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EXPLORING RESILIENCE AMONG SCHOOL TEACHERS: CORRELATES OF AGE AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE IN A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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Abstract

In recent years, teaching is a profession that often brings with it, its challenges. In this study, we explore the resilience of school teachers and how it relates to their teaching experience and personal background. A sequential explanatory mixed-method approach was used, 113 school teachers employed in government and private schools selected through purposive and convenience sampling. Resilience was assessed using the 25-item Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-25). Quantitative analyses included one-way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation to evaluate variations and associations across demographic groups. Results show that teachers with more experience tend to have higher resilience. A brief qualitative component was included to understand teacher perspectives on resilience, but the study primarily focuses on assessing current resilience rather than coping mechanisms. The findings highlight the importance of teacher well-being and can contribute to the development of support systems and training programs focused at strengthening resilience in the teaching profession.

Keywords: Resilience, School Teachers, CD-RISC-25, Teaching Experience, Mental Health

Exploring Resilience Among School Teachers: Correlates of Age and Teaching Experience in a Mixed Methods Study

The teaching profession is widely recognized as one of the most demanding careers in today’s rapidly changing world. Teachers perform a multifaceted role that extends beyond instruction, encompassing emotional support, classroom management, and continuous professional engagement. They are required to constantly adapt to new pedagogical demands, curricula, and educational technologies while maintaining high-quality instruction such as being well equipped with technology to take online classes, examinations, which might be an easy task for some professionals but difficult for others especially post COVID 19 pandemic, the rapid shift to hybrid/online teaching has worsened teacher stress globally. In current times, even on holidays, online classes are scheduled leaving little or no spare time for the teachers. Alongside these professional expectations, they also face challenges such as managing student behavior, addressing learning difficulties, dealing with organizational concerns, and navigating stressful communication situations (Cordingley & Crisp, 2020).

One of the concepts increasingly emphasized in understanding how teachers cope with such challenges is resilience. Resilience refers to an individual’s capacity to adapt effectively when faced with stressors or challenging circumstances while maintaining positive functioning and well-being.

The American Psychological Association (2010) describes resilience as the capacity to adapt effectively when confronted with significant stressors or adverse life events. Similarly, Egeland (1993) viewed resilience as an individual’s ability to regain or maintain positive functioning despite exposure to high-risk circumstances. Fiksel (2006) emphasized its systemic nature, defining resilience as “the capacity of a system to survive, adapt, and grow in the face of change and uncertainty.” From a socio-ecological standpoint, Ungar (2012) framed resilience as emerging through continuous interaction between individuals and their surrounding contexts, where access to meaningful resources facilitates adaptation and growth.

Resilient individuals often share certain core qualities, such as the ability to maintain motivation, regulate emotions, solve problems effectively, and maintain purpose in the face of stress (Windle, 2011). Research further indicates that resilience is not a static or inborn characteristic rather it evolves through ongoing interplay between personal attributes and environmental influences (Howard et al., 1999; Luthar et al., 2000; Rutter, 1990). This developmental view highlights the



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role of supportive relationships, adaptive coping strategies, and contextual resources in strengthening resilience over time (Werner, 1995).

Within education, teacher resilience is understood as the ability of teachers to continue functioning effectively despite adversities associated with their profession (Kostoulas & Lämmerer, 2020). It involves not only survival but also the capacity to thrive, sustain motivation, and remain committed to teaching in challenging circumstances (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011). Resilient teachers are more capable of balancing personal and professional demands, managing stress, and avoiding burnout, ultimately enabling them to provide quality education (Sentana & Wiyasa, 2021). Importantly, teachers serve as role models; students are less likely to develop resilience if their teachers themselves do not embody it (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

The theoretical foundation for resilience research is often attributed to Resilience Theory, which views resilience as the capacity to achieve positive adaptation despite significant adversity (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Masten, 2001). This framework emphasizes two critical components: (a) the presence of risk or adversity, and (b) successful positive adaptation in response to these risks. Within the teaching context, resilience theory provides a lens to understand how teachers manage professional stressors while sustaining personal well-being and commitment to their vocation. It further highlights the interaction of individual traits, environmental resources, and social support systems in fostering resilience (Werner, 1995; Day et al., 2006)

Taken together, these perspectives underscore that resilience—plays a vital role in supporting teachers’ effectiveness and well-being. As schools continue to evolve amid social, cultural, technological and institutional changes, understanding and strengthening teachers’ resilience has become a central focus for promoting sustainable and successful education systems. Given the demanding nature of teaching, the principles of general resilience take on specific relevance within educational settings. Applying resilience theory to teachers provides insight into how they adapt to daily stressors and sustain their well-being, making teacher resilience an important area of focused inquiry.

