Author’s response to reviews

Title: A methodological systematic review of meta-ethnography conduct to articulate the complex analytical phases

Authors:

Emma France (emma.france@stir.ac.uk)
Isabelle Uny (isabelle.uny@stir.ac.uk)
Nicola Ring (n.ring@napier.ac.uk)
Ruth Turley (TurleyRL@cardiff.ac.uk)
Margaret Maxwell (margaret.maxwell@stir.ac.uk)
Edward Duncan (edward.duncan@stir.ac.uk)
Ruth Jepson (ruth.jepson@ed.ac.uk)
Rachel Roberts (Rachel.Roberts@rpharms.com)
Jane Noyes (jane.noyes@bangor.ac.uk)

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Anne Menard

We would like to thank the reviewers for their thorough, helpful and positive reviews. We have addressed all the editor’s comments and reviewers 1’s suggested revisions. Below we have described how we have responded to the issues they raised. Reviewer 2 did not require any changes. We have also taken the opportunity to amend any minor errors and to update the references, where necessary.

Editor Comments:

1. Currently, Table 1 is not in the format of a table, it is a list. Please include this information in the main text and remove the Table. Please ensure that the citations are amended as well.

DONE – page 11-12
2. Please change the Findings heading to Results.

DONE – page 17

3. The individual contributions of ALL authors to the manuscript should be specified in the Authors’ Contributions section. Guidance and criteria for authorship can be found here:

http://www.biomedcentral.com/submissions/editorial-policies#authorship

Currently, Isabelle Uny and Rachel J Roberts appear to be missing from the contributions.

DONE – page 52

4. Currently, Figure 1 is not in a figure format. Please consider uploading this as a Supplementary Material file, and adding the citation to the Additional File list, and a citation in the text.

DONE – this is now additional file 1.

5. At this stage, please upload your manuscript as a single, final, clean version that does not contain any tracked changes, comments, highlights, strikethroughs or text in different colours. All relevant tables/figures/additional files should also be clean versions. Figures (and additional files) should remain uploaded as separate files.

DONE.

Reviewer 1:

Peggy A Shannon-Baker (Reviewer 1):

Below are some points related to the findings presented that may help to further strengthen the manuscript.

1. Key findings:

Phase 4: Analyze studies that contain rich, conceptual data and limit the inclusion of 'thin' data/accounts - though this will then necessitate a description of how the reviewers distinguished thick from thin
The issue of drawing from rich data should also be addressed more directly in the discussion section of the article. This finding in particular seems connected to the authors' discussion of the trend in health sciences meta-ethnographies of aiming for quantity (perhaps over quality, i.e. richness). Coming from education myself, the later discussion of the disciplinary differences between education versus health/social care meta-ethnographies is particularly interesting. This could be where a more direct conversation on the richness finding could come in if not earlier in the discussion section.

Our response: on page 46 we have added this text: ‘and could result in an aggregative synthesis.’

Also, we have added a paragraph to the discussion on page 45 on the topic of thick versus thin data for meta-ethnographic synthesis:

‘A key consideration in meta-ethnography conduct is which studies to include. The nature of the primary study data available to synthesise is an important factor. Incorporating predominantly superficial or ‘thin’ descriptive data in a meta-ethnography is potentially problematic: further interpreting data which lack depth and detail is difficult. We define conceptual data as explanatory, i.e. they explain a phenomenon. Rich descriptive data are those which provide sufficient detail that they can be further interpreted to develop conceptual insights. Rather than including ever-increasing volumes of studies based on topic relevance alone, selecting studies containing data suitable for a meta-ethnography is potentially more conducive to producing an interpretive synthesis.’

2. Consider issues of efficiency when drawing comparisons (e.g. through tables, QDAS) for Phase 4.

Our response: This is not only relevant for phase 4 so we have chosen to add a sentence to the discussion on page 46:

‘Reviewers choosing methods for phases 4 to 6 should consider their potential impact on not only the efficiency of conduct, but also the outputs of a meta-ethnography.’

3. Phase 5: Organizing the studies by concepts could influence the interpretation of subsequent studies and the 'overall interpretation' (p. 25); comparing 'concepts account by account' could be useful with large data sets, but this approach does not follow Noblit and Hare—both findings addressed in the insights on reciprocal translation (p. 27)

Our response: We assumed the reviewer wanted us to include reference to these issues as key findings in the discussion, so we have added to the discussion on page 46:

‘The order in which studies are synthesised could also influence the overall interpretation [10, 19, 22, 35, 50, 61], this too requires empirical investigation.’
Comparing 'concepts account by account' versus grouping concepts is covered in paragraph 1 of page 46 of the discussion:

‘The process of translation we, and others [1], believe is what distinguishes meta-ethnography from other qualitative evidence synthesis methodologies, therefore we propose it should be done using the theoretical principles laid out by Noblit and Hare [9]. Less labour-intensive methods of translation, such as grouping concepts without an account by account comparison (e.g. used by Toye et al [19]), diverge more from Noblit and Hare’s original methodology but are likely to be popular with reviewers…’

4. There were few refutational translation examples—no ‘insights’ section, though the last paragraph in this section seems to indicate the insights (especially the last sentence).

Our response: We have labelled the last paragraph of the refutational translation section as ‘insights on refutational translation’

Minor issues:

5. try to limit the use of compound sentences (joining 2+ sentences into one sentence).

6. There were a number of typographical errors in the text, citing the page number with the reference number was formatted in at least five different ways (cf. pages 5-7).

Our response: We have made some amendments and corrections throughout and made page number citations consistent.

Reviewer 2

Katy Sutcliffe, PhD (Reviewer 2): The authors have done some thoughtful work to refine the focus of the paper and to further distil the findings following comments from reviewers. This is a really valuable article and I highly recommend publication.

Our response: Thank you for your positive review.

Yours sincerely,

Emma France on behalf of all authors