Reviewer's report

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

Version: 0 Date: 22 Feb 2018

Reviewer: Gordon Shen

Reviewer's report:

This study aims to explore the effects of "contexts" - socio-economic and health system features - on rural health workforce interventions in Cambodia, China, and Vietnam. The following are major and minor comments I have upon reviewing the manuscript:

Major comments:

- Case selection: The rural provinces chosen in each country raises two questions about within and between case selection. First, how are they representative of all rural provinces in each country. For example, is Bac Giang a developed or developing region in Vietnam, as per line 50 pf p.9? Second, how are they comparable to one another?

- Sampling: The 28 interviewee sample from the three country cases is based on the principle of "information saturation" (p.6, line 43). I reviewed the O'Reilly & Parker (2012) paper you cited, or reference #15, which questions researchers' acceptance of the concept of saturation in qualitative research. While I agree with their argument that the aim of qualitative inquiries is not to acquire a fixed number of participants, but to gather sufficient depth of information as a way of fully describing the phenomenon being studied, I don't think you've achieved the latter aim based on my comments on your results. On an equally important note, if you review the Glaser & Strauss (1976) book they cite, it's referred to as "theoretical saturation" and not "information saturation".

- Analytical approach: It is not clear to me whether your analytical approach is inductive, deductive, or abductive. I was under the impression that it's inductive until the latter of the paragraph following the sentence: "Key interventions...", which suggests a deductive approach to data analysis. Put another way, if your approach is an inductive one, then I would suggest further interrogating your data because no clear themes cutting across all the three country cases or, more specifically, provinces are stated. If your approach is a deductive one, where you are slotting the data into a framework, then I would suggest expanding Table 3 to include the interaction of the six contextual factors by the three key interventions (in Table 2). You did not refer to any theory to suggest that you are taking an abductive approach. Regardless of approach, the two tables are problematic. Table 2 is missing a column for regulation, one of the four key interventions from the WHO (2010)
report. In Table 3, with the exception of two cells, I do not see unifying comments in the cells under the Description and Implications columns. For example, you talk about dual practice in Cambodia and Vietnam, but shift the discussion in p.16 to private hospitals for China. The comparison should be flushed out for all three countries, whereby you talk about dual practice in China and private hospitals in Cambodia and Vietnam as well, else it would seem as if you're comparing apples and oranges and you're cherry picking from the data collected.

- Results: The presentation of your results suggest that you have not thoroughly interrogated your data. For instance, the cluster of codes under each theme is not clear, per my comment on the inductive approach. Second, the number of times a code is mentioned to support a given theme is not mentioned. Lastly, a quote from one country is presented in each section, but not comparable or conflicting quote(s) from the other two countries.

Minor comments:

- Background section, p.4, line 9: There is no SDG solely devoted to UHC. UHC is a target of SDG 3.

- Study design subsection, p. 5, line 50: "Existing collaborations was used as the other selection criteria for location". Existing collaborations among whom? Also, I think you meant "criterion", not "criteria".

- Data collection subsection, p. 6, line 20: Take out duplicated "in".

- Data collection subsection, p. 6, line 38: Take out the period before "Local".

- Cambodia sub-sub-section, p. 10, line 18: "Interviewees" not "Interviews".

- Cambodia sub-sub-section, p. 10, line 18: "...and a high..." not "...and high...".

- Contextual factors...subsection, p. 10, line 43: "table" should be capitalized.

- Conclusions and recommendations, p. 20, line 18: Do you mean landscape analysis and not systematic context analysis?

- Conclusions and recommendations, p. 20, line 27: "in" should not be capitalized.
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Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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