Practical Strategies in Conducting a Qualitative Meta-Synthesis

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Abstract. Although still new in many parts of the world, qualitative research is growing exponentially. More and more countries are experiencing a growing interest in qualitative research. More and more universities are promoting the inclusion of qualitative research in the coursework, faculty research production and dissemination, as well as theses and dissertations. Research funding organizations that used to be strongly based on quantitative research have begun promoting alternative research methods. More and more scholarly conferences and seminars are opening up for qualitative research papers and presentations. People who used to struggle with quantitative research are finally finding their voice and discovering their formerly-unexplored skills. As a result, there is a growing wealth of qualitative research. Unfortunately, synthesizing qualitative research is still an uncommon practice. It is not yet common to find many meta-syntheses in many fields in general. There is more need to systematically synthesize the qualitative research studies that have recently been produced. One of the ways to do so is to conduct a meta-synthesis, known also as meta-narrative. Although this qualitative research design is not necessarily new, it is still not frequently used to help synthesize existing qualitative research studies. This is because either most qualitative researchers do not know how to use it, since they are still fairly new to the field, or because it is a challenging undertaking. Unlike meta-analysis, its counterpart, meta-synthesis still needs to be more clearly and more practically introduced to qualitative researchers in many parts of the world. This presentation paper defines meta-synthesis, provides different orientations of meta-synthesis, as well as a step-by-step guide in conducting a meta-synthesis. This presentation of this ongoing work is meant to generate more interest and discussion on this less-used and yet much needed qualitative research design. The discussion generated here will be helpful in improving the practice of meta-synthesis in general. With this knowledge, more qualitative research may be systematically synthesized to help orient new directions of inconclusive research. Expertise in meta-synthesis can also help generate more informed practical guidelines needed by different policymakers and practitioners in different fields. Such a contribution would take the relevance of qualitative research one step higher. Although the presentation uses the illustration from the field of education, it is based on principles and steps that are useful in many different fields where qualitative research is used.

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