

IASRD

International Association for Social Research Dynamics

Research Training Needs Assessment Report 2026

Findings and Strategic Recommendations for the IASRD Research Skills
Development Programme

IASRD Technical Report No. 01/2026 | Version 1.0

Prepared by the IASRD Research & Development Unit
July 2026

International Association for Social Research Dynamics (IASRD)
UK Registered Charity No. 1217292 | www.iasrd.com

Publication Details

Series: IASRD Technical Reports | Report No. 01/2026 | Version 1.0

Published: July 2026, Reading, United Kingdom

DOI: 10.67265/iasrd.rsdg.2026.001

Publisher: International Association for Social Research Dynamics (IASRD), UK Registered Charity No. 1217292

How to cite this report:

International Association for Social Research Dynamics. (2026). *Research training needs assessment report 2026: Findings and strategic recommendations for the IASRD Research Skills Development Programme* (IASRD Technical Report No. 01/2026). <https://doi.org/10.67265/iasrd.rsdg.2026.001>

This report is published open access. It may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes with appropriate attribution.

Executive Summary

In June–July 2026, the International Association for Social Research Dynamics (IASRD) conducted a Research Training Needs Assessment to inform the design of its forthcoming Research Skills Development Programme. A cross-sectional online survey, administered via Google Forms, was completed by 56 respondents, predominantly students and early-career researchers based in Pakistan and the United Kingdom.

Although 34 of 56 respondents (61%) had received formal research methods training through a university, 31 of 56 (55%) rated their skills at or below beginner level, and the most frequently reported challenges were applied rather than theoretical: finding reliable sources and data analysis (each 16 of 55; 29%), literature review and publishing research (each 14 of 55; 25%), and using analysis software such as SPSS and NVivo (13 of 55; 24%).

Demand for structured, accessible training is strong. Qualitative Research Methods attracted the highest course interest (24 of 56; 43%), followed by Advanced Research Methods (34%), with AI-assisted research methods (30%) and Quantitative Research Methods (29%) close behind. Self-paced online courses were the preferred format (22 of 55; 40%), and 27 of 56 respondents (48%) can commit one to two hours per week. Certification emerged as the strongest motivational factor: 40 of 56 (71%) said a completion certificate would definitely increase their motivation, and a recognised certificate was the most frequently selected enrolment factor (49%). Access barriers are substantial: only 21% have institutional access to paid training platforms, while similar proportions are unaware of options (25%), mainly rely on free resources (25%), or find paid platforms too expensive (21%).

The survey also revealed institutional opportunity: 32 of 56 respondents (57%) had not previously heard of IASRD, yet 31 of 56 (55%) expressed definite interest in publishing in the Journal of Social Research Dynamics (JSRD); the proportion exceeds 90% when 'maybe' responses and existing JSRD authors are included.

This report recommends a phased, free, certificate-bearing Research Skills Development Programme of six modular self-paced courses, prioritising applied data analysis and software skills, incorporating AI-assisted research methods, and culminating in an academic writing and publishing pathway into JSRD. An implementation roadmap for August 2026 – December 2027 is presented in Section 9, with eight strategic recommendations in Section 8.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	i
Table of Contents	ii
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Objectives.....	1
3. Methodology	1
3.1 Survey Design.....	1
3.2 Instrument and Administration	2
3.3 Sampling and Recruitment.....	2
3.4 Sample.....	2
3.5 Data Analysis	2
3.6 Ethical Considerations.....	2
4. Respondent Profile	2
4.1 Current Role	2
4.2 Geographic Distribution.....	3
4.3 Educational Background	3
4.4 Subject Areas	4
5. Survey Findings	4
5.1 Current Research Skills.....	4
5.2 Prior Research Methods Training.....	4
5.3 Research Challenges	5
5.4 Training Needs and Course Interest	6
5.5 Learning Format, Time, and Motivation	6
5.6 Access and Barriers	8
5.7 IASRD Awareness and JSRD Publishing Interest.....	9
5.8 Subject Areas and Recruitment Channels	9
5.9 Open Feedback	10
6. Discussion.....	11
6.1 The Theory–Practice Gap.....	11
6.2 The Role of Certification in Motivation and Enrolment.....	11
6.3 Designing for Constrained Time and Access.....	12
6.4 AI Research Skills as an Emerging Need	12
6.5 From Training Community to Author Community.....	12
7. Key Insights	12
8. Strategic Recommendations	13
Recommendation 1: Launch a Structured Research Skills Development Programme	13
Recommendation 2: Issue Verifiable Completion Certificates for Every Course	13
Recommendation 3: Prioritise Applied Data Analysis and Software Training	13

Recommendation 4: Develop an AI-Assisted Research Methods Course Anchored in TRACE-AI	14
Recommendation 5: Build the Training-to-Authorship Pipeline into JSRD	14
Recommendation 6: Strengthen Outreach Through Institutional Partnerships and Referral	14
Recommendation 7: Adopt Mobile-Friendly, Low-Bandwidth Course Design Standards	14
Recommendation 8: Repeat the Needs Assessment Annually	15
9. Implementation Roadmap	15
10. Limitations	16
11. Conclusion.....	16
References.....	18
Appendix A. Survey Questionnaire	19
Section 1 — Consent & Data Protection.....	19
Section 2 — About You	19
Section 3 — Current Research Skills	19
Section 4 — Training Needs.....	19
Section 5 — Access & Barriers.....	19
Section 6 — IASRD Awareness.....	19
Section 7 — Your Research Area.....	20
Section 8 — Open Feedback.....	20
Appendix B. Representative Open-Text Responses.....	21
Q17 — Requested training topics.....	21
Q18 — General comments and suggestions	21

1. Introduction

The International Association for Social Research Dynamics (IASRD) is a UK registered charity (No. 1217292) dedicated to advancing social research capacity, open-access scholarly publishing, and evidence-informed practice. Through its peer-reviewed journal, the Journal of Social Research Dynamics (JSRD), its open-source research integrity platform TRACE-AI, and its emerging training portal, IASRD supports students, early-career researchers, and practitioners, particularly those in low- and middle-income settings where access to structured research training is limited.

Research capacity development is a strategic priority for IASRD in 2026. Global disparities in research capacity and investment remain pronounced, with researchers in many low- and middle-income countries continuing to face structural barriers to training and participation in science (UNESCO, 2021). International evidence consistently shows that building research capacity requires structured, needs-led interventions that develop skills and confidence close to practice (Cooke, 2005), and that capacity-strengthening efforts in low- and middle-income countries too often remain fragmented and inadequately matched to locally identified needs (Franzen et al., 2017). Good-practice frameworks therefore emphasise systematic needs assessment as the starting point for capacity-strengthening programmes (ESSENCE on Health Research, 2016). Anecdotal evidence from JSRD submissions and IASRD's editorial work has consistently pointed to recurring weaknesses in research design, data analysis, referencing, and publication readiness among prospective authors. However, prior to this study, IASRD had no systematic evidence base describing the training needs, learning preferences, and access barriers of its target community.

To address this gap, IASRD designed and administered the Research Training Needs Assessment 2026, an online survey exploring respondents' backgrounds, current research skills, perceived challenges, training preferences, and awareness of IASRD's services. The survey was conducted in June–July 2026 and received 56 complete responses.

This report presents the survey methodology, findings, and analysis, and translates the evidence into strategic recommendations and a phased implementation roadmap for the IASRD Research Skills Development Programme. It is intended for IASRD trustees and management, university partners, funding bodies, and the wider research community, and will be published on the IASRD website as part of the organisation's commitment to transparency and evidence-informed programme design.

2. Objectives

The Research Training Needs Assessment 2026 was designed to meet five objectives:

- Identify the research training needs of students, early-career researchers, and practitioners in IASRD's target community.
- Assess respondents' current research skills and prior exposure to formal research methods training.
- Explore barriers to accessing research training, including cost, awareness, and institutional access.
- Determine preferred learning formats, time availability, and motivational factors to inform course design.
- Gauge awareness of IASRD and interest in publishing in JSRD, to inform outreach and engagement strategy.

