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## PERCEIVED STRESS AMONG PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS DURING PRACTICE TEACHING- UNFURLING THE HIDDEN BURDENS

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### Abstract:

Stress is a psychological state in which people experience extreme distress and anxiety during various situations. It is an inevitable part of contemporary living. Every person experiences it according to their level of intelligence, personality and other traits. Naturally everyone has the capacity to cope up with stress, which is known as frustration- tolerance or stress- tolerance. But when this limit is crossed, we get upset and depressed that can be highly injurious to both mental and physical health. Students particularly at higher level of education have fear and pessimistic feeling about what would be their future. Pre- service training period prepares the prospective teachers both in skill and knowledge. Teaching practice is an integral component of becoming a teacher. It grants student- teachers, with an experience in the actual teaching and learning environment. Though student teachers know the significance and value of practice teaching, and they perceive it as “the crux of their preparation for the profession”. This practical component is providing the real interface between student and a teacher. Still the phase of teaching practice creates a mixture of anticipation, anxiety and apprehension in the students. The core intention of this article is to review the most influencing factors of stress that affect the prospective teachers especially when they undergo practice teaching.

**Key words:** Perceived Stress, Prospective Teachers, Practice Teaching.

### Introduction:

Stress can be defined as any type of change that causes physical, emotional, or mental strain. Stress is your body's response to anything that requires attention or action. Everyone experiences stress to some degree. The way you respond to stress, however, makes a big difference to your overall mental and physical well-being. Sometimes, the best way to manage your stress involves changing your situation. At other times, the best strategy involves changing the way you respond to the situation. Exposure to chronic stressors can cause maladaptive reactions, including depression, anxiety, cognitive impairment, and heart disease. (Ketchesin et al 2017). Perceived stress is defined as “a measure of the degree to which situations in one’s life are appraised as stressful and is comprised of socio- cultural context dependent on medical, physical, psychological and psychosocial aspects” (Pangtey et al, 2020)

### Stress Indicators:

Stress is not always easy to recognize, but there are some ways to identify some signs that you might be experiencing too much pressure. Sometimes stress can come from an obvious source, but sometimes even small daily stresses from work, school, family, and friends can take a toll on your mind and body.

If you think stress might be affecting you, there are a few things you can watch for:

- **Cognitive signs** such as difficulty concentrating, worrying, anxiety, and trouble remembering
- **Emotional signs** such as being angry, irritated, fearful, or moody
- **Physical signs** such as high blood pressure, headaches, clammy/sweaty hands, muscle tension and neck pain, changes in weight, frequent colds or infections, teeth grinding, digestive problems, and changes in the menstrual cycle and sex drive



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- **Behavioral signs** such as poor self-care, not having time for the things you enjoy, or relying on drugs and alcohol to cope.

### Practice teaching:

A temporary period of teaching in a school undertaken under supervision by a person who is training to become a teacher. Practice teaching occupies a key position in the programme of teacher education. It is a culminating experience in teacher preparation. It provides opportunity to beginning teachers to become socialized into the profession. Performance during practice teaching provides some basis for predicting the future success of the teacher. Outgoing popularity and centrality of practice teaching is an important contributing factor towards the quality of teacher education programme. During practice teaching working with students in schools provides a high degree of emotional involvement of a mostly positive nature. Student teachers feel themselves grow through experience and they begin to link to a culture of teaching. During practice teaching, they feel engaged, challenged and even empowered.

### Definitions of Practice:

Teaching A number of terms such as the practice teaching, student teaching, teaching practice, field studies, infield experience, school based experience or internship are used to refer to this activity. The term practice teaching embraces all the learning experiences of student teachers in schools.

The term practice teaching has three major connotations: the practicing of teaching skills and acquisition of the role of a teacher; the whole range of experiences that students go through in schools; and the practical aspects of the course as distinct from theoretical studies. Practice teaching is the name of the preparation of student teachers for teaching by practical training. It is the practical use of teaching methods, teaching strategies, teaching principles, teaching techniques and practical training and practice / exercise of different activities of daily school life.

