Using Q-Methodology to Evaluate Students’ Perceptions of Their Clinical Education Experience

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Context. The Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) requires entry-level athletic training education programs (ATEPs) to develop and implement an assessment plan to evaluate all aspects of these undergraduate and graduate programs. This includes continual assessment of the clinical education portion of these programs, which may include, but is not limited to, evaluation of preceptors, clinical sites and clinical competencies. This evaluation process most commonly incorporates Likert scale surveys that students complete during their clinical education experience throughout the ATEP. However, Q methodology has the potential to be a more comprehensive tool in that it would enable program administrators to identify various views, consensus, patterns of subjectivity and students’ preferences regarding their clinical experience. Objective. To present the benefits of using Q methodology in athletic training education research. In this context, to explain the potential for Q methodology to contribute to overall ATEP assessment by determining various views and consensus of athletic training students in regards to their clinical education experience. Background. Q methodology is mixed methods approach that involves the systematic study of human subjectivity to provide a means to determine a population’s subjective viewpoint(s). A Q study involves participants ranking a set of statements regarding a particular topic according to their own point of view. It then utilizes factor analysis and correlation to determine consensus and differences of that population’s opinions, beliefs, and/or attitudes. Description. The results of a Q-study will be discussed to illustrate the value of Q methodology in determining students’ subjective perspectives regarding their clinical education experience as part of an overall assessment of an ATEP. Clinical Advantage(s). Q methodology has the potential to provide valuable, more subjective data to program administrators compared to traditional Likert scale surveys. Results from Q studies can allow faculty of ATEPs to gain greater insight about students’ views of these programs and, in turn, enable these faculty to improve the clinical education aspect of their programs. Specifically, it may assist faculty in making decisions regarding preceptor training, clinical site decisions, student placement and curriculum development. Conclusion(s). Q methodology can be used as an assessment tool for ATEP program administrators to evaluate the clinical education component of ATEPs. Key Words. Q methodology, curriculum assessment, clinical education, student evaluation