

Q DATA INSIGHT

OCTOBER 2021

PERCEPTIONS OF TIME AND RESEARCH USE



When thinking about research, I ask “How does this relate to my extremely busy teaching load? I have so little time to do extra [work] with my teaching load being so full-on. How will I have the time?”

Teacher, Government Secondary School, Victoria.

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

According to the Q Project’s recent Discussion Paper “[Using Research Well in Australian Schools](#)”, the process of using research well is a “time and effort-dependent task” (Rickinson et al., 2021, p. 6). Yet, it is recognised that teachers’ time is stretched with long hours, heavy workloads and excessive administrative requirements (Heffernan et al., 2019). As a result, there is a need to understand the time pressures faced by educators, if we are to help them find the time to use research well.

But how does a ‘lack of time’ influence educators’ research use in practice? What forms of research are most useful for educators who are time-poor? Drawing on data from two recent Monash Q Project surveys with 1,311 educators across Australia¹, this Data Insight aims to shed light on:

- (i) supports required to provide educators with time to engage with research;
- (ii) how the pressures of time affect educators’ research use in practice; and
- (iii) forms of research most useful given the time constraints faced by educators.

WHAT ARE THE FINDINGS?

1. **Lack of time** is a **significant barrier** for educators’ use of research in practice. Teachers in particular, perceive themselves as having less time than school leaders. However, when school leaders provide **time to engage with research** or put in place **formal or informal processes** to support research use in schools, educators’ perceptions about time are more positive.
2. When educators believe that they have a lack of time they not only use **research less often in practice**, but when sourcing research they are more likely to rely on **relational and convenience factors** instead of considering the contextual relevancy or credibility of the research.
3. Given time constraints, educators value research that is **practical, easy to take in, easy to apply, and credible**. For educators who valued all of these characteristics, they were most likely to prefer formats such as professional development, practical guides and conferences.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

For Teachers

These findings highlight the forms of research that educators consider compact, credible and convenient. In light of a teacher’s own time constraints, accessing these forms of research may encourage them to increase and improve their use of research in practice.

For School Leaders

School leaders can support the quality use of research if they understand: (i) how the availability of time is a crucial enabler for research use; and (ii) how they can leverage collaborative and relational factors that are valued by educators who feel constrained by a lack of time.

For System Leaders and Researchers

When system leaders and researchers understand the forms of research that educators value, they are better equipped to publish their research in time-efficient formats that are practical, easy to take in and easy to apply in practice.

¹ - Figure 1 draws on a sample of 492 educators who participated in our survey about the ‘quality use of research’. Figure 2 and Table 1 draw on a sample of 819 educators who participated in our survey about ‘research use and sharing practices’. The demographics of this combined sample can be found on the last page.

Q DATA INSIGHT

OCTOBER 2021

PERCEPTIONS OF TIME AND RESEARCH USE

Q PROJECT KEY FINDINGS

What are educators' perceptions of time in relation to using research?

Our findings suggest that a perceived lack of time is a notable barrier to educators' use of research in practice. Overall, 76.2% of educators indicated that they 'do not have adequate time to access and review research'. Teachers expressed significantly² greater concern about this (84.3% did not believe that they had enough time) compared with leaders (61.0%). 75.9% of educators also indicated finding it 'difficult to keep up with new and emerging research'. Again, teachers expressed significantly² greater concern (79.7%) about keeping up with new research, compared with leaders (69.2%).

There were a number of school-based supports that appeared to have positive impacts on educators' perceptions of time. In schools where these supports were implemented, educators were significantly² more likely to report 'having adequate time to access and review research'. For example:

- 33.6% of educators indicated having adequate time in schools where '**time was made available to use different information sources**', compared with 11.8% of educators in schools where this time was not made available.
- 29.8% of educators reported having adequate time in schools where '**formal processes**' were in place to support their use of different sources, compared with 13.0% of educators in schools without these formal processes.
- 27.9% of educators reported having adequate time in schools where '**informal processes**' were in place to support their use of different sources, compared with 14.6% of educators in schools without these informal processes.

How does this translate into practice?

Educators who indicated a 'lack of time' were significantly² less likely to use research-related sources in practice. 69.2% of educators who 'had adequate time' reported using university research on a regular basis, compared with only 34.9% who felt they did not have adequate time. Similarly, while 56.4% of educators who 'had adequate time' regularly engaged with university guidance, this fell to 29.6% for those who believed that they lacked adequate time.

Educators' perceptions of time also influenced how and why they sourced research (see Figure 1). When educators believed that they lacked adequate time, they were significantly² more likely to use research based on relational and convenience factors such as 'word of mouth recommendations' and 'ease of access'. Yet, when educators 'had adequate time, they were more influenced to use particular research based on its contextual relevancy (e.g., 'alignment with school plans') and credibility (e.g., 'credibility of the source' and 'academic backing' etc.).

