

20 - 22 March 2026

Lisbon , Portugal

Exploring Final-Year Pre-service Teachers' Experiences with Cooperative Learning in an Introduction to Research Module

Rozanne Meyers

The IIE's Emeris

Abstract

Introduction to research modules in undergraduate teacher education programmes is often experienced as abstract, complex and anxiety-provoking, especially by pre-service teachers encountering formal research for the first time. In response to these challenges, cooperative learning is increasingly employed as a pedagogical approach to promote engagement, shared learning and peer support. Cooperative learning is widely advocated for in educational theory, but limited empirical research exists that examines how it is experienced by pre-service teachers in research-intensive coursework in South African higher education. Drawing on Social Interdependence Theory, the study examines the enabling and constraining dimensions of cooperative learning. This qualitative study explores how final-year pre-service teachers experience cooperative learning within the context of an introductory research module. Data was generated from a single open-ended questionnaire, consisting of six reflective questions, completed by sixteen final-year pre-service teachers. Responses were thematically analysed. The findings indicate that cooperative learning fostered a sense of connectedness, reduced anxiety and supported shared meaning-making. Challenges are also related to unequal participation and dominant group members. This article argues that cooperative learning enhances pre-service teachers' experiences of learning research, only when the design is deliberate and actively facilitated to support novice researchers.

Keywords: initial teacher education; novice researchers; pedagogical approaches; social interdependence theory, South African higher education.