Reviewer's report

Title: Computer Supported Collaborative Learning in clerkship: An exploratory study of task-focussed discussion activity on a self-selected clinical problem

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Reviewer: Sören Huwendiek

Reviewer's report:

Koops et al. describe an exploratory study investigating whether computer supported discussion activity is correlated with revision of critical appraisal papers on self-selected clinical problems.

Overall, this is a nice paper with the interesting topic of using computer supported collaborative learning for revision of critical appraisal papers on self-selected clinical problems. It is impressive that this project worked out so well with students as there own CSCL session moderators…

However, I have some suggestions for improvement, which I envision as compulsory before a decision on publication can be made:

General comments:

While there have been made statistics on the correlation between high discussion activity and revision of papers I would find it very interesting if also some of the following aspects could be addressed or more addressed:

E.g. I ask myself what to do with the outcome of that study? What lies in the hand of the educator to do with the results? What made this intervention so effective? Might there be other reasons for revising besides more active discussion? Might there be personal aspects e.g. some students are more eager to revise than other students and as they are themselves moderators of the CSCL they might influence the CSCL in a way that allows them to revise their paper…? What influence on revision has the quality of the original CAT paper? I think it could be a bit more emphasized that the students were CAT experienced and so the method was very effective, seen in so many paper revisions.

It would be interesting whether there are any data available on the perception of the overall intervention? Whether there are any data on how students experienced the use of a CSCL for such a task? How did students perceive the instruction on how to moderate such CSCL sessions…? Was the moderation competence of the students correlated with the revision of papers?

Some concrete comments:

Title: should be more focussed on the aim of the study, e.g. at the moment “Computer supported collaborative learning in a clerkship: relation of discussion activity and revision of critical appraisal papers”

Abstract:
Introduction: should be more streamlined: revise the sentences “a more intense discussion...”. “Moreover... “

Results section: critical appraisal topics should be named the same as in the tables and should be divided in “xy” and “xy” separately to make this more clear...

Conclusion: The conclusion could also address again the research question e.g. “Revision of CAT papers appears to be related to ...”

Conclusion:
See comment on the conclusion of the abstract

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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'