Author’s response to reviews

Title: Analysis of strategies to attract and retain rural health workers in Cambodia, China and Vietnam and context influencing their outcomes

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear editor,

Thank you very much for the further comments from the reviewers. We appreciated the valuable comments and have revised the paper accordingly. Below are the point-by-point responses to each comment. All new changes are highlighted in red in the manuscript.

Best regards,

Xiaoyun Liu

1. Reviewer #3: Many thanks for the opportunity to re-review your article. The article is much strengthened and easier to read, interpret as an international reader.

However, I have a few other comments to further simplify and clarify ambiguous terms. This will require relatively minor changes and consideration. I hope you are encouraged to pursue the changes as the article would be a valuable contribution to its field.

RESPONSE: Thank you very much for the valuable comments to further improve the paper.
2. Perhaps the title could be simplified to: "Analysis of strategies to attract and retain rural health workers in Cambodia, China and Vietnam and context influencing their outcomes". This would capture what it is about without any excess of words. It is simpler for the international reader to know what the article is about.

RESPONSE: The title has been changed as suggested.

3. P2 line 6 Abstract - Background - Suggest simplify the aim again to this: This study aims to "describe the strategies supporting rural health worker attraction and retention in Cambodia, China and Vietnam and explore the context influencing their outcomes."

This would be clearer for the reader than how it is currently written and I think better captures the thrust of the paper.

RESPONSE: The study objectives are changed as suggested.

4. P2 line 16 Abstract - Methods - I suggest change the text to: "This paper is a policy analysis based on key informant interviews with stakeholders about a rural province of Cambodia, China and Vietnam, coupled with a broad review of the literature to understand the context for human resource strategies in each country". Please check this sort of wording flows through to the methods section of the main paper.

It was not based in three countries, just one rural province in each country. Please make this clear throughout the article.

RESPONSE: The study methods are changed as suggested.

5. Take our "we" from the whole article and re-phrase. The first person is not required.

RESPONSE: We have checked whole manuscript and taken out the use of “we” in the main text.
6. P2 line 27 Abstract - Results take out "context-specific interventions, including". This word "context-specific" is confusing and not required. As suggested in the revised aim above it may be best to say you are describing the interventions and the context influencing their outcomes.

Does socio-economic development determine the "design" or the "scope" and "number" of interventions? The three things are different though related concepts and it is best to be very specific for the reader to interpret this better. Perhaps use term like "socio-economic development related to the range of interventions and their scope".

RESPONSE: This has been changed to “the range and scope of interventions”.

7. P2 line 27 Abstract Results - perhaps discuss China and Vietnam together, then Cambodia to help the reader digest the information.

RESPONSE: The presentation of results is by different context factors, not by countries. These factors appeared in different countries. It may be difficult to understand if we first present China and Vietnam together, then Cambodia.

8. P2 line 50 Clarify "led to brain drain of health workers at rural primary health facilities, impeded implementation and determined effectiveness of financial incentive”. When presenting these results, there is a need to be suggestive only, as this study is not using objective data to test things, it is exploring themes and opinions. The sentence is also not clear to the international reader. Please clarify the text for the meaning to be really obvious for the reader.

RESPONSE: We have replaced the term “brain drain” with “attract more health workers from rural primary health facilities.”

9. P2 line 55 Abstract - Conclusion

"should be integrated into overall health system reform." Change to "need to be considered within overall health system reform" 

RESPONSE: Changed as suggested.
10. P4 line 6 Main article - Background -

P4 line 52 "interventions to strengthen the rural workforce need to be tailored…to individual countries and the broader context can influence their implementation and outcomes" (note you raise socio-economic, but in the article you talk about health system context too, so I suggest not bringing up one over the other here) "Cambodia fell below the critical shortage threshold" the rate per 1000 is lower than the health workers per 1000 population presented in previous sentence. This is confusing. Keep sentences about each country together, as currently it jumps around too much.

RESPONSE: we have re-written this part to make it more logical.

11. Make sure the aim is consistent with that stated in the abstract. The aim is stated twice - please correct this.

RESPONSE: we have updated the aim to be consistent with that stated in the abstract, also deleted the repeated statement.

12. Main article Methods -

P5 line 43 The study is a policy narrative "built around key informant interviews with stakeholders about a rural province of Cambodia, China and Vietnam".

RESPONSE: Added as suggested.

13. P5 line 56 "the provinces are recommended by our country" take out "our". They "were commended through known collaborations of the authorship team …"

RESPONSE: Changed as suggested.
14. P6 line 5 "wiliness" to collaborate. This is a typo.

RESPONSE: this typo is corrected.

15. P6 line 6 Key informants - what was the purposive sampling used - that is, how did you sample them?

RESPONSE: The interviewees were recommended and recruited through the existing local collaborations. They main criteria was that they need to represent the four types of key stakeholders. This is now added to the text.

16. P6 line 16 You suggest the sampling allowed deep exploration, but I suggest instead that it is "broad" for the purpose of informing policy.

RESPONSE: Changed as suggested.

17. P6 line 20 Instead of "field data collection" call this In depth interviews"

RESPONSE: Changed as suggested.

18. P6 line 25 Delete "factors" from "context factors".

RESPONSE: Deleted as suggested.

19. Results subheading 2, I suggest renaming this "Context influencing strategies and their outcomes"

RESPONSE: The subheading is changed as suggested.
20. P18 line 50 Main article Limitations - this was qualitative and could only discuss opinions of stakeholders and written material rather than actually testing outcomes. A limited number of stakeholders was interviewed relative to exploring this topic in rural provinces of three countries, but it still provides some useful insights. More in-depth case studies would be needed to explore particular human resource questions relative to context.

RESPONSE: Thank you for the re-writing of the limitation. We have updated this part.

21. Overall comments

Overall, the article is much strengthened by your latest response to review. I suggest to make some of these additional changes as you see fit and then check the flow of the overall article again in relation to the exact aim, just to ensure it flows well for the reader, and concepts are very clear, and concise.

RESPONSE: Thank you again for the detailed and useful comments.