3. Methodology

3.1 Survey Design

A cross-sectional online survey design was adopted. The questionnaire comprised 18 questions organised into eight sections: (1) Consent and Data Protection; (2) About You; (3) Current Research Skills; (4) Training Needs; (5) Access and Barriers; (6) IASRD Awareness; (7) Your Research Area; and (8) Open Feedback. Question formats included single-choice, multiple-choice (select all that apply), and open-text items.

3.2 Instrument and Administration

The survey was built and administered using Google Forms. Informed consent was obtained from all participants at the outset: respondents were required to confirm that they had read and understood the participant information and agreed to take part before proceeding. All 56 respondents (100%) provided this confirmation. No personally identifying information is reported in this document.

3.3 Sampling and Recruitment

A convenience sampling approach was used. The survey was distributed through IASRD's website and social media channels, email, university and institutional networks, and personal referral. Recruitment channels are analysed in Section 5.8 (Figure 16).

3.4 Sample

A total of 56 responses were received. Two multiple-response items (Q6 and Q8) recorded 55 responses, and one multiple-response item (Q12) recorded 55 responses; percentages for those items are calculated on the relevant base and stated explicitly throughout.

3.5 Data Analysis

Responses were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) generated in Google Forms and verified in Microsoft Excel. For multiple-response items, percentages represent the proportion of respondents selecting each option and therefore sum to more than 100%. Open-text responses (Q17 and Q18) were reviewed and grouped thematically.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The consent statement outlined the purpose of the survey, the use of aggregated data for programme planning and public reporting, and respondents' right to withdraw before submission. Data were collected and stored in line with UK GDPR principles of data minimisation and purpose limitation.

4. Respondent Profile

4.1 Current Role

Respondents were predominantly students: 22 of 56 (39%) were undergraduate students and 10 of 56 (18%) were postgraduate students, meaning that students together accounted for over half the sample (57%). A further 8 respondents (14%) identified through other roles (including homemakers, administrators, and school teachers), 7 (13%) as academics or lecturers, 6 (11%) as early-career researchers, and 3 (5%) as non-academic professionals (Figure 1).

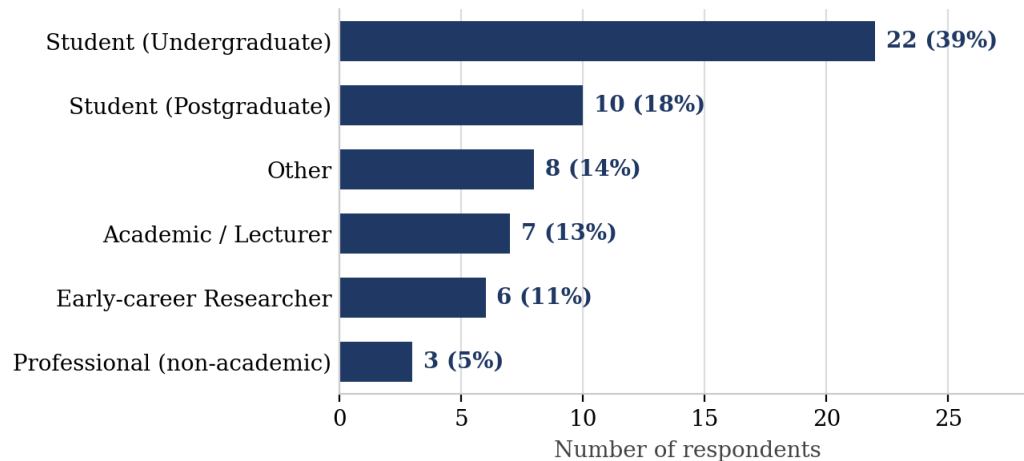
Figure 1. Current role of respondents (n = 56)

Figure 1. Current role of respondents (n = 56). Source: IASRD Research Training Needs Assessment Survey (Google Forms), June–July 2026.

4.2 Geographic Distribution

The sample was strongly concentrated in South Asia. Approximately 49 of 56 respondents (88%) were based in Pakistan (including responses recorded under city or abbreviated labels), 6 of 56 (11%) in the United Kingdom, and the remainder in Bangladesh (Figure 2). This distribution reflects IASRD's outreach and engagement network during the survey period. While it limits the generalisability of the findings (see Section 10), it also gives the assessment particular value: the results speak directly to the training needs of researchers and students working in resource-constrained contexts, where access to affordable research training, capacity-building opportunities, and scholarly publishing support is often limited; this is the community that IASRD's charitable objects are intended to serve.

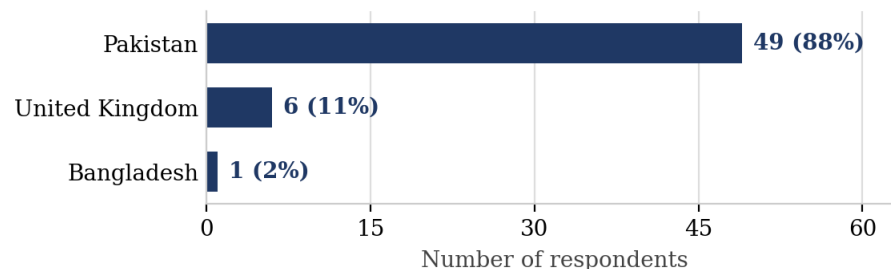
Figure 2. Country of residence (n = 56)

Figure 2. Country of residence (n = 56). Source: IASRD Research Training Needs Assessment Survey (Google Forms), June–July 2026.

4.3 Educational Background

The sample was well educated: 27 of 56 respondents (48%) held a postgraduate degree and 21 of 56 (38%) an undergraduate degree, while 6 (11%) reported secondary or high-school education, 1 (2%) held a doctoral degree, and 1 (2%) reported an equivalent professional teaching qualification (Figure 3).

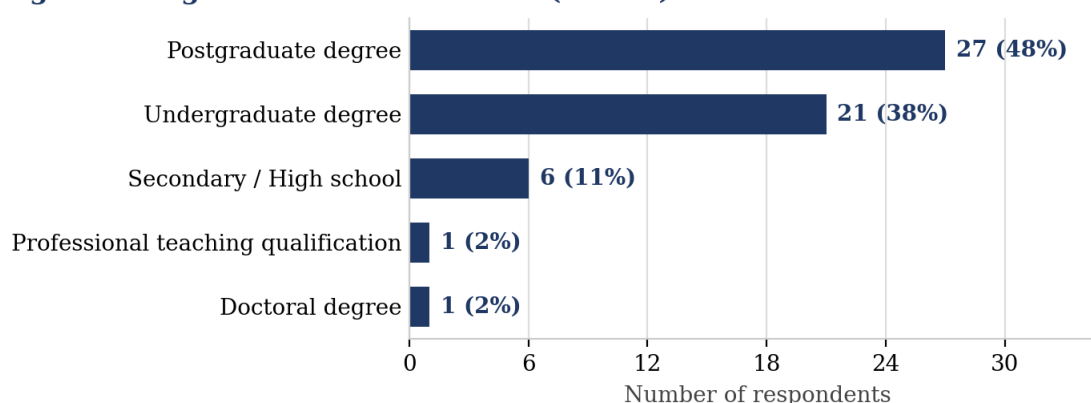
Figure 3. Highest level of education (n = 56)

Figure 3. Highest level of education (n = 56). Source: IASRD Research Training Needs Assessment Survey (Google Forms), June–July 2026.

4.4 Subject Areas

Respondents' research interests were concentrated in the Social Sciences (20 of 56; 36%) and Education (16 of 56; 29%), followed by Computer Science & AI (7 of 56; 13%) and Health & Medicine (4 of 56; 7%), with the remaining 9 respondents (16%) spanning Psychology, Business & Management, Humanities & Arts, Sociology, and Engineering & Technology (Figure 15, Section 5.8). This disciplinary spread aligns closely with JSRD's scope.

