Reviewer's report

Title: Boolean versus Ranked Querying for Biomedical Systematic Reviews

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Reviewer: Nancy Wilczynski

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Manuscript Review - BioMed Central

Title: Boolean versus Ranked Querying for Biomedical Systematic Reviews

The purpose of the study was to explore the effectiveness of using ranked retrieval compared with Boolean querying for the purpose of constructing a systematic review – an important question.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Although the question is important and the results are interesting the manuscript is difficult to read due to its length; too many details in some areas and not enough in others. The researchers have done extensive work and the results should be published but in a more succinct fashion. The manuscript would be strengthened by following the suggestions below.

Sections 1 though 3 of the manuscript are far too long – this background information should be presented in a more succinct fashion. The reader has to wade through far too much detail in the end losing the key messages. Findings of the study are presented in Section 1 which should be presented in the results and discussion sections of the manuscript. Some of the references are dated (e.g., Dickersin et al, 1994 – Problems with Reported Search Strategies) - are these data still relevant? Searching has evolved since 1994 particularly with the addition of Clinical Queries (i.e., methodologic search filters) in Pubmed and Ovid Limits. In the Problems with Reported Search Strategies section of the manuscript the authors indicate “this problem is partly due to the fact that the different resources have different implementations for parsing, indexing, and search documents.” The problem is also likely due to the less than 35% overlap in the journals indexed in Medline and Embase.

Some of the sections of the manuscript seem to be outside of the scope of the research question, for example, the extent of detail provided in Section 3.

Sections 4 and 5 of the manuscript are difficult to follow because of too much detail, too many acronyms, figures not explicitly described (e.g., Figure 1 – not clear on how this representation relates to the Boolean search strategy presented), and table data being difficult to interpret.

The methodology described was difficult to follow and it was not clear what methodology was used to arrive at the data presented in the tables.
A rewrite of the manuscript focusing on the research question and relevant background information, methods, and results would be worthwhile. As indicated earlier the research question is important and the results of this study should be published but in a more succinct, focused manner.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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.