Reviewer's report

Title: Establishing confidence in the output of qualitative research synthesis: the ConQual approach

Version: 2
Date: 12 May 2014

Reviewer: Megan Morris

Reviewer's report:

The authors have made significant changes to the manuscript that improve upon the article. I believe that the expansion on the methods used to develop ConQual significantly improve the credibility of the development of the tool. I do have a few remaining questions, specifically about CerQual versus ConQual. Finally, the authors need to conduct a thorough review of the grammar throughout the article. Below I have listed multiple errors but am sure I missed some errors.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. I appreciate the inclusion of the discussion of CerQual in the context of ConQual. I believe this is an important addition. I do believe the authors need to expand on the differences between CerQual and ConQual and when ConQual should be used instead of CerQual. I understand that the authors are using ConQual specifically with the meta-aggregate method. I am still unclear of why a tool focused on meta-aggregate synthesis is needed. An obvious next question is why different tools are needed for each of the methods of qualitative synthesis. It seems as though one evaluation method for all qualitative synthesis would be most efficient. Finally, I would have to agree with reviewer #2 that these names are quite similar and it was confusing to read at times.

2. I would agree with reviewer #2 that the research column seems redundant. The explanation on page 14 did not really address this question. Perhaps an example of what else could be written in the research type column would be helpful.

Minor Essential Revisions

3. Overall, I would recommend the authors re-read the manuscript and pay close attention to the grammar. Below are some grammar edits, but I am assuming I missed some errors. I did not correct any comma omission or placements. These were extensive throughout the entire paper. Additionally, I would recommend considering modifying the manuscript to be in active voice, rather than passive voice. Finally, the authors should pay close attention to verb agreement.

a. Page 4 - “Evidence-based medicine has been defined as ‘the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients, with the systematic review of evidence viewed as the
pillar on which evidence based healthcare rests.”

i. The second “evidence based healthcare” needs a hyphen.

b. Page 4 - “However, qualitative systematic reviews also have an important role in evidence based-healthcare to inform healthcare professionals regarding issues that are not conducive to quantitative research methods.”

i. The hyphen in “evidence based-healthcare” is incorrect.

c. Page 4 - “Evidence-based organisations such as the Cochrane Collaboration and the Joanna Briggs Institute, both established in the 1990s, were established to develop methodologies and guidance on the process of systematic reviews.”

i. The sentence is awkward because the word “established” appeared twice in the same sentence.

d. Page 5 - “There are now exists a number of methodologies to synthesize findings from qualitative research in order to inform practitioners and policy makers.”

i. Change to: “A number of methodologies now exist to…” The word “are” is inappropriate.

e. Page 5 - “It was the view of this development group that regardless of the type of evidence being synthesized (whether of effectiveness, qualitative research, economic, diagnostic etc.) the process of systematic review as a research method in and of itself should be the same across evidence types.”

i. The terms in the parentheses do not make sense as the authors mixed nouns and adjectives.

ii. Also, the last part of the sentence is awkward. Consider changing to: “This development group decided that regardless of the type of evidence being synthesized, systematic reviews should be conducted similarly across evidence types.”

f. Page 5 - “These well-established steps in the systematic review process are then tailored to the evidence type being addressed within the review.”

i. Change “these” to “the” as the authors did not discuss the steps.

g. Page 6 – “This can be seen in contrast with other approaches (such as meta-ethnography) which aim to develop explanatory theory or models.”

i. Theory needs to be changed to “theories”

h. Page 6 - “More recently there has been an international endorsement from many organisations conducting reviews to follow the guidance of the GRADE (Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation) working group.” – Page 6

i. This is an awkward sentence. Consider revising to: “Multiple international organizations that conduct reviews endorse the recommendations from the GRADE (Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation) working group.”

i. Page 6 – “The GRADE working group have developed a process to establish
confidence in the synthesised results of quantitative research through considering issues related to study design, risk of bias, publication bias, inconsistency, indirectness, imprecision of evidence, effect sizes, dose-response relationships, and confounders of findings.”

i. Change “have” to “has” or delete the word

j. Page 7 – “These ‘Summary of Findings’ tables have been shown to improve understanding and accessibility of the results of systematic reviews.”

i. Change to “Findings”

k. Page 7 - “The GRADE approach has been widely adopted by international organisations in the conduct of quantitative systematic reviews.”

i. This is an awkward sentence. Consider revising to: International organizations have widely adopted the GRADE approach when conducting quantitative systematic reviews.

l. Page 8 – The authors switch between using the term “Summary of Findings’ table” and “summary of findings table”. Please use one description.

m. Page 8 - “Many of these experts are well-versed in qualitative research synthesis and particularly the meta-aggregative approach, and were thus seen as the ideal audience to provide feedback and advice on the methodological development of the tool.”

i. Verb tense disagreement

n. Page 9 - “Following this, it was ratified at an all of Institute board meeting.”

i. I recommend eliminating the words “all of”.

o. Page 9 - “Following this process, the group now believe the methodology requires publishing to receive further feedback from the international audience.”

i. Change “believe” to “believes”

p. Page 10 – “The way the group view ‘confidence’ is similar (but not exact) to Guba and Lincoln’s ‘truth value’ of the findings of a particular inquiry.”

i. Change “view” to “viewed”

q. Page 10 – The authors used the word “conformability” throughout the manuscript but in the cover letter they report that this should be confirmability. It is unclear which they are referring to. I would assume confirmability.

r. Page 12 – Again there is confusion about the term “conformability” and whether it needs to be changed to “confirmability”.

s. Page 12 – “Although various definitions exist for what a finding is in qualitative research, in meta-aggregation, findings are defined as a verbatim extract of the author’s analytic interpretation accompanied by either a participant voice, fieldwork observations or other data.”

i. Eliminate the word “either” as “either” is used when there are only two options.

t. Page 12 – “The credibility of the finding can be established by assessing the congruency between the author’s interpretation and the supporting data.”
i. Change to “authors’” since often articles have more than one author. Additionally, consider changing “finding” to findings

u. Page 13 – “It was agreed the Summary of Findings table would incorporate the key findings of the review along with the ConQual score.”

i. Change to “agreed that the…”

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

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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