5. Survey Findings

This section presents the survey findings with accompanying figures. Each subsection reports the result, a short interpretation, and the key implication for programme design.

5.1 Current Research Skills

Self-rated research skill levels were low overall. The largest group, 20 of 56 respondents (36%), rated themselves as beginners, while a further 11 of 56 (20%) reported no research experience; together, more than half the sample (55%) sits at or below beginner level. Fifteen respondents (27%) rated themselves intermediate and 10 (18%) advanced (Figure 4).

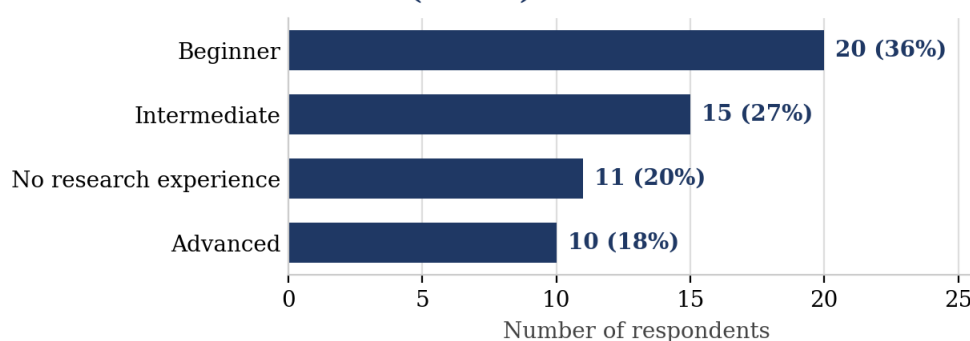
Figure 4. Self-rated research skills (n = 56)

Figure 4. Self-rated research skills (n = 56). Source: IASRD Research Training Needs Assessment Survey (Google Forms), June–July 2026.

Implication: there is a strong need for foundational, introductory-level research training, with progression pathways for the intermediate cohort.

5.2 Prior Research Methods Training

Thirty-four of 56 respondents (61%) had received formal research methods training through a university, with a small number reporting more than one training route. However, 13 of 56 (23%) reported no formal research training at all, 8 (14%) were self-taught, 3 (5%) had trained through online courses, and only 1 (2%) through a workplace (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Prior formal research methods training (n = 56)

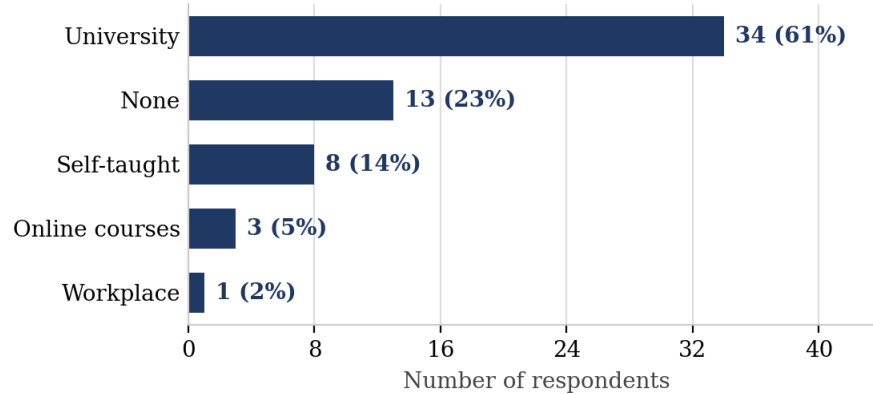


Figure 5. Prior formal research methods training (n = 56; multiple responses permitted). Source: IASRD Research Training Needs Assessment Survey (Google Forms), June–July 2026.

Implication: university exposure is common but has evidently not translated into applied confidence (see Section 5.1), a central finding developed further in the Discussion.

5.3 Research Challenges

Respondents were asked which challenges they encounter most frequently in their research (multiple responses permitted; n = 55). The most frequently reported research challenges were finding reliable sources and data analysis (each 16 of 55; 29%), followed by literature review and publishing research (each 14 of 55; 25%), and using analysis software such as SPSS and NVivo (13 of 55; 24%). Academic writing (18%) and understanding qualitative (16%) and quantitative (13%) methods also featured prominently (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Most frequently reported research challenges (n = 55)

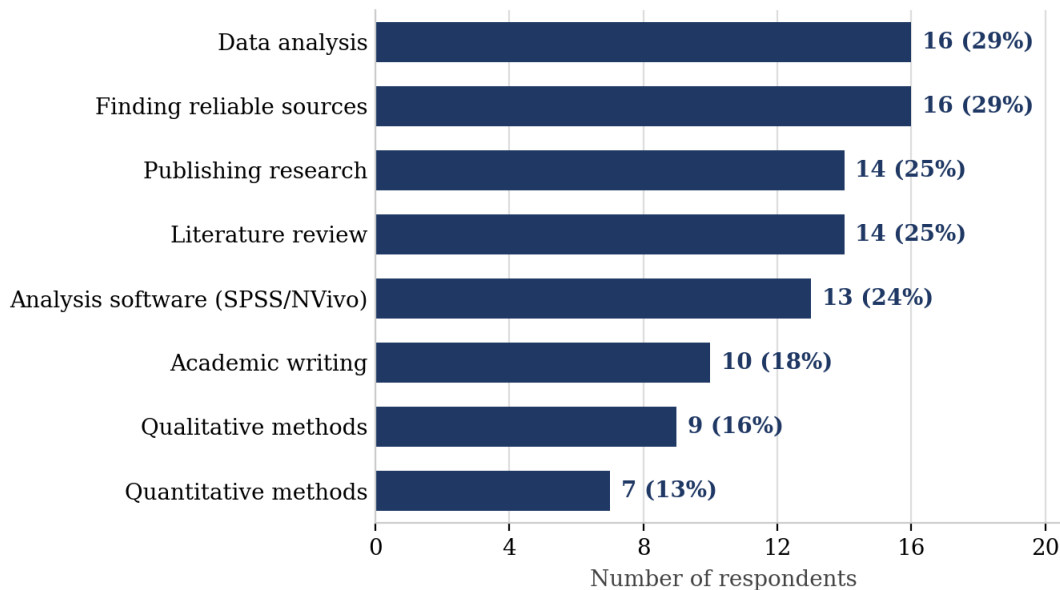


Figure 6. Most frequently reported research challenges (n = 55; multiple responses permitted). Source: IASRD Research Training Needs Assessment Survey (Google Forms), June–July 2026.

Implication: the leading challenges cluster around applied analytical competence (software, data analysis) and the research-to-publication pipeline (sources, literature review, publishing); the areas least served by theory-focused curricula.

5.4 Training Needs and Course Interest

Interest in IASRD's proposed free online courses was highest for Qualitative Research Methods (24 of 56; 43%), Advanced Research Methods (19 of 56; 34%), AI-assisted research methods (17 of 56; 30%), and Quantitative Research Methods (16 of 56; 29%). Academic Writing & Publishing was selected by 12 respondents (21%), SPSS for Beginners by 11 (20%), and NVivo for Qualitative Analysis by 8 (14%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Interest in free online courses (n = 56)