Existing studies often assess resilience levels in general populations, but few have examined the role of demographic variables such as age and teaching experience in shaping resilience among school teachers. Moreover, many studies have not compared resilience scores between teachers having different levels of teaching experience. The present study addresses these gaps by assessing resilience among school teachers and examining its relationship with demographic variables, particularly age and teaching experience. By identifying whether resilience differs across teachers with varying levels of experience, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of resilience in the school teaching profession and offers insights that may inform teacher training, counseling, and policy making. In this context, resilience emerges as a crucial factor that enables teachers to adapt positively, maintain their mental health, and perform effectively despite adversities.

The study was guided by the following hypotheses:

H1: Resilience will be significantly associated with years of teaching experience.

H2: Resilience will show a significant association with age.

H3: Levels of resilience will vary significantly across different categories of teaching experience.

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods framework was employed, integrating quantitative and qualitative components across two structured phases:

“Phase 1: Quantitative Phase” A correlational and one-way ANOVA approach was used to assess resilience among school teachers using standardized scales administered through an online survey.



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“Phase 2: Qualitative Phase” To gain deeper insight into how resilient teachers sustain their resilience, a subset of participants with high resilience scores (90 and above) were selected for semi-structured interviews. Their narratives were analyzed thematically to complement and explain the quantitative findings. This mixed-method approach allowed both statistical trends and personal experiences to be explored, providing a more holistic understanding of resilience among educators.

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA USED IN THE STUDY

Inclusion Criteria

- o School teachers who are currently teaching in schools
- o School teachers who were willing to participate
- o School teachers from both rural and urban background
- o School teachers currently employed in both private and government schools
- o School teachers with a minimum of 3 years of teaching experience

Exclusion Criteria

- o School teachers who are not currently employed in schools
- o School teachers with less than 3 years of teaching experience
- o Non-teaching staff

SAMPLE

The total sample for the quantitative phase consisted of 113 school teachers. It was obtained through purposive and convenience (non-probability) sampling method. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire prepared on Google Forms, which was shared with school teachers via email and social media platforms. Participants responded voluntarily and anonymously. It included both male and female teachers predominantly female (88%). Most participants worked in urban schools (95%) and in private institutions (59%). A majority were married (69.2%). Teaching experience varied across groups: 29.1% of participants reported 3–5 years of service, 15.4% had 6–10 years, 20.5% had 11–15 years, 11.1% had 16–20 years, and 23.9% reported more than 21 years of experience.

For the qualitative component, a purposive subsample of four teachers scoring 90 or above on the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale participated in semi-structured interviews. These participants represented individuals with comparatively high resilience levels, allowing deeper exploration of both personal and contextual influences shaping their adaptive capacities.

TOOLS USED:

The scale used in the present study is described below:

1. THE CONNOR-DAVIDSON RESILIENCE SCALE (CD-RISC; Connor, K.M., & Davidson, J.R., 2003): Resilience was assessed using the 25-item Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC; Connor & Davidson, 2003). Items are rated on a five-point response format ranging from 0 to 4, with higher cumulative scores reflecting stronger resilience. The instrument has demonstrated robust psychometric reliability in previous research (original $\alpha = .89$). In the current sample, internal consistency was satisfactory (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .881$).
2. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET: It consisted of basic participant details (Name, age, gender, school type, teaching experience in years, marital status, region).



STATISTICAL ANALYSIS:

For the quantitative phase, the statistical analysis was done using IBM SPSS version 27.00. The data was analyzed by using Correlation and one-way ANOVA.

For the qualitative phase, Thematic Analysis was employed. Interview transcripts from high-resilience participants were manually coded to identify recurring patterns and themes such as family support, role of teaching experience, workplace climate and coping strategies, etc.