According to Akbar (2002) Following are the objectives of practice teaching:

1. To provide the prospective teachers with an opportunity of establishing an appropriate teacher pupil relationship.
2. To provide an opportunity for evaluating the student potential as a teacher and suitability for the teaching profession.
3. To develop personal relationship with others: administrators, teachers, parents and students.
4. To provide the future teacher with practical experience in school to overcome the problems of discipline and enable him / her to develop method of control.
5. To provide with an opportunity to put theories into practice and to develop a deeper understanding of educational principles and their implication for learning.
6. To enable the student teachers effectively to plan and prepare lessons.
7. To develop skill in the use of fundamental procedures, techniques and methods of teaching.
8. To develop desirable professional interests, attitudes and ideas relative to teaching profession.
9. To enable student teachers to acquire desirable characteristics / traits of a teacher and to display appropriate behaviour.
10. To provide student teachers with an opportunity to have teaching evaluated and to gain from the benefits of constructive criticism.
11. To provide an opportunity for self-evaluation and to discover own strengths and weaknesses.
12. To develop skills in future teachers related to teaching like fluent speaking, meaningful reading, using blackboard and other teaching material.
13. To provide an opportunity to liaise with school environment, its functioning and with community and its resources.
14. To provide for the exchange of ideas and methods between practicing school and teacher training institution, by teacher training institutions' staff and students, perceiving new ideas material and equipment in use in practicing schools and introducing new ideas, material and equipment's into the school.



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## Challenges during their teaching practice:

Student- teachers often encounter a variety of challenges during their teaching practice. A study by Solanki,A. (2018), reported that student teachers in B.Ed. colleges experienced significant stress, which adversely affected their teaching performance and overall well-being.

Here are some of the key challenges they may face

**Classroom Management and Discipline Issues:** Managing student behaviour be difficult, especially in diverse classrooms with varying levels of motivation and engagement.

Gaining respect and establishing authority as a new teacher can be challenging, particularly when students are aware of their novice status. According to (Domingo & Diwag, 2016), academic workload, performance anxiety, and classroom management were the major stressors identified among pre- service teachers and most students commonly used social support and religious coping strategies.

**Lesson Planning and Execution:** Balancing lesson planning with teaching responsibilities and other commitments can lead to time constraints. (Balakrishnan, Bahari & Paul, 2017) studied the Impact of Predisposing Factors on Academic Stress among Pre-Service Teachers and gave an insight that factors such as academic pressure, teaching demands, and lack of preparation contributed significantly to stress levels especially female students reported higher level of stress.

**Building Relationships:-** Connecting with Students: Establishing rapport with students is essential for effective teaching, but it can take time and effort to build these relationships. Collaboration with Staff: Working effectively with other teachers and staff members requires communication skills and teamwork.

**Emotional and Psychological Stress:-** Imposter Syndrome: Many student teachers struggle with feelings of inadequacy or fear of failure, which can affect their confidence and performance. According to a study reported by Heera, P., & Kaur, A. (2017), highlighted a significant difference in emotional intelligence between male and female pre-service teachers, suggesting that emotional intelligence, which is linked to stress management, plays a role in teaching efficacy.

**Access to Resources:-** Limited Materials: Some student teachers may find themselves in under-resourced schools, making it difficult to provide engaging and effective lessons. A comprehensive study by Mushahari, P., & Sharma,H.(2021), found that pre-service teacher trainees had a moderate to highly favourable attitude towards experiential learning approaches. However, challenges such as lack of resources and training impeded the effective implementation of these approaches, potentially increasing stress and affecting pedagogical skills. Technology Integration: Incorporating technology into lessons can be challenging, especially for those unfamiliar with educational tech tools.