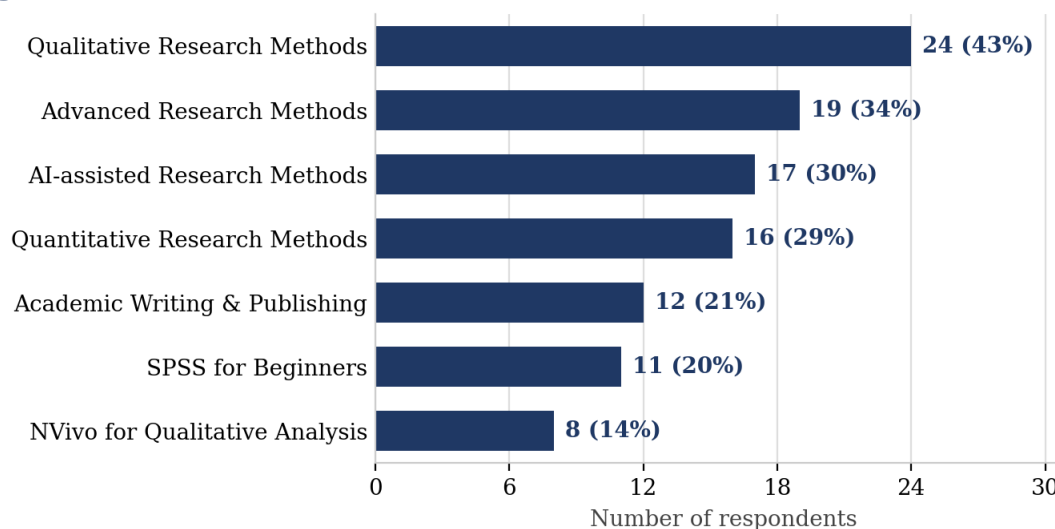


Figure 7. Interest in free online courses (n = 56; multiple responses permitted). Source: IASRD Research Training Needs Assessment Survey (Google Forms), June–July 2026.

Open-text responses (Q17; analysed thematically in Section 5.9) reinforced and extended these priorities, with recurring requests for systematic reviews and meta-analysis, advanced biostatistics, applied data analysis, and AI-enabled research workflows.

Implication: demand supports a broad methods portfolio anchored in qualitative and quantitative foundations, with AI-assisted research methods as a forward-looking strand.

5.5 Learning Format, Time, and Motivation

Self-paced online courses delivered via a learning management system were the most preferred format (22 of 55; 40%), followed by in-person workshops (15 of 55; 27%), video tutorials (13 of 55; 24%), and live online workshops (12 of 55; 22%). Mobile-friendly learning and written guides or toolkits were each selected by 11 respondents (20%), and downloadable PDFs by 10 (18%) (Figure 8).

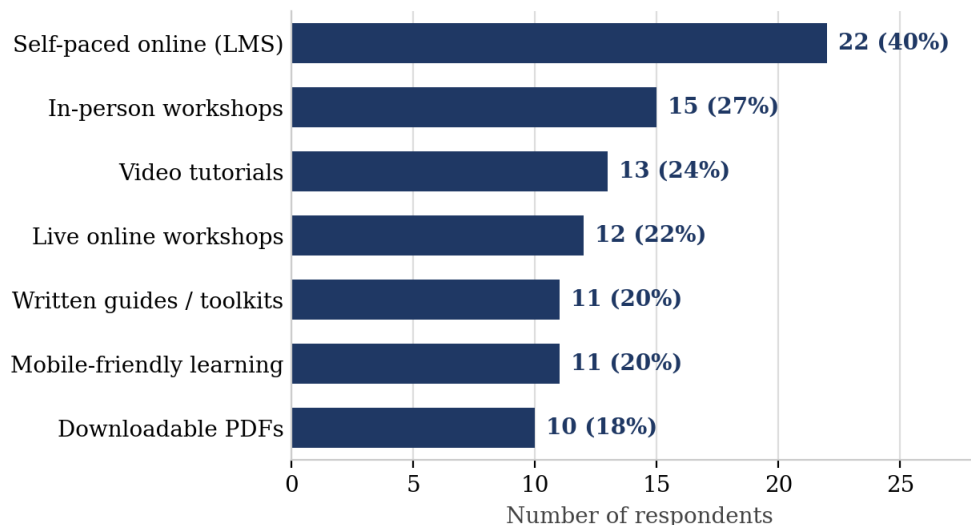
Figure 8. Preferred learning formats (n = 55)

Figure 8. Preferred learning formats (n = 55; multiple responses permitted). Source: IASRD Research Training Needs Assessment Survey (Google Forms), June–July 2026.

Time availability is modest: 27 of 56 respondents (48%) can commit one to two hours per week, 13 (23%) three to five hours, 9 (16%) less than one hour, and 7 (13%) more than five hours (Figure 9).

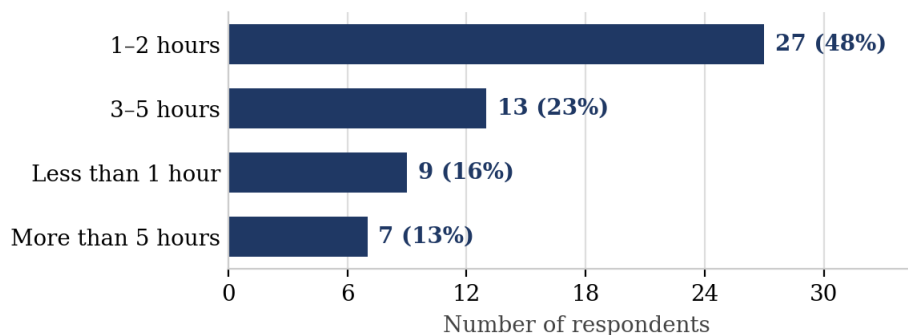
Figure 9. Weekly time available for learning (n = 56)

Figure 9. Weekly time available for learning (n = 56). Source: IASRD Research Training Needs Assessment Survey (Google Forms), June–July 2026.

Certification is a powerful motivator: 40 of 56 respondents (71%) stated that a completion certificate would definitely increase their motivation to complete a course, and a further 12 (21%) said it would somewhat increase motivation (Figure 10). Consistent with this, a recognised certificate was the strongest single factor that would increase enrolment in free courses (27 of 55; 49%), ahead of flexible scheduling (29%), better awareness and promotion (27%), and university partnership or credit (25%) (Figure 12).

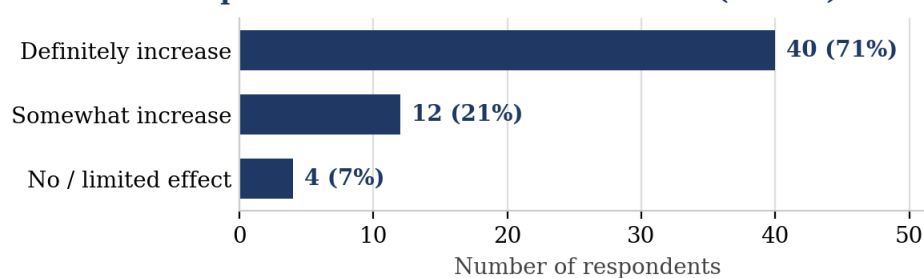
Figure 10. Effect of a completion certificate on motivation (n = 56)

Figure 10. Effect of a completion certificate on motivation (n = 56). Source: IASRD Research Training Needs Assessment Survey (Google Forms), June–July 2026.

Implication: course design should default to short, self-paced, certificate-bearing modules requiring no more than one to two hours of study per week, with optional live and in-person elements layered on top.

5.6 Access and Barriers

Access to paid research training platforms is limited and uneven. Only 12 of 56 respondents (21%) have access through their institution and just 4 (7%) pay personally. Meanwhile, 14 (25%) are not aware of available options, 12 (21%) find platforms too expensive, and 14 (25%) rely mainly on free resources (Figure 11).

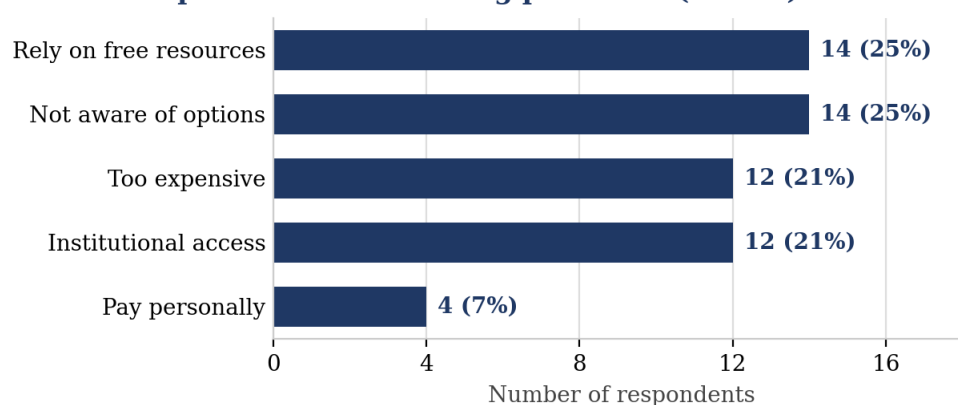
Figure 11. Access to paid research training platforms (n = 56)

Figure 11. Access to paid research training platforms (n = 56). Source: IASRD Research Training Needs Assessment Survey (Google Forms), June–July 2026.

