Reviewer’s report


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Reviewer: Shawna Smith

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This paper is a scoping review of the engagement of knowledge users and stakeholders in the knowledge synthesis process. Generally, it is a well designed and well written paper that contributes to the literature on how knowledge stakeholders become engaged with knowledge creation but some revisions would improve further:

1. "Engagement" is a broad term (as this article in fact describes) so I would appreciate provision of a working definition for purposes of this paper. This is particularly important for the eligibility criteria described on p. 9, line 142 of "papers that described any engagement strategy." I recognize the reference to Keown et al’s framework on p. 12 (as well as the full protocol paper), but inclusion of a short description of how this was operationalized earlier in the paper would be appreciated.

2. I was struck by use of the phrase "optimal methods" (p. 6, line 89). For one, any kind of optimization requires a description of the dimensions to be optimized, but more importantly this paper cannot speak to anything optimal—rather it can only describe how, when and through what means knowledge users are involved. I would recommend rewording.

3. The study design excludes scoping reviews that do not "mention" at least one type of knowledge user, but nowhere in the paper did I find discussion of how many papers actively engaged knowledge users and how many "mention" knowledge users but were not able to engage them in the process. I.e., did any of the scoping reviews describe failed attempts to engage knowledge users or were all the reports successful in some level of engagement?

a. Relatedly, if in fact all scoping reviews included in the study did engage knowledge users, findings for RQ4 should include a caveat that the barriers reported are within the context of studies that were successful in engaging knowledge users.

4. At times, the number of studies included is confusing. The total number of studies is 84 + 7 = 91, but most tables refer only to 84 (or to the 74 application articles). Please include a statement as to how the companion reports relate to the 84 unique documents (e.g., they are excluded from analysis due to inherent duplication of information).

5. I found it interesting that although the search spanned 20 years, all included documents spanned only the last 10. Does this say something meaningful about the extent to which this
engagement process has changed in recent history, or rather is it possible that different terminology was used prior to 2005/6?

a. Relatedly, although I realize all included documents were quite recent, I was curious as to whether there were any over-time trends (especially with respect to the number of stages at which knowledge users were engaged or the stage at which knowledge users were engaged)?

6. I was also struck by the very limited number of articles that discussed outcomes of engagement. This seems an obvious next step moving forward, so would appreciate a bit more discussion as to what this might look like moving forward, or what steps further scoping reviews related to knowledge synthesis might take to examine outcomes relate to engagement of knowledge users.

7. With respect to limitations, connecting these limitations back more clearly to the findings of your work would be appreciated. For example, limiting to the past 20 years doesn't seem to be problematic given that all reviews included came from the past 10 years—unless, of course, the methodology used was time-sensitive, as noted above. However, inclusion of only English language reviews likely limits this review's ability to speak to RQ1 contexts related to HICs vs. LMICs. Similarly, the conflation of knowledge users and stakeholders seems to be key to understanding what questions or issues this paper can speak to, so reminding the reader again what the difference is and why a more precise distinction might be important would be appreciated.

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