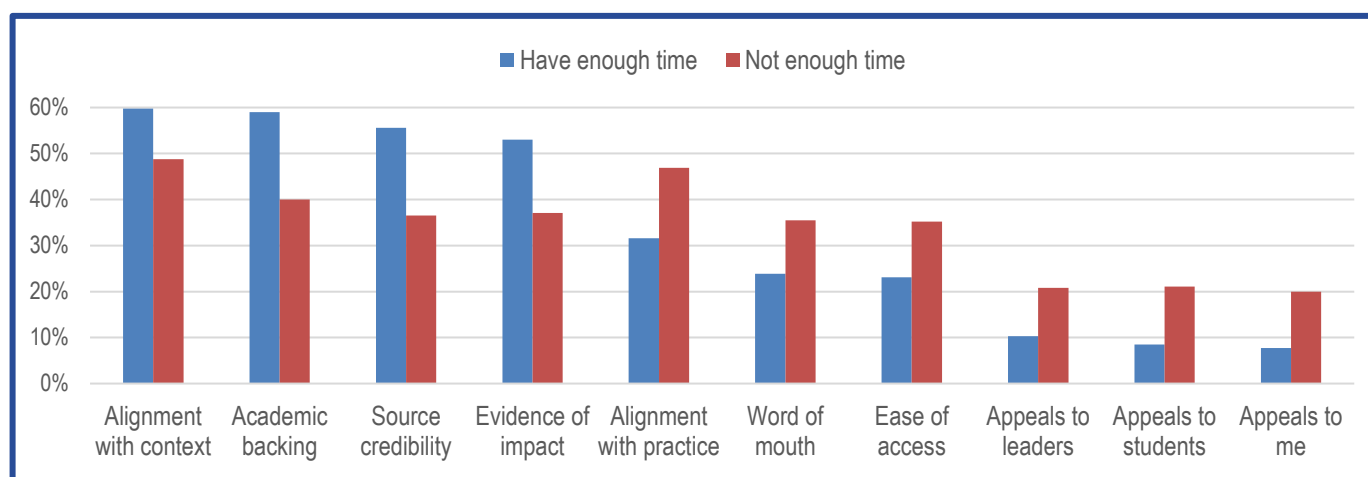


Figure 1: How do educators' perceptions of time influence how they source research?

² - Using Fisher's exact tests, there were statistically significant ($p < .05$) differences.

Q DATA INSIGHT

OCTOBER 2021

PERCEPTIONS OF TIME AND RESEARCH USE

When using research, we need “sufficient time to engage in the process and [go beyond] doing a surface level job to ‘tick the box’”. Middle Leader, Government Secondary School, Victoria.

What formats of research are viewed as useful and time-efficient?

Educators indicated that for research to be time-efficient and useful in practice, it had to be:

- i) **Practical** (65.0%);
- ii) **Easy to take in quickly** (63.7%);
- iii) **Easy to apply to practice or issues at hand** (63.2%);
- iv) **High quality or credible** (62.6%)

When asked about the specific formats that they were most likely to find useful, educators indicated strong preferences for formats which **made clear links to practice** (e.g., ‘professional development’) and/or were **discussed in-person** (e.g., ‘in-person talks’; see *Figure 2*). Importantly, educators also favoured accessing **short forms of original research** (e.g., ‘short reports’ or ‘articles’) compared with excessively summarised (e.g., ‘one-page summaries’) or extended forms (e.g., ‘books’).