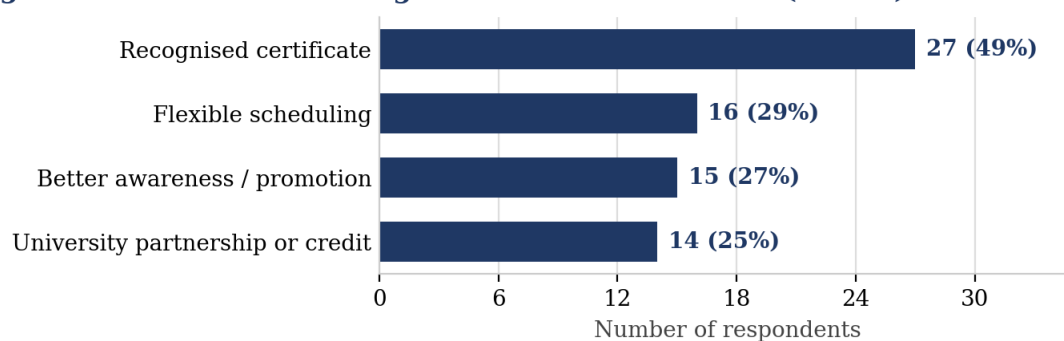
Figure 12. Factors increasing likelihood of enrolment (n = 55)

Figure 12. Factors increasing likelihood of enrolment in free courses (n = 55; multiple responses permitted). Source: IASRD Research Training Needs Assessment Survey (Google Forms), June–July 2026.

Implication: around seven in ten of the sample face cost, awareness, or access barriers. Free, credible, certificate-bearing provision directly addresses the dominant barriers reported.

5.7 IASRD Awareness and JSRD Publishing Interest

More than half of respondents (32 of 56; 57%) were hearing about IASRD for the first time through the survey. Eleven respondents (20%) had visited iasrd.com, 7 (13%) had published in JSRD, and 6 (11%) had heard of IASRD through social media (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Prior awareness of IASRD (n = 56)

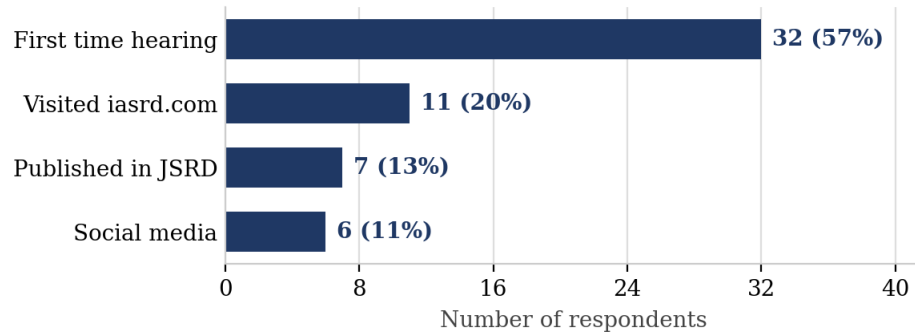


Figure 13. Prior awareness of IASRD (n = 56). Source: IASRD Research Training Needs Assessment Survey (Google Forms), June–July 2026.

Despite limited prior awareness, publishing interest was strong: 31 of 56 respondents (55%) expressed definite interest in publishing in JSRD and 16 (29%) said 'maybe', while 4 (7%) had already published in JSRD and only 5 (9%) expressed no interest (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Interest in publishing in JSRD (n = 56)

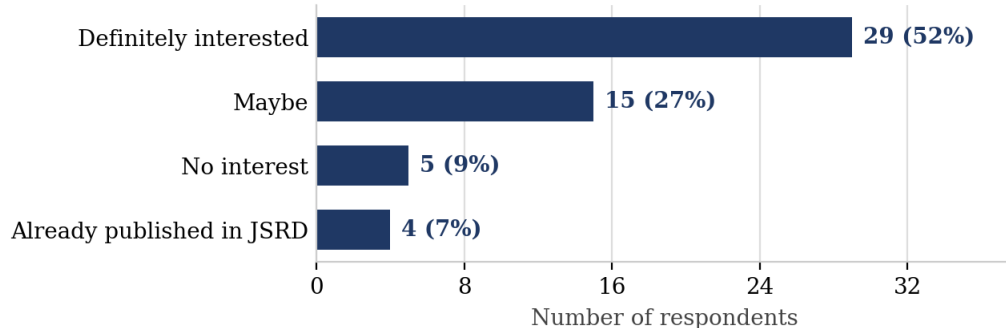


Figure 14. Interest in publishing in JSRD (n = 56). Source: IASRD Research Training Needs Assessment Survey (Google Forms), June–July 2026.

Implication: the training programme is a natural gateway into JSRD authorship: over 90% of respondents are open to publishing, and training completers represent a qualified author pipeline.

5.8 Subject Areas and Recruitment Channels

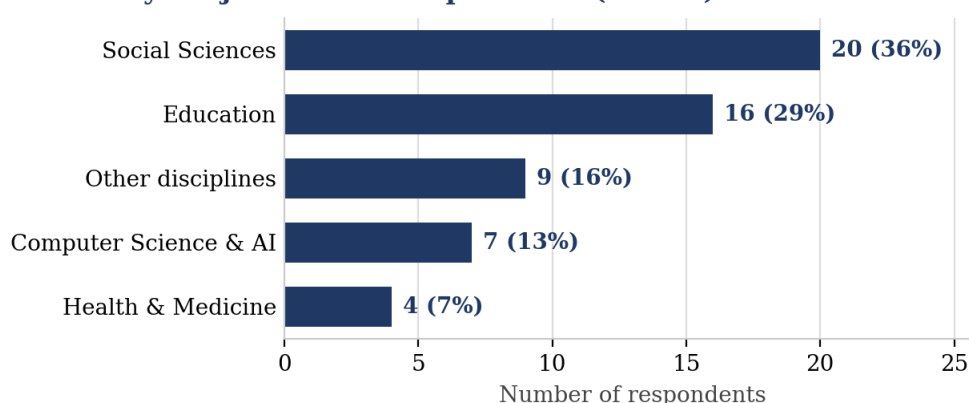
Figure 15. Primary subject area of respondents (n = 56)

Figure 15. Primary subject area of respondents (n = 56). Source: IASRD Research Training Needs Assessment Survey (Google Forms), June–July 2026.

Respondents reached the survey mainly through personal and institutional networks: approximately 18 of 56 (32%) via a friend or colleague and 15 (27%) via a university or institution, with social media (18%), the IASRD website (16%), email (4%), and other channels such as education officers (4%) accounting for the remainder (Figure 16).

