



# An overview of survey-based research carried out with Australian preservice teachers (1995–2015)



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- 304 surveys of Australian preservice teachers Australia published 1995–2015 are reviewed.
- Surveys were mostly small-scale, with few studies comparing programs.
- Surveys mostly addressed attitudes, perceptions and beliefs rather than skills or knowledge.
- Generally reporting of surveys was poor.
- Teacher educators in Australia need to be more open to comparative studies.

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## ABSTRACT

Teacher preparation in Australia is, as in other countries, a frequent topic of discussion and inquiries. This paper provides an overview of survey-based research, published in refereed journals from 1995 to 2015 where Australian preservice teachers were the respondents. The findings of the study were that commonly the surveys were small-scale with respondents most likely to be elementary school preservice teachers. Most surveys addressed attitudes, perceptions or beliefs and less frequently skills and knowledge. The reporting of many surveys was poor. There was a dearth of surveys recruiting from more than two universities, and hence a lack of meaningful comparisons of courses that could inform policy direction.

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## 1. Introduction

The preparation of teachers remains a contentious area in Australia, subject to frequent media publicity and to regular reports and enquiries that have resulted in little action (Dyson, 2005; Louden, 2008; Rowan, Mayer, Kline, Kostogriz, & Walker-Gibbs, 2015; Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, 2014). The various reports, including the most recent, have frequently been critical of teacher education and noted the need for more research on the effectiveness of teacher education programs (Dyson, 2005; Louden, 2008; Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, 2014).

There are around 48 institutions providing teacher education in Australia (Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, 2014), and programs vary in level and prepare teachers for a wide range of age groups and content areas. As Louden (2008) noted, this array of programs provides opportunities to compare and contrast the outcomes of different programs, different preservice teacher (PST) experiences and even to examine differences in teacher behavior and school student outcomes. Survey-based research is one methodology that might be used to take up these opportunities.

### 1.1. Survey-based research in teacher education

Survey-based research appears to be relatively popular in teacher education. Sleeter (2012) who analyzed all the articles published in 2012 in the four teacher education journals with the highest impact factors in that year found that over a third reported survey research, mostly gathered using questionnaires. Self-report questionnaires used in survey research allow for the efficient collection of data from relatively large samples with little cost and allow researchers to describe attributes of PSTs such as their attitudes, beliefs, self-perceptions, knowledge, perceptions of programs, units of study and activities, motivations and intentions. Pre and post surveys, longitudinal and cross-sectional surveys allow exploration of change in PST attributes over time and across samples (Creswell, 2008; McMillan, 2012).

Large-scale surveys comparing programs may provide useful information about the areas of strength in the programs offered by different providers (Louden, 2008). Others argue for the value to the field of small scale and qualitative surveys that report, for example, personal student experiences and their feelings of preparedness (Rowan et al., 2015). Although these small-scale studies may be seen to have value, it has also been noted that they reflect a

field driven by researchers' personal interests to produce a collection of isolated studies rather than a coordinated research agenda to investigate large-scale issues (Murray, Nuttall, & Mitchell, 2008).

## 2. Contribution of this review

Given the recognized value and potential value of survey-based research it may be helpful to examine what has been published in regard to Australian PSTs using survey-based methods. Some research users may be interested in small-scale, single university studies while others, particularly policy makers may be more interested in larger, across university studies that have more generality or offer comparison data on differing programs. It would also be of interest to identify both the presence of related studies in a particular area, as well as aspects of PST preparation that remain under-researched. Consolidated information about the general topics investigated in survey-based research, the nature of the respondents and the survey instruments and used would be of use to researchers. The general quality of the research as indirectly judged by the journals in which reports appear and by citation rates, the transparency and completeness of the reporting, and hence the credence that can be placed on the reports and the validity of the findings would be helpful not only to academics, but also to policy makers. Although analyses of published research articles are not uncommon in education (see for example, Avalos, 2011; Rock et al., 2016; Sleeter, 2014) there seems to have limited work of this nature in Australia. Tisher (1990) provided a general overview of teacher education research and Murray et al. (2008) more recently surveyed articles on initial teacher education in peer-reviewed journals in Australia from 1995 to 2004. Murray et al. located 215 articles overall, and 114 used questionnaires or other types of surveys and 21 studies used a standardized instrument.

### 2.1. Aims and research questions

The aim of the study reported here was to investigate the nature of survey-based research using written or electronic response formats carried out with Australian pre-service teachers between 1995 and 2015 and published in refereed journals. Specifically, the following research questions relating to the content and quality of the reports were addressed:

Where, when and by whom is survey-based research published? This included information about journals where the articles were published, date of publication and authors and their

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