

Preparing occupational therapy students for research-active careers: A longitudinal, mixed-method study

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Introduction: Occupational therapy (OT) education has seen calls for enhancing the development of research capacity to facilitate evidence-based practice and assist in securing the profession's future. This study engaged a cohort of undergraduate OT students, investigating their research experiences and perceptions and factors related to preparation for research-active careers.

Objectives: To understand OT students' perceptions around research and the factors related to preparation for research active OT careers

Methods: After gaining ethical approval, this longitudinal, mixed-method study repeatedly surveyed final year OT students from one university during the process of implementing their final year research projects. The Research Spider, Q-methodology and non-standardised surveys investigated research engagement, knowledge and competencies, and emotional variables. Data was analysed using quantitative and qualitative methods.

Results: Data collected at three time points yielded 33, 21 and 10 survey responses and 18, 12 and 6 Q-sort responses respectively. Results profile research attitudes and perceptions at the three time points, with findings demonstrating shifting profiles related to experiences of professional research engagement across time.

Conclusion: The need to ensure that OTs are research-competent and confident is increasingly important across all areas of practice. Findings have the potential to enhance evidence-based practice as a key component of OT's professional standards with clear implications for OT educational provision, potentially facilitating enhanced understanding of educational factors that contribute to longer-term research attitudes. This has the potential for informing OT study programmes, raising graduate confidence, and enhancing professional identity and profile through improved skills for ensuring efficacy of interventions.