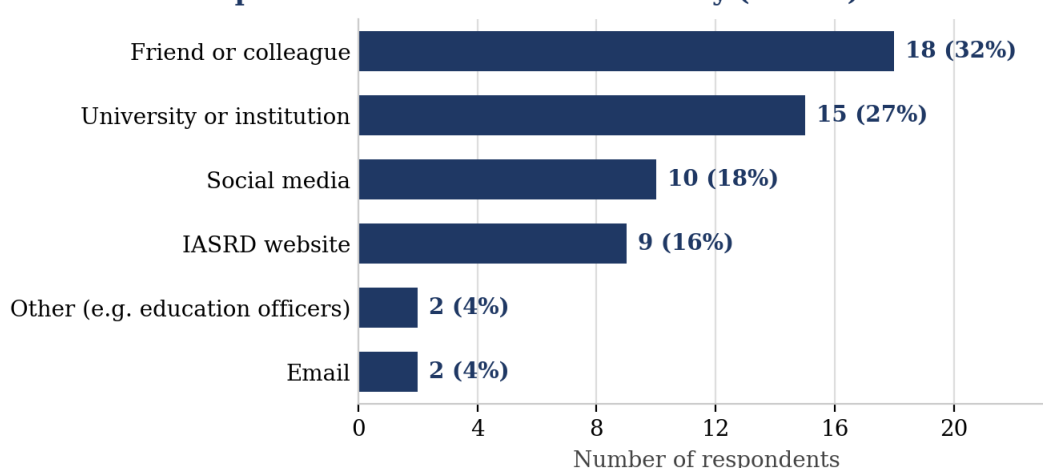
Figure 16. How respondents heard about the survey (n = 56)

Figure 16. How respondents heard about the survey (n = 56). Source: IASRD Research Training Needs Assessment Survey (Google Forms), June–July 2026.

Implication: word-of-mouth and institutional partnerships are IASRD's most effective current channels; direct digital reach (website, social media) has clear headroom for growth.

5.9 Open Feedback

Two open-text questions concluded the survey: requested training topics not currently available (Q17; 43 responses) and general comments or suggestions (Q18; 36 responses). Responses were reviewed and grouped thematically; verbatim responses are reproduced in Appendix B.

Six themes emerged from Q17. First, advanced and applied methods training: respondents requested systematic reviews and meta-analysis, advanced biostatistics, data analysis (raised repeatedly, including SPSS and Python specifically), qualitative methodology, academic writing, and research proposal writing for beginners. Second, AI-enabled research skills: one detailed response identified advanced AI research workflows and practical data science as the top missing components in traditional research training, calling for hands-on skills in AI-assisted literature synthesis, computational text analysis, and digital ethnography; AI applications in medical research and AI tools in research were raised

independently. Third, breadth and depth: several respondents asked for training to be more comprehensive and detailed rather than limited to specific topics, and more practical and career-focused, particularly for final-year students. Fourth, a substantial minority (approximately a third of Q17 responses) suggested research topics rather than training topics (geopolitics, colonialism, climate initiatives, women's empowerment, and contemporary social issues), indicating both the substantive interests of the community and some misinterpretation of the question (noted in the Limitations). Fifth, an emerging education-practitioner strand: several teachers and education officers requested action research for school improvement, AI in educational research and classroom practice, and research data management, visualisation, and presentation skills, pointing to a distinct practitioner audience alongside the core student and early-career researcher base. Sixth, a smaller group reported that their needs were already met by existing provision.

Q18 responses were predominantly positive endorsements of the initiative, describing IASRD as a good initiative and a strong platform for students, alongside direct expressions of engagement intent, including one respondent's wish to become a regular IASRD author and another's enquiry about sociology internships. Two substantive suggestions stand out. One respondent called for more practical workshops and hands-on training, echoing the quantitative findings on applied skills. Another raised the cost of publishing as a structural barrier, describing publication charges as a form of intellectual injustice for researchers in lower-income countries such as Pakistan; the comment directly affirms IASRD's free, open-access publishing model and the case for free training provision. One respondent reported not understanding the survey form, a point taken forward in the Limitations.

Implication: the open feedback independently corroborates the quantitative findings (practical, applied, AI-aware training with free access) and surfaces demand for beginner-level proposal writing, career-focused support for final-year students, and a distinct practitioner-facing strand for teachers and education officers, all of which should inform module design.

6. Discussion

6.1 The Theory–Practice Gap

The central finding of this assessment is a marked disconnect between formal training and applied competence. Although 34 of 56 respondents (61%) received research methods training at university, 31 of 56 (55%) nonetheless rated themselves at or below beginner level, and the leading self-reported challenges (finding reliable sources and data analysis, 29% each; literature review and publishing research, 25% each) are predominantly applied, practical skills. This pattern suggests that existing university curricula in the sampled contexts provide theoretical grounding but insufficient hands-on analytical practice. This finding is consistent with the wider capacity-strengthening literature, which emphasises that research skills and confidence develop most effectively through structured practice close to real research activity rather than through theoretical instruction alone (Cooke, 2005), and with evidence that training provision in low- and middle-income settings is frequently mismatched to locally identified needs (Franzen et al., 2017). It is also consistent with UNESCO (2021), which documents persistent gaps between formal research education and applied research capacity in many lower-income countries. A training programme that leads with practical, tool-based instruction (SPSS, NVivo, applied data analysis) is therefore likely to complement rather than duplicate university provision.

6.2 The Role of Certification in Motivation and Enrolment

Certification emerged as the strongest motivational factor in the survey: 40 of 56 respondents (71%) stated that a completion certificate would definitely increase their motivation, and a recognised certificate was the most frequently selected enrolment factor (49%). Credentialing should therefore be treated as a core design requirement rather than a peripheral feature. For a population in which only 21% have institutional access to paid platforms, a free but formally certificated course carries signalling value for employment and postgraduate applications. University partnership or credit, selected by 25% of respondents, would strengthen this effect further and aligns with IASRD's ongoing engagement with UK universities.

6.3 Designing for Constrained Time and Access

Nearly two-thirds of respondents can commit no more than two hours per week, and mobile-friendly delivery matters to one in five. The clear preference for self-paced LMS delivery (40%) over live formats fits this constraint profile and reflects established principles of adult learning: adult learners are typically self-directed, bring existing experience to their study, and learn best when content is immediately applicable to their work (Knowles et al., 2015). The evidence base for online provision is also reassuring in this respect: meta-analytic findings indicate that learning outcomes in well-designed online and blended courses are at least comparable to face-to-face instruction (Means et al., 2013). Modular course design, comprising short units of 60–90 minutes with downloadable resources and asynchronous assessment, is the appropriate architecture, with periodic live workshops as supplementary rather than core delivery.

6.4 AI Research Skills as an Emerging Need

AI-assisted research methods attracted interest from 30% of respondents in the structured question, and open-text responses independently raised AI-assisted literature synthesis, computational text analysis, AI applications in medical research, and — from a small but distinct group of teachers and education officers — AI in educational research and classroom practice. Only 9% cited understanding AI tools as a current challenge, suggesting that the community perceives AI less as a present difficulty and more as an approaching capability requirement. This mirrors the global picture: in a Nature survey of more than 1,600 researchers, most expected AI tools to become central to research practice within the decade, while expressing concern about skills and integrity risks (Van Noorden & Perkel, 2023). The higher education literature reaches a similar conclusion, noting rapid growth in AI applications alongside limited attention to pedagogy and ethics (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). TRACE-AI, IASRD's open-source platform for evidence verification and responsible AI use in research, positions the organisation to develop AI-assisted research training that is aligned with contemporary research integrity standards (All European Academies [ALLEA], 2023) and grounded in practical application.

6.5 From Training Community to Author Community

The awareness findings show IASRD reaching well beyond its existing audience, with 57% of respondents new to the organisation, while the publishing findings show a large latent author base, with over 90% open to publishing in JSRD. Open feedback sharpens this opportunity: one respondent explicitly framed publication charges as an intellectual injustice for researchers in lower-income countries, underscoring the strategic value of JSRD's free, open-access model, which is consistent with the founding principles of the open access movement (Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2002). Structured training that culminates in an Academic Writing & Publishing module creates a deliberate pipeline: participants develop publishable work, understand journal standards, and convert into JSRD authors, directly serving both IASRD's charitable objects and the journal's growth.