The findings from both phases were later integrated during interpretation to provide a comprehensive understanding of resilience among school teachers.

RESULTS

Table 1
 Correlation among Resilience, Age and Teaching Experience

Variables	Emotional Resilience	Teaching Experience	Age
Emotional Resilience	1	.59**	.41**
Teaching Experience		1	.76**
Age			1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between teaching experience and resilience among teachers. Results show a significant, moderately strong positive correlation, ($r = .59, p < .001$) indicating that teachers with more years of teaching experience tend to report higher levels of resilience.

Furthermore, it examined the relationship between age and resilience among teachers. Results show a significant, moderate positive correlation, ($r = .41, p < .001$) suggesting that older teachers tend to report higher levels of resilience compared to younger teachers.

Table 2
 One-Way ANOVA for Resilience Across Teaching-Experience Groups

VARIABLE (Teaching experience)	N	MEAN	SD	F	p
3-5 years	31	71.35	10.378	16.330	<.001
6-10 years	20	76.15	10.733		
11-15 years	23	76.00	11.509		
16-20 years	12	86.58	4.795		
21+ years	27	89.07	5.158		



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One-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference in resilience across teaching-experience groups, $F(4,108) = 16.33, p < .001$, with a large effect size ($\eta^2 = .38$).

This indicates that the number of years a teacher has worked is strongly associated with resilience levels. Post-hoc comparisons using the Games–Howell test showed that teachers with 16–20 years and 21+ years of experience had significantly higher resilience than teachers with 3–5 years, 6–10 years, and 11–15 years of experience (all $p < .05$).

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

A thematic analysis of interview responses from high-resilience teachers ($n = 4$) revealed two major themes:

Theme 1: Support systems aid resilience

Teachers spoke about encouragement and support from family, support from colleagues, and a positive school environment. This external support helped them cope during difficult times.

“My family has always supported me, they have been very cordial that is why I am going every day, be that my children, my husband, my in laws, my parents. Very often I thought of leaving also but that proper help and support was provided to me whenever I needed that, which helped me in being consistent in my job.”

(Participant 1, Female, 21+ years of teaching experience)

“It is the teamwork in so many situations that helped in facing the challenging situations, in any company or job when we work together then only we can achieve success and in my case my colleagues have played a very important role in helping me stand firm in those tough days of my job.”

(Participant 4, Female, 16-20 years of teaching experience)

Theme 2: Patience Built Through Experience

Teachers highlighted that they developed emotional strength gradually—especially while handling children, parents, and classroom stress. Experience taught them calmness.

“As a teacher we have to look into the needs of both children and their parents and at times it becomes difficult to handle problems but patience is very important at every step of this profession because if you are not patient enough, you will fail as a teacher.”

(Participant 3, Female, 21+ years of teaching experience)

“One of the most difficult situations as a teacher we face is to deal with the parents, they have that right on us along with a lot of expectations but despite the difficulty these moments make us very strong, many teachers feel helpless as well but because of the long teaching experience, now we are able to satisfy the parents with ease and in a better way as compared to the initial years of being a teacher”

(Participant 2, Male, 21+ years of teaching experience)

DISCUSSION

The present investigation sought to assess resilience levels among school teachers and to analyze how these levels relate to selected demographic factors, including age, gender, and professional experience.

Relationship with teaching experience and age:

Resilience among educators is increasingly recognized as a key factor in sustaining teacher well-being and professional effectiveness, particularly in demanding school environments. Prior studies have highlighted that resilience does not develop in isolation; rather, it is shaped by personal, developmental, and professional factors that interact over time (Beltman et al.,



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2011; Gu & Day, 2013). Teachers in the present sample showed moderate to high resilience, indicating a generally strong ability to adapt to stress. This pattern aligns with earlier findings showing that teachers often develop effective coping strategies to handle occupational demands and reduce burnout (Richards et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2016).

In this regard, age and teaching experience have been frequently linked to the gradual strengthening of coping skills, professional confidence, and related factors, suggesting that resilience may deepen as teachers spend more years in the profession. Given this background, the present study examined how these two variables relate to teachers who were able to adapt, cope, and remain effective in the face of stress.

A significant positive correlation has been found between teaching experience and resilience ($r = .59, