Reviewer’s report

Title: Systematic mapping of checklists for assessing transferability

Version: 0 Date: 03 Jul 2017

Reviewer: Bianca Albers

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for submitting an interesting article that raises a number of pertinent questions related to knowledge translation. My high-level feedback listed below invites you to reconsider the structure of the text and rethink the emphasis and weight put on particular sections.

1. I suggest to think about the ways in which you have laid out the background section. You spend considerable time on making two points in the beginning: (1) That a transparent approach for assessing the transferability of review findings is needed; and (2) that the TRANSFER will be a tool in this. For the study presented in this article, these points can be made much quicker and the level of detail you provide is not needed.

2. Defining the aim of the study on the other hand (beginning with line 133) gets too little attention. It remains unclear to me what the exact research question is you wish to answer through the mapping exercise and with that the precise purpose of the study (i.e. Why is a summary of the criteria included in existing checklists and tools of interest to the wider KT community?). I am not saying that you do not have this information in the article - rather that it is not explicitly emphasised and clearly organised. Among others, you first in line 343 - 345 present an important aspect of the study aim - all this information need to be collated and put more up front in the article.

3. Furthermore, readers who are not familiar with how a checklist like the ones you were interested in looks like / is conceptualised will struggle getting a clear picture of what they are. It would therefore be worth providing some insight into checklists through one or two examples. This may also be done as part of the 'Previous Research’ Overview - a section that is underdeveloped. At a minimum, you should provide a brief summary of the overarching conclusion(s) derived from these reviews.

4. This also applies to the terminology you apply. You highlight the terms of interest - applicability, generalisability, external validity, transportability, indirectness, relevance - as both different and overlapping but do currently not help the reader to get a basic understanding of their potential meanings, commonalities and the differences between them. This limits the options for a critical discussion of the findings: All included
checklists are treated equally, but is that fair given that some of them may not have a targeted focus on transferability?

5. Furthermore, in relation to your use of terminology: In your results section (line 208-210) you mention 'there appeared to be no relationship between the use of terms and the intended end user'. It is unclear how you get to this conclusion, and whether this was based on systematic data extraction and comparison of definitions provided through the included checklists. If this is the case, this should be given more attention - that way, your article will be helpful in creating greater clarity around the transferability concept. However, note that insights like these should be moved to the discussion section.

6. Closely related to point 5, I am missing a clearer presentation of your definition of 'transferability', which you seem to present in lines 143-145. A couple of interrelated thoughts: 'Transferability' can not be an assessment of a potential difference - it should be described as a characteristic that can be assessed but is not an assessment in itself. You seem to tend to describe it as the degree to which review findings can be directly applied in the context for which a systematic review was developed. If this is the case, then it should be made more explicit. Related hereto I would also recommend to explain in greater detail what a direct and immediate applicability of findings would mean and also unfold the characteristics of a context for a systematic review (what is that?).

7. For the characteristics of included studies, I am missing an overview table of all included studies summarising the names of the checklists, their developers, and the information provided in lines 212-221. This table should be expanded with information about the country in which the checklist was developed in order to indicate whether there are any cultural trends in the material.

8. The brief summary of your analysis method remains slightly unclear to me. How exactly did you treat each publication included in the study? This needs to be described more systematically. The same is the case for the six broad categories defined in line 245 - these need to be defined clearly so it is transparent what aspects can be included in them as part of your analysis. E.g. 'Population - this category describes checklist items aiming at understanding whether ......' - something like this is needed.

9. I am surprised by the rather brief presentation of findings and only get a very superficial idea of the checklist categories and their breadth (or opposite hereof). Do checklists choose the same approach in inquiring about intervention characteristics? Are there any trends in the material? It appears to me that a stronger analysis is needed across all categories.
10. In elaborating on results further (per point 9), you may also be able to create a stronger connection between the findings and your discussion. Currently, these two sections seem to be rather separate such that findings are rarely used in the discussion. And part of the discussion is not anchored in the data analysis (e.g. the terminology discussion in lines 313-322). It is also surprising that you accept the six broad categories as the categories that should guide the TRANSFER - without discussing whether any of these may need to be revised / any gaps exist in the light of other research and experience. In other words: The discussion appears underdeveloped in some of its aspects (e.g. should 'intervention' and 'implementation' really be in the same category, given the considerable barriers to implementation that exist in different contexts? And the still very limited information about implementation in systematic reviews? - just to provide you with one example of a question that is worth discussing.

11. One of your limitations appears to question your entire article: The one mentioned from line 381: You discuss the potential differences between terms and highlight that you may have included checklists that assess aspects irrelevant to the concepts of transferability. This emphasises even more that the terminology discussion should be prioritised differently in this article and be provided more attention.

Taken together, this leads me to recommend major revisions before this article can be published. I hope these comments are helpful in revising the article. I am happy to provide further comments at a later stage.

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