7. Key Insights

- **Early-career, low-confidence audience.** The sample is dominated by students and early-career researchers, over half of whom rate their research skills at or below beginner level.
- **Theory–practice gap.** 61% received university research training, yet applied skills (finding sources, data analysis, literature review) remain the most frequently reported challenges. Practical instruction is the gap to fill.
- **Data analysis is the biggest skills gap.** Data analysis and analysis software (SPSS, NVivo) constitute the single largest cluster of reported challenges.
- **Certificates drive completion.** 71% say a completion certificate would definitely increase motivation; a recognised certificate is the top enrolment driver (49%).
- **Self-paced, low-burden learning is preferred.** Self-paced LMS courses are the preferred format, and 48% of respondents can commit only 1–2 hours per week.

- **Access barriers are widespread.** 71% lack institutional access to paid platforms, are unaware of options, or find them too expensive; free provision removes the dominant barriers.
- **AI research training is an emerging need.** 30% want AI-assisted research methods, and open feedback independently requested AI research workflows, meta-analysis, and biostatistics.
- **Strong latent author pipeline for JSRD.** 55% definitely want to publish in JSRD (over 90% including 'maybe' and existing JSRD authors), creating a training-to-authorship pipeline.

8. Strategic Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Launch a Structured Research Skills Development Programme

Launch a modular, beginner-to-advanced research skills programme comprising six self-paced, certificate-bearing courses delivered in phases through the IASRD LMS (iasrd.com/learn): (1) Foundations of Research Methods; (2) Qualitative Research Methods; (3) Quantitative Research Methods & SPSS for Beginners; (4) Advanced Research Methods; (5) AI-Assisted Research Methods; and (6) Academic Writing & Publishing. Modules should be structured in 60–90 minute units to fit the 1–2 hours per week available to most respondents.

Field	Detail
Responsible	IASRD Training Unit
Priority	High
Timeline	August 2026 – December 2027

Recommendation 2: Issue Verifiable Completion Certificates for Every Course

Introduce digitally verifiable completion certificates (unique certificate IDs verifiable on iasrd.com) for all courses, given that 71% of respondents report certification would definitely increase motivation and 49% cite a recognised certificate as the top enrolment driver. Pursue university endorsement or credit recognition to strengthen certificate value.

Field	Detail
Responsible	IASRD Training Unit / Trustees
Priority	High
Timeline	October 2026

Recommendation 3: Prioritise Applied Data Analysis and Software Training

Ensure every methods course embeds hands-on exercises with real datasets, and prioritise SPSS and NVivo practical instruction, responding to the leading challenge cluster (data analysis 29%; software use 24%). Provide downloadable practice datasets and step-by-step toolkits, reflecting the 20% preference for written guides.

Field	Detail
Responsible	IASRD Training Unit
Priority	High
Timeline	From February 2027

Recommendation 4: Develop an AI-Assisted Research Methods Course Anchored in TRACE-AI

Design a dedicated course covering AI-assisted literature synthesis, computational text analysis, and responsible AI use in research, using IASRD's TRACE-AI platform as the applied case study for research integrity and evidence verification. This addresses the 30% structured demand and recurring open-text requests, and builds on IASRD's existing technical capability.

Field	Detail
Responsible	IASRD Technical Lead / Training Unit
Priority	Medium–High
Timeline	May–August 2027

Recommendation 5: Build the Training-to-Authorship Pipeline into JSRD

Conclude the programme with an Academic Writing & Publishing module that walks participants through JSRD's submission, peer-review, and APA 7 standards, with a supported pathway for completers to submit manuscripts. With over 90% of respondents open to publishing in JSRD, this converts trainees into a qualified author pipeline.

Field	Detail
Responsible	JSRD Editorial Team / Training Unit
Priority	Medium
Timeline	September–December 2027

Recommendation 6: Strengthen Outreach Through Institutional Partnerships and Referral

Formalise partnerships with universities in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the UK for programme promotion and potential credit recognition, and introduce a structured referral mechanism, reflecting the finding that 59% of respondents reached the survey via friends, colleagues, or institutions. In parallel, invest in social media and website visibility to grow direct reach.

Field	Detail
Responsible	IASRD Trustees / Communications
Priority	Medium
Timeline	From August 2026, ongoing

Recommendation 7: Adopt Mobile-Friendly, Low-Bandwidth Course Design Standards

Ensure all LMS content is mobile-responsive and downloadable for offline study (PDFs, transcripts), reflecting demand for mobile-friendly learning (20%) and downloadable resources (18%), and the access constraints typical of the programme's primary geographies.

Field	Detail
Responsible	IASRD Technical Lead
Priority	Medium
Timeline	August–November 2026

Recommendation 8: Repeat the Needs Assessment Annually

Institutionalise an annual Research Training Needs Assessment with an expanded, more geographically diverse sample and pre/post skills measures for programme participants, enabling IASRD to evidence impact to donors, partners, and regulators.

Field	Detail
Responsible	IASRD Research & Training Unit
Priority	Medium
Timeline	Q4 2027

9. Implementation Roadmap

The recommendations translate into a five-phase roadmap spanning August 2026 to December 2027, giving the programme sufficient time for pilot delivery, quality assurance, and partnership development alongside course launches.

Phase	Key Activities	Timeline	Lead
Phase 1	LMS readiness, certificate system, pilot testing, and course framework development, including mobile/offline design standards	August–October 2026	Training Unit / Technical Lead
Phase 2	Launch Foundations of Research Methods and Qualitative Research Methods	November 2026 – January 2027	Training Unit / Trustees
Phase 3	Launch Quantitative Research Methods & SPSS for Beginners with hands-on datasets; university partnership development	February–April 2027	Training Unit / Technical Lead
Phase 4	Launch Advanced Research Methods and AI-Assisted Research Methods (TRACE-AI integration)	May–August 2027	Training Unit
Phase 5	Launch Academic Writing & Publishing; open supported JSRD submission pathway for completers; conduct mid-programme impact evaluation of enrolment, completion, and certification data; plan the 2028 needs assessment	September–December 2027	JSRD Editorial / Training Unit

Progress against the roadmap should be reviewed monthly by the Training Unit and reported quarterly to the IASRD Board of Trustees, with enrolment, completion, and certification metrics tracked from launch.

10. Limitations

The findings of this assessment should be interpreted in light of the following limitations:

- **Sample size.** The sample size ($n = 56$) is small, and results should be treated as indicative rather than statistically generalisable.
- **Sampling method.** Convenience sampling through IASRD's existing networks and referral chains may over-represent individuals already interested in research training.
- **Geographic concentration.** Approximately 88% of respondents were based in Pakistan, reflecting IASRD's outreach and engagement network during the survey period. The findings offer a strong evidence base for informing IASRD's current programmes, but should not be interpreted as representative of the global research community. As IASRD's international partnerships and outreach expand, future surveys will aim for broader geographical representation to strengthen the wider applicability of the findings.
- **Self-report bias.** Skill levels and challenges are self-reported and were not verified through objective assessment; self-rating may understate or overstate actual competence.
- **Item non-response.** Two multiple-response items (Q6 and Q8) recorded 55 rather than 56 responses; percentages for these items use the relevant base.
- **Cross-sectional design.** As a cross-sectional survey, the assessment captures needs at a single point in time, and needs, particularly around AI, are likely to evolve quickly.
- **Open-question interpretation.** A substantial minority of Q17 responses proposed research topics rather than training topics, and one respondent reported not understanding the form, suggesting the open-text questions were not uniformly interpreted; future iterations should include examples or clarifying prompts.

These limitations do not undermine the value of the assessment for programme design, but they underline the importance of Recommendation 8: repeating the assessment annually with a larger sample and objective measures of participant progress.

11. Conclusion

The Research Training Needs Assessment 2026 provides IASRD with its first systematic evidence base for research capacity development. The findings present a consistent picture: a young, motivated community of students and early-career researchers facing practical barriers of skill, cost, awareness, and time.

The evidence indicates that the Research Skills Development Programme should be free, modular, self-paced, and certificate-bearing; that it should prioritise practical instruction in data analysis and research software; that it should be deliverable in one to two hours per week on any device; and that it should include a dedicated course in AI-assisted research methods, an area in which IASRD's TRACE-AI platform provides a practical foundation.