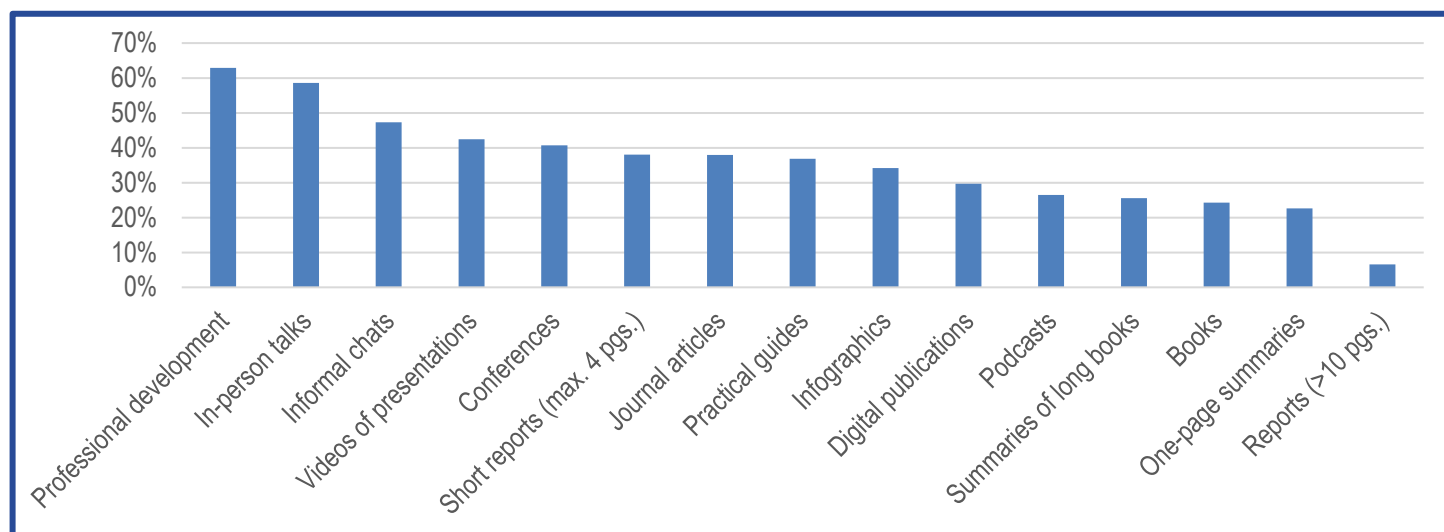


Figure 2: What forms of research are most useful to educators?

To further understand these response patterns, we investigated the relationships between educators’ reasons for viewing research as useful and their preferences for specific formats. We were interested to understand what research formats were considered useful based on educators’ preferences for research that was ‘practical’, ‘easy to take in’, ‘easy to apply’ and/or ‘credible’.

Research “should be made available in a compact form. I don’t have the time to read extended reports”.
Teacher, Government Secondary School, Queensland.

Educators who valued research that was ‘easy to apply’ expressed statistically² stronger preferences for all forms of research except for audio books, news articles and long reports (>10 pages). In other words, **most formats were seen as more useful by educators who valued research that was ‘easy to apply’**.

Q DATA INSIGHT

OCTOBER 2021

PERCEPTIONS OF TIME AND RESEARCH USE

However, different response patterns were identified for educators who valued practicality, credibility and/or whether research was easy to take in. Journal articles were not seen as more useful by educators who favoured 'easy to take in' sources, while blogs or informal chats were not seen as more useful for educators who valued credibility (see *Table 1*).

Importantly, **professional development, practical guides and conferences** were the only formats that were consistently viewed as significantly more useful by educators who valued research that was easy to apply, practical, consumable and credible. These formats were widely considered to be **compact, credible and convenient**. This suggests that they have great potential for impact in contexts where educators face different time constraints and hold varied beliefs about what makes research useful.

Table 1: Why do educators prefer certain forms of research?

Format	Easy to apply	Practical	Easy to take in	Credible
Professional development	✓	✓	✓	✓
Practical guides	✓	✓	✓	✓
Conferences	✓	✓	✓	✓
Short reports	✓	x	✓	✓
Articles	✓	✓	x	✓
Informal chats	✓	✓	✓	x
Blogs	✓	✓	✓	x

Note: ✓ indicates that there was a statistically significant relationship between the selection of a specific format and the reasons for which research was considered useful ($p < .05$).

IMPLICATIONS

These findings highlight that time is an important factor which influences **how** educators engage with research and **what forms** of research are considered most useful. Consequently, ensuring that educators are provided with dedicated time to engage with **compact, credible and convenient research** (such as professional development) is an important enabler for the quality use of research in Australian schools. In conclusion, we highlight several considerations:

- For teachers: *What forms of research would be most useful in expanding my professional knowledge given my own time constraints? In situations where I lack sufficient time, how can use my networks to access compact, credible and convenient research?*
- For leaders: *How can I implement informal processes and provide my staff with dedicated time to support their quality use of research? How can research be incorporated into the current offerings of professional development at my school?*
- For others: *How can we ensure that research is produced and shared in accessible forms that are compact and convenient, but also credible?*

ABOUT Q

These considerations form part of the broader conversation regarding research use that Q Project is seeking to foster. We invite all educators to join us at:



[Q Project Website](#)



[@MonashQProject](#)



MonashQProject@monash.edu

Access the Monash Q Project Quality Use of Research Evidence **Framework Report** and **Discussion Paper**.

Source: This Data Insight draws on two surveys conducted with a total of 1,311 educators from across VIC (32.3%), NSW (28.5%), QLD (22.1%), SA (7.2%), WA (6.6%), TAS (2.1%), ACT (0.8%), and NT (0.5%). The samples include: 125 Q participating school respondents, 367 respondents recruited through The Online Research Unit, and 819 respondents recruited through Where To Research. The total sample comprised 19.7% senior and middle leaders, 66.4% teachers, and 14% other staff. Represented schools included primary, secondary, combined and special schools from government, independent and Catholic education sectors.