

# Research Informed Teaching: Attitudes & Implementation

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## Introduction to Research-Informed Teaching (RIT)

The integration of scholarly findings into pedagogical practice, commonly termed **Research-Informed Teaching** (RIT), represents a critical paradigm shift in educational quality assurance and development, particularly within higher education sectors. This approach necessitates that educators move beyond reliance on traditional methods or personal instinct, instead grounding their instructional decisions, curriculum design, and assessment strategies in robust empirical evidence derived from educational research, cognitive psychology, and discipline-specific scholarship. Attitudes towards RIT are not monolithic; they are complex constructs shaped by individual beliefs, professional experiences, institutional context, and perceived utility. Understanding these attitudes is paramount because they serve as powerful mediating variables determining the actual uptake, fidelity, and sustainability of evidence-based practices in the classroom. A teacher who views research as inaccessible, irrelevant, or overly demanding is unlikely to invest the necessary cognitive load to translate complex findings into actionable teaching strategies, regardless of institutional mandates. Therefore, examining the psychological landscape surrounding RIT adoption--encompassing affective responses, cognitive evaluations, and behavioral intentions--is essential for promoting educational excellence and ensuring that teaching methodologies evolve dynamically in response to new knowledge.

RIT is often distinguished from other related concepts, such as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) or mere reflective practice, by its explicit requirement for the systematic application of external evidence. While SoTL involves generating new knowledge about teaching and learning, RIT focuses on consuming and implementing existing, validated knowledge. The attitudes held by faculty members regarding this process often reflect a tension between the perceived autonomy of the teaching professional and the external accountability imposed by evidence-based standards. Positive attitudes are typically characterized by a belief in the efficacy of research to improve student outcomes, a willingness to engage in continuous professional development, and a view of teaching as an intellectual endeavor requiring constant refinement. Conversely, negative attitudes often stem from skepticism about the generalizability of research findings, time constraints associated with synthesizing literature, or a preference for experiential knowledge accumulated over years in the classroom. Analyzing these prevailing attitudes requires a nuanced approach that considers both the perceived value of the research itself and the practical feasibility of its integration into demanding academic schedules; furthermore, the cultural context of the discipline often dictates how readily external evidence is embraced, with some fields inherently more inclined toward empirical validation than others.

## The Conceptual Framework of RIT Attitudes

Attitudes towards RIT can be effectively modeled using established social psychological frameworks, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that behavioral intentions

are predicted by three core components: behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs. Applied to RIT, the **behavioral beliefs** relate to the perceived outcomes of integrating research--for instance, believing that using evidence-based methods will demonstrably increase student engagement or improve examination scores. The strength and valence of these beliefs heavily influence the overall affective response to RIT. If the perceived benefits outweigh the perceived costs (e.g., effort, time, complexity), attitudes are likely to be favorable. Furthermore, the cognitive component involves the explicit evaluation of research quality and relevance; teachers must believe the research is methodologically sound and applicable to their specific disciplinary context and student population, rather than viewing it as abstract theory divorced from classroom reality. This cognitive assessment demands a level of research literacy that allows instructors to critically appraise methodologies, interpret statistical significance, and judge the ecological validity of findings before committing to implementation.

The **normative component** addresses the perceived social pressure surrounding RIT adoption. This involves understanding whether significant others--such as departmental chairs, senior colleagues, or professional bodies--expect the instructor to utilize research findings. If a strong departmental culture emphasizes evidence-based practice and rewards instructors who engage in RIT, the normative pressure contributes positively to attitude formation. Conversely, if the prevailing departmental norm views RIT as an optional or burdensome activity, even instructors with strong personal beliefs in its value may hesitate due to lack of social reinforcement or fear of deviating from established customs. This highlights the crucial interplay between individual psychology and the immediate professional environment, where the visibility and vocal support of departmental leadership can dramatically shift group attitudes from passive acceptance to active enthusiasm. The perceived expectations of students can also form a secondary normative influence, particularly if students articulate a preference for innovative, research-backed instructional methods.