The assessment also identifies a strategic opportunity beyond training. More than half of respondents encountered IASRD for the first time through this survey, yet more than nine in ten are open to publishing in JSRD. A well-designed training programme therefore serves two purposes: it builds research capacity in underserved communities, and it develops IASRD's own community of engaged, publication-ready researchers, thereby advancing the charity's objects, strengthening JSRD's author base, and generating demonstrable impact for donors, university partners, and regulators.

IASRD's delivery infrastructure is already substantially in place: the learning management system at iasrd.com/learn, the JSRD publishing platform, TRACE-AI, and an established Crossref DOI and open-access framework. This assessment provides the evidence needed to direct that infrastructure effectively. The implementation roadmap in Section 9 sets out a realistic phased pathway towards full implementation of the Research Skills Development Programme by December 2027, allowing sufficient time for pilot delivery, quality assurance, learner feedback, partnership development, and continuous improvement, with the first courses launching in November 2026. IASRD's Training Unit and Board of

Trustees are invited to adopt the recommendations in Section 8 and to commission the annual repetition of this assessment so that the programme remains grounded in the evolving needs of the community it serves.

References

- All European Academies. (2023). *The European code of conduct for research integrity* (Rev. ed.).
- Budapest Open Access Initiative. (2002). *Budapest Open Access Initiative declaration*. <https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/>
- Cooke, J. (2005). A framework to evaluate research capacity building in health care. *BMC Family Practice*, 6, 44. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2296-6-44>
- ESSENCE on Health Research. (2016). *Planning, monitoring and evaluation framework for research capacity strengthening* (Rev. ed.). World Health Organization/TDR
- Franzen, S. R. P., Chandler, C., & Lang, T. (2017). Health research capacity development in low and middle income countries: reality or rhetoric? A systematic meta-narrative review of the qualitative literature. *BMJ Open*, 7(1), e012332. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2016-012332>
- Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2015). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (8th ed.). Routledge
- Means, B., Toyama, Y., Murphy, R., & Bakia, M. (2013). The effectiveness of online and blended learning: A meta-analysis of the empirical literature. *Teachers College Record*, 115(3), 1–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811311500307>
- UNESCO. (2021). *UNESCO science report: The race against time for smarter development*. UNESCO Publishing
- Van Noorden, R., & Perkel, J. M. (2023). AI and science: What 1,600 researchers think. *Nature*, 621(7980), 672–675. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-023-02980-0>
- Zawacki-Richter, O., Marín, V. I., Bond, M., & Gouverneur, F. (2019). Systematic review of research on artificial intelligence applications in higher education — where are the educators? *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 16, 39. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-019-0171-0>

Appendix A. Survey Questionnaire

Research Training Needs Assessment 2026, administered via Google Forms, June–July 2026.

Section 1 — Consent & Data Protection

- Please confirm the following to proceed: I have read and understood the above information and I agree to participate in this survey. (Required)

Section 2 — About You

- Q1. What is your current role? (Student — Undergraduate; Student — Postgraduate; Early-career Researcher; Academic / Lecturer; Professional — non-academic; Other)
- Q2. Which country are you based in? (Open response)
- Q3. What is your highest level of education? (Secondary / High School; Undergraduate degree; Postgraduate degree; Doctoral degree)

Section 3 — Current Research Skills

- Q4. How would you rate your current research skills? (No experience; Beginner; Intermediate; Advanced)
- Q5. Have you ever received formal research methods training? (Yes — through university; Yes — through workplace; Yes — through online courses; Self-taught; No formal research training)
- Q6. What are your biggest challenges in research? (Select all that apply: Finding reliable sources; Literature review; Referencing & citation management; Understanding qualitative methods; Understanding quantitative methods; Data analysis; Using software — SPSS, NVivo, etc.; Academic writing; Research ethics; Publishing research; Understanding AI tools in research; Access to free training resources)

Section 4 — Training Needs

- Q7. Which free online courses would you be interested in? (Select all that apply: Qualitative Research Methods; Quantitative Research Methods; SPSS for Beginners; NVivo for Qualitative Analysis; Advanced Research Methods; AI-assisted research methods; Academic Writing & Publishing)
- Q8. What format do you prefer for learning? (Select all that apply: Self-paced online courses — LMS; Live online workshops — Zoom; In-person workshops; Video tutorials — YouTube; Written guides / toolkits; Downloadable PDFs; Mobile-friendly learning)
- Q9. How much time can you commit to learning per week? (Less than 1 hour; 1–2 hours; 3–5 hours; More than 5 hours)
- Q10. Would a completion certificate increase your motivation to complete a course? (Yes, definitely; Somewhat; I don't know; No)

Section 5 — Access & Barriers

- Q11. Do you currently have access to paid research training platforms? (Yes, through my institution; Yes, I pay personally; No — too expensive; No — not aware of options; I mainly use free resources)
- Q12. What would make you more likely to enrol in free courses? (Select all that apply: Recognised certificate; University partnership / credit; Recommendation from supervisor; More course variety; Better awareness / promotion; Practical hands-on exercises; Beginner-friendly courses; Flexible schedule)

Section 6 — IASRD Awareness

- Q13. Were you aware of IASRD before this survey? (Yes — I have published in JSRD; Yes — I have visited <https://iasrd.com>; Yes — heard through social media; No — first time hearing about IASRD)
- Q14. Would you be interested in publishing in JSRD (Journal of Social Research Dynamics)? (Yes; Maybe; No; I have already published in JSRD; I would like to publish again in JSRD)

Section 7 — Your Research Area

- Q15. Which subject area best describes your research or field of interest? (Health & Medicine; Education; Business & Management; Social Sciences; Psychology; Engineering & Technology; Computer Science & AI; Humanities & Arts; Other)
- Q16. How did you hear about this survey? (IASRD website — <https://iasrd.com>; Social media; University / institution; Email; Friend / colleague)

Section 8 — Open Feedback

- Q17. What research training topics would you like to see offered that are not currently available? (Open response)
- Q18. Any other comments or suggestions? (Open response)

Appendix B. Representative Open-Text Responses

Selected quotations are reproduced below, grouped by theme, to illustrate the range of open-text responses to Q17 (43 responses) and Q18 (36 responses). Quotations are reproduced as submitted, in anonymised form; the full response dataset is held on file by the IASRD Research & Training Unit.

Q17 — Requested training topics

Advanced and applied methods.

“Training on systematic reviews and meta-analysis, AI applications in medical research, advanced biostatistics”

“Advanced research methods, data analysis (SPSS/Python), academic writing, and AI tools in research.”

“Basic research proposal writing for beginners”

AI-enabled research skills.

“Advanced AI research workflows and practical data science are the top missing components in traditional research training. Researchers need hands-on skills in AI-assisted literature synthesis, computational text analysis, and digital ethnography.”

Breadth and depth of provision.

“I think each and every topic is available now but research training topics should be more in details”

“Overall research training, not training only in one specific area”

Substantive research interests (topic suggestions).

“Carbon footprint among youth with Karachi climate initiative”

“Independent living of women. Women empowerment. Women in business. Single women empowerment”

“Perception of career uncertainty among final year students”

Education-practitioner requests.

“As a teacher, I would like training in AI in educational research and classroom practice, action research for school improvement, academic writing and publication”

“Action research for teachers and school leaders, research data management, visualisation and presentation skills”

Q18 — General comments and suggestions

Access and equity.

“Publishing cost restricts researchers in poor countries like Pakistan and this is intellectual injustice.”

Practical orientation.

“More practical workshops and hands-on training would be appreciated.”

“Research training should be more practical and career-focused for final year students”

“It was informative and well organised. I would suggest including more practical activities, hands on exercises, and real life case studies to enhance learning.”

Engagement and endorsement.

“Want to be a regular author IASRD”

“It is best platform for students”

“Good initiative for students”