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Student teachers' beliefs and feelings towards educational research

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The fact that student teachers commonly perceive educational research and theory to be far removed from practice is well documented in initial teacher education (ITE) research. Teacher educators emphasise the importance of multiple knowledge sources, including educational research, to support teacher agency and professionalism (Winch et al., 2015). However, student teachers often prioritise experiential learning over research knowledge, commonly attributed to perceptions of limited research relevance in school placements (Korthagen, 2017). Person-centred factors for this disconnect have received less attention. Drawing on my own studies (Peiser et al., 2025; Peiser, 2025) in this blog post, I make the case for different person-centred factors as important influences on student responses to educational research, namely student teachers' epistemic beliefs (EBs) and epistemic emotions (EEs).

EBs concern beliefs about the nature of knowledge, including whether it is viewed as stable or evolving, simple or complex, discrete or interconnected. They can also encompass beliefs about effort and involvement in active knowledge construction (Schommer, 1993). EEs, or academic emotions, include those of curiosity, enjoyment, confusion, boredom and frustration, and arise when engaging with new knowledge or cognitive tasks. These emotions are shaped by learners' perceptions of relevance, value, novelty, complexity and control relating to the task or text in hand (Muis et al., 2018). Joram et al. (2020) argue that the value teachers attribute to research knowledge is closely bound up with EBs. EBs are related to EEs, as emotions emerge from appraisals of how well new information aligns with existing beliefs about knowledge.

My own research involved a cross-sectional survey and semi-structured interviews. It explored:

- differences in EBs and EEs associated with different demographics and subgroups
- how EBs or other factors elicited EEs
- the combined impact of EBs and EEs.

Findings in Peiser et al. (2025) indicated significant effects of gender, age and ITE pathway. Male participants demonstrated receptive EBs and EEs but expressed a preference for quick learning. Mature students were less likely to hold EBs and EEs associated with negative views of research. Undergraduate student teachers perceived lower utility in educational research than postgraduates, potentially susceptible to negative emotions due to perceived irrelevance. Participants on university-led ITE routes exhibited significantly more receptive EBs and EEs towards research than those on school-led pathways.

Four subgroups were also identified, represented in table 1.

Table 1: Four subgroups of student teachers’ beliefs and feelings towards educational research

Subgroup	Details	Percentage (%) of survey population
‘like research but want quick fix’	Positive about research but not so keen to devote time to read	12.8
‘medium all’	Neither strongly positive nor negative towards research	42
‘medium to low EBs and low EEs’	The least favourable beliefs and emotions	35.4
‘all high’	Most receptive EBs and EEs	9.8

Interview data highlighted the influence of prior academic and professional experiences. Participants with scientific backgrounds favoured research producing clear, quantifiable evidence:

I think most scientific people do like research backed up to things so that you're not just doing something because you think it works. Like you actually want some proof behind it that it does work.

Those with humanities backgrounds reported more positive orientations towards different research types:

It was a really interesting voyage into a completely sort of fresh area.

Student teachers with prior professional experience in education were more likely to integrate research findings with existing schema, experiencing positive EEs.

Contextual influences, particularly school-based mentors' attitudes towards research, also played a role. However, these had a stronger impact on student teachers who viewed knowledge as stable or were less inclined to critically engage with research. When mentors contextualised research for classroom practice, student teachers experienced greater certainty regarding its value:

The practical setting for discussing that reading, I think made it feel much more real.

Further examples are documented in Peiser (2025).

[‘Scaffolding engagement with diverse research texts may also help mitigate negative epistemic emotions linked to complexity and novelty, supporting the development of confidence to decode and apply research to practice.’](#)

The findings from the combined datasets suggest that, alongside continued efforts to bridge theory and practice through ITE course design, teacher educators should therefore attend to learning about the variability in EBs and EEs across student teacher demographics and profiles. This may support targeted approaches to developing research engagement. Scaffolding

engagement with diverse research texts may also help mitigate negative EEs linked to complexity and novelty, supporting the development of confidence to decode and apply research to practice.

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