Finally, the **control component**, or perceived behavioral control, relates directly to the instructor's self-efficacy regarding RIT implementation. This involves assessing the perceived ease or difficulty of the behavior, factoring in resources, skills, and time availability. An instructor may possess highly positive behavioral and normative beliefs, yet if they lack the training to interpret statistical analyses (a skill barrier) or are overwhelmed by high teaching loads (a resource barrier), their sense of control diminishes, leading to less favorable attitudes toward actual implementation. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of RIT attitudes must account for the cognitive burden of research synthesis, the technical skills required for application, and the structural supports necessary to make the practice sustainable within the institutional ecosystem. If an instructor perceives that the institution provides ample training, accessible resources, and sufficient time, their sense of control increases, resulting in a more resilient and positive attitude toward engaging in the challenging yet rewarding process of evidence-based pedagogical change.

## Factors Influencing Positive Attitudes

Several internal and external variables significantly contribute to the formation and maintenance of positive attitudes toward the integration of research into teaching. Internally, a teacher's existing level of **research literacy** is perhaps the most critical determinant. Faculty members who are active researchers themselves, or who possess strong methodological training, often exhibit greater confidence and lower perceived complexity when engaging with educational literature. They are better equipped to critically appraise studies, distinguish between reliable findings and preliminary data, and extrapolate implications for their specific teaching context. This confidence translates directly into a more favorable disposition toward RIT, viewing it not as an imposed requirement, but as a natural extension of their scholarly identity. Furthermore, a strong intrinsic motivation for pedagogical improvement, coupled with a growth mindset regarding teaching skills, predisposes individuals to embrace RIT as a valuable tool for professional mastery, seeing it as an opportunity for intellectual engagement rather than a bureaucratic hurdle.

Externally, the provision of targeted, high-quality professional development is indispensable. Workshops and training sessions must move beyond merely introducing the concept of RIT and focus instead on practical translation skills--how to bridge the gap between abstract research findings and concrete classroom actions. When training is contextualized, discipline-specific, and collaborative, instructors are more likely to view RIT as relevant and achievable. For example, a physics department workshop focusing on evidence-based methods for teaching complex problem-solving skills will be perceived as significantly more useful than a generic session on learning theories. Furthermore, formalized structures for collaborative inquiry, such as teaching fellowships or learning communities focused on evidence-based practice, provide essential peer support and reduce the isolation often associated with adopting new methodologies. These environments allow instructors to share successes, troubleshoot challenges, and collectively build a repertoire of effective, research-backed techniques, thereby reinforcing positive affective responses to the effort involved and establishing positive normative beliefs.

Crucially, positive attitudes are strongly correlated with demonstrable success and positive feedback loops. When faculty members implement a research-informed strategy (e.g., using retrieval practice techniques based on cognitive load theory) and subsequently observe measurable improvements in student learning outcomes or engagement, the utility of RIT is affirmed. This **empirical validation** acts as a powerful reinforcing mechanism, transforming the belief in RIT from a theoretical acceptance into a deep, practice-based conviction. Institutions must therefore facilitate methods for faculty to systematically collect and analyze data on the impact of their pedagogical innovations, ensuring that the benefits of RIT are visible, quantifiable, and personally experienced by the instructor, thus sustaining favorable attitudes over the long term. Effective institutional support includes providing easy-to-use assessment tools and consultation services that help faculty design small-scale action research projects to evaluate the efficacy of

their research-informed changes within their own classrooms.

## Barriers and Challenges to Adoption

Despite the recognized benefits of RIT, numerous systemic and individual barriers often impede its adoption and cultivate negative or resistant attitudes among faculty. The most frequently cited structural constraint is the severe limitation of **time and workload allocation**. Academic reward structures traditionally prioritize research productivity (discovery) over pedagogical excellence (application), leaving faculty with insufficient dedicated time to search, synthesize, and implement educational research findings. This perception that RIT is an additive burden, rather than an integrated component of their role, generates significant resistance and negative affective responses, characterized by feelings of stress and resentment toward administrative mandates promoting RIT. If the institutional environment fails to recognize and reward the significant cognitive effort required for effective research translation, attitudes will remain skeptical and implementation superficial, often leading to minimal compliance rather than genuine commitment.

