.94	.37	4	COPD
505	175	2.89	2.92	-27	7	1.15	1.4	1.08	.7	.98	.39	17	Sarcoidosis
508	175	2.90	2.93	-28	7	1.02	.2	.96	-.3	1.09	.40	19	Pneumothorax
508	175	2.90	2.94	-29	7	.85	-1.4	.80	-1.9	1.28	.45	5	Pulmonary Embolism
521	175	2.98	3.02	-37	7	.93	-.6	.92	-.7	1.10	.44	15	Acute Coronary Syndrome
527	175	3.01	3.07	-42	7	.94	-.5	.91	-.8	1.08	.39	7	Anemia
530	175	3.03	3.09	-44	7	.93	-.5	.91	-.8	1.09	.36	2	Lung Cancer
557	175	3.18	3.26	-64	7	1.03	.2	1.05	.4	1.00	.33	9	Anxiety/Panic disorder
567	175	3.24	3.32	-72	8	.92	-.6	.88	-.9	1.15	.41	18	Pneumonia
589	175	3.37	3.46	-91	8	.90	-.8	.82	-1.2	1.10	.37	8	Peptic Ulcer Disease
443.0	175.0	2.53	2.52	7	7	1.01	.0	.99	-.1		.36	Mean (Count: 19)	
111.0	.0	.63	.71	66	0	.15	1.6	.16	1.7		.07	S.D. (Population)	
114.0	.0	.65	.73	68	1	.15	1.6	.17	1.7		.07	S.D. (Sample)	

Appendix B: MFRM Clinical Problem Solving Approach Measurement Report

Total Score	Total Count	Obsvd Average	Fair(M) Average	Model Measure	Model S.E.	Infit MnSq	Infit ZStd	Outfit MnSq	Outfit ZStd	Estim. Discrm	Corr. PtBis	Exact Agree. Obs %	Exact Agree. Exp %	N	Clinical Problem Solving Approach
637	447	1.43	1.98	56	4	1.02	.3	1.05	.7	.94	.22	.0	.0	1	Guessing
6288	2414	2.60	2.63	-1	2	1.03	.9	1.01	.3	.98	.32	.0	.0	2	Hypothetical Deductive
1492	464	3.22	2.99	-34	5	.88	-1.6	.83	-2.2	1.14	.26	.0	.0	3	Scheme Inductive
2805.7	1108.3	2.42	2.54	7	4	.98	-.1	.97	-.4		.27			Mean (Count: 3)	
2487.0	923.3	.74	.42	37	1	.07	1.1	.09	1.3		.04			S.D. (Population)	
3045.9	1130.8	.91	.52	46	2	.08	1.4	.12	1.6		.05			S.D. (Sample)	