## Stress coping Strategies used by student teachers:

Four main categories of coping strategies were identified: Personal, Professional, Social, and Institutional. A number of subcategories were associated with these main categories.

### Personal Coping Strategies

Five specific strategies were identified under the category of Personal coping strategies. Personal coping was represented in:

- (1) Cognitive strategies such as positive thinking, setting realistic expectations, pragmatism, and blocking the negative, and included comments like: “I concentrated on the positive aspects more than the negative” and “telling myself that I am not an experienced teacher and cannot expect to perform like one”.



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- (2) Physical strategies, some of which were active (recreation, sport and general exercise) while others were passive (listening to music, watching TV, reading or simply relaxing or taking “long hot baths” at the end of a day).
- (3) Behavioural strategies. These included the reported practice of engaging in routines, like housework, that did not require thought. Eating and drug-taking (e.g. alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine) were also behaviours that some students consciously or habitually used: “I coped with stress by having a can of coke and a biscuit at recess times.”
- (4) Emotional strategies included use of self-deprecation, a capacity of students to laugh at themselves: “If you make a mistake, like writing a word incorrectly in front of the class, it shows you are human” and trying not to be hard on themselves “I just did the best that I could.”
- (5) Rational/Time Organization strategies were identified by students in the way they clearly defined their priorities for work and free time “Having a balance between work and social life” and “On weekends I spent some time not thinking about anything involved with teaching.” Students commonly stressed the importance of making time for themselves during the teaching practicum. Finding the time to relax, either passively or in a physically active way, was a widely reported strategy.

### Professional Coping Strategies

Being well prepared for lessons as well as for the general responsibilities associated with life as a school teacher were seen as important strategies in avoiding stress. Three specific Professional coping strategies were identified.

- (1) Knowledge of the curriculum and what they were expected to teach and knowing the structure, organisation and culture of the school helped students feel comfortable in that environment.
- (2) (Use of self-management skills such as preparation, planning and organizational skills were reflected in comments like “I tried to be well organised to prevent a last minute panic. I used detailed lesson plans and programmed the day in detail. On the home front I also tried to be better organised.” Some students used self-reflection “I’m here to learn to be better so I have to face all challenges” while others reported techniques for managing school related problems “Taking deep breaths and counting to ten” (Smith & Johnson, 2024), explored the stress management and well- being needs of pre-Service Teachers reported that high levels of stress were due to workload, teaching practice expectations, and time constraints. Among the various stress coping strategies mindfulness and time management training were identified as useful interventions.
- (3) Professional qualities were classified as strategies where they were clearly adaptive “At least one lesson a week I would plan something I enjoyed as much as the kids e.g. music and drama.” Students generally did not emphasis the role that a sound grasp of the curriculum or an awareness of school organization and culture might have as coping strategies. However, it might be that these are assumed elements of ‘being prepared’.

### Social Coping Strategies

Turning to family and friends in times of crisis or simply for conversation and reflection was widely reported as a significant coping strategy. Involvement in social events such ‘partying’ and general socialising away from their practicum school were seen by the students as important.

### Institutional Coping Strategies

Within this category were human and system-related strategies involving both the School and the University. Considerable emphasis was given to the importance of talking to, and learning from, supervising teachers. Having other student teachers in the school with whom to share experiences was also significant. This strategy is highly proved by the statement given by (Li & Zhang, 2022), who has stated that social support and self-efficacy were found to significantly reduce academic burnout. A supportive institutional climate also contributed to lower stress levels.



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## Conclusion:

Thus, the present article throws light on the concept of perceived stress, among prospective teachers. It also speaks of the specific stressors on student- teachers undergoing teaching practice, a major component in teacher education. It also adds to the different coping strategies followed by student- teachers in order to overcome the stressful situation. This will pave way for the inclusion of stress coping mechanism in teacher education which would be highly useful for student teachers for a more successful professional journey.

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