A second major barrier relates to the accessibility and perceived relevance of educational research literature. Many instructors, particularly those outside education departments, find the language and methodology of pedagogical research dense, specialized, and difficult to interpret without extensive training. This **epistemological distance** fosters a belief that the research is irrelevant to their specific discipline or classroom context, leading to intellectual dismissal. Furthermore, the sheer volume of research can be overwhelming, making it difficult for time-poor faculty to determine which findings are robust, contextually appropriate, or easily scalable. The lack of reliable, curated resources that distill complex findings into clear, actionable guidelines further exacerbates this challenge, reinforcing a cynical attitude that the effort required to find useful information outweighs the potential pedagogical gain. Faculty often express frustration that research findings are presented in journals inaccessible to non-specialists, requiring significant translation effort that they feel unqualified or too busy to undertake.

Finally, psychological and cultural barriers play a significant role. Some experienced educators harbor a strong sense of **pedagogical autonomy**, viewing the external imposition of evidence-based standards as a threat to their professional judgment accumulated through years of practice. This resistance is often rooted in the belief that tacit, experiential knowledge is superior to codified, formal research knowledge, particularly when the research seems to contradict long-held personal beliefs about effective teaching. Furthermore, fear of failure or vulnerability associated with trying new, unfamiliar research-backed methods can be a powerful inhibitor. If the departmental culture lacks psychological safety--meaning instructors fear negative evaluation or criticism if a new method temporarily fails--they are likely to revert to established, comfortable practices, thereby maintaining resistant attitudes toward innovation. Overcoming these barriers requires not just resource allocation, but a fundamental cultural shift toward valuing teaching experimentation and

reflective practice, and recognizing that pedagogical innovation inherently involves a degree of risk and potential short-term setbacks.

## The Role of Institutional Culture

The prevailing institutional culture operates as a powerful macro-level determinant of faculty attitudes toward RIT, either fostering enthusiasm or perpetuating apathy. A supportive culture is characterized by explicit recognition, reward, and resource allocation aligned with the goals of evidence-based teaching. Institutions that genuinely value RIT integrate it into promotion and tenure criteria, ensuring that efforts spent on pedagogical innovation and research translation are weighed equally alongside traditional research outputs. When faculty perceive a misalignment between institutional rhetoric promoting RIT and actual reward structures, it breeds cynicism and reinforces the negative attitude that RIT is merely an administrative fad that can be safely ignored. Conversely, when RIT engagement is demonstrably linked to professional advancement, the incentive structure aligns behavioral intent with positive attitude formation, transforming RIT from an optional extra into a core professional competency required for career progression.

Moreover, institutional leadership plays a crucial role in modeling and championing RIT. When deans, department chairs, and senior faculty actively engage with educational research, discuss pedagogical findings in meetings, and provide resources for RIT implementation, they establish a clear **normative expectation** for all faculty members. This visible commitment helps to dismantle the perception that teaching is a private, isolated activity and instead frames it as a collaborative, evidence-driven scholarly endeavor. The creation of dedicated Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTLs) that are well-funded, staffed by pedagogical experts, and integrated into the academic life of the institution provides essential infrastructure, signaling a serious, long-term commitment to RIT and bolstering faculty confidence in the availability of support. These centers often serve as vital mediators, translating complex research into practical, context-specific advice and reducing the friction involved in the adoption process, thereby improving perceived behavioral control.

A mature institutional culture also cultivates a climate of intellectual curiosity and continuous improvement regarding teaching. This involves moving beyond mandatory, compliance-driven training and fostering voluntary, intrinsic engagement. Effective institutions promote RIT by providing flexible, discipline-specific opportunities for faculty to engage with research in ways that are personally meaningful and relevant to their current teaching challenges. This approach respects faculty autonomy while guiding them toward evidence-based solutions, thereby mitigating resistance. The culture must emphasize that RIT is not about adopting a rigid set of rules, but about developing critical pedagogical judgment informed by the best available evidence, thus framing RIT as an empowering professional tool rather than a restrictive administrative mandate. Furthermore, a culture of transparency regarding student outcomes and pedagogical effectiveness encourages faculty to seek out evidence-based practices as a means of addressing identifiable

performance gaps.

## Measuring and Assessing Attitudes

Accurately measuring faculty attitudes toward RIT is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of institutional interventions and identifying specific barriers that require targeted support. Measurement tools typically utilize psychometric scales designed to capture the multi-dimensional nature of attitudes, encompassing affective, cognitive, and conative (behavioral intention) components. Affective measures assess the emotional response--the degree to which faculty feel positive, enthusiastic, or anxious about engaging with research. Cognitive measures evaluate beliefs about the usefulness, relevance, and quality of educational research, often focusing on perceived gaps between theory and practice and the perceived methodological rigor of studies. Conative measures assess the likelihood and willingness of faculty to adopt specific research-informed practices in the near future, providing insight into the transition from belief to action and often utilizing scenarios to gauge intended behavior in challenging contexts.

