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# The Evidence Claims in The Systematic Reviews of Qualitative Studies in Education: A Framework for Reading and Understanding

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## Abstract

This study, conducted as part of my PhD, examines a common issue in qualitative systematic reviews in educational research. Reviews often make strong claims, but they don't clearly explain how they moved from the original study findings to broader conclusions or recommendations. To make these inferential moves visible and assessable, the study develops and applies an integrated framework that combines Toulmin's model of argumentation with Gough's fitness-for-purpose perspective. Toulmin clarifies the internal logic of claims (data/grounds, warrants, backing, qualifiers, rebuttals), while Gough situates those components in relation to aims, audiences, contexts of application, and conditions of use. Together, they support a dual reading of evidence claims: internal coherence and external appropriateness. A purposive sample of qualitative systematic reviews in education was analysed with this framework, reconstructing each review's argumentative chain and synthesising cross-case patterns in how claims are framed, warranted, qualified, and limited. The study contributes in three ways. Methodologically, it offers a practical tool for critical appraisal that moves beyond checklist compliance by foregrounding reasoning and intended use. Theoretically, it advances understanding of the epistemological and argumentative dimensions of qualitative synthesis. Practically, it equips researchers, practitioners, and policymakers with a structured way to judge the credibility, scope, and applicability of review-level claims. The core premise is that systematic reviews are not neutral containers of knowledge but argumentative practices that shape what counts as evidence. By making warrants, qualifiers, and rebuttals explicit—and aligning claims with their purposes and audiences—qualitative synthesis can better serve scholarly inquiry and support democratic decision-making in education.

**Keywords:** Educational Research, Qualitative Studies, Systematic Reviews, Transparency, Knowledge Claims