Quantitative surveys employing Likert-type scales are the most common instruments, allowing for statistical analysis of attitude prevalence across departments, career stages, and disciplinary groups. Effective survey design requires careful operationalization of RIT concepts to ensure clarity and validity, distinguishing clearly between general support for pedagogical improvement and specific attitudes toward research utilization. Key areas of assessment often include: the perceived accessibility of relevant literature, self-efficacy regarding research interpretation, perceived institutional support, and the perceived impact of RIT on student outcomes. Longitudinal studies are particularly valuable, as they track changes in attitudes over time following major institutional policy changes or professional development initiatives, helping to determine which interventions successfully shift attitudes from skepticism to acceptance and which institutional strategies yield the most sustainable positive change.

While quantitative methods provide breadth, qualitative approaches--such as semi-structured interviews and focus groups--offer crucial depth, allowing researchers to uncover the nuanced reasoning behind specific attitudes. These methods are invaluable for identifying tacit cultural barriers, understanding the specific epistemological challenges faculty face in interpreting research, and capturing the emotional labor involved in pedagogical change. For instance, interviews can reveal that negative attitudes stem less from lack of belief in RIT and more from deep-seated anxieties about professional competence or lack of departmental support. Combining both quantitative and qualitative data (mixed methods) provides the richest understanding, allowing institutions to confirm statistical trends while simultaneously understanding the underlying psychological and contextual factors driving those attitudes. This comprehensive assessment approach ensures that interventions designed to improve attitudes are grounded in a deep understanding of faculty experiences and perspectives, leading to more tailored and effective

support mechanisms.

## Strategies for Cultivating Favorable Attitudes

To intentionally foster positive and sustainable attitudes toward RIT, institutions must adopt a multi-pronged strategy that addresses individual skills, cultural norms, and structural constraints simultaneously. The first critical strategy involves **reducing the cognitive load** associated with research engagement. Instead of expecting faculty to independently search vast databases, institutions should invest in dedicated staff (e.g., pedagogical consultants or research translators) who can curate, synthesize, and disseminate discipline-specific research briefs and actionable summaries. This provision of easily digestible, high-quality evidence reduces the perceived difficulty of RIT, thereby enhancing perceived behavioral control and improving attitudes toward engagement. Furthermore, utilizing technologies that seamlessly integrate relevant research findings into curriculum planning tools or learning management systems can minimize the time barrier, making evidence-based choices the path of least resistance.

Secondly, professional development must transition from mandatory, generic workshops to sustained, context-specific learning communities. These communities should be structured around specific teaching challenges identified by the faculty themselves, allowing them to collaboratively investigate research-based solutions and experiment with implementation in a low-stakes environment. Key elements of effective professional development include:

Modeling the implementation of specific research techniques by trusted, successful colleagues.

Providing time for peer observation and feedback grounded in evidence-based rubrics.

Facilitating reflective practice that links observed student outcomes directly back to research principles.

By framing RIT as a collaborative, problem-solving activity rather than an individual requirement, the normative environment shifts toward support and shared expertise, significantly boosting positive affective attitudes and transforming the professional learning experience from compliance-driven to intrinsically motivating.

Finally, administrative policies must align institutional rewards with RIT engagement. This requires systematically reviewing and revising promotion and tenure guidelines to explicitly recognize the scholarly effort involved in adopting and evaluating research-informed pedagogies, perhaps through the creation of a teaching portfolio category that emphasizes evidence utilization and assessment of impact. Furthermore, resource allocation must prioritize teaching release time, grants for pedagogical innovation, and internal awards that celebrate evidence-based teaching excellence. When faculty perceive that their commitment to RIT is genuinely valued and rewarded by the institution, their intrinsic motivation is reinforced, leading to deeply internalized, favorable attitudes toward the continuous integration of research into their fundamental role as educators.

This holistic approach ensures that positive attitudes are not fleeting responses to temporary mandates, but enduring components of the professional academic identity, crucial for long-term institutional improvement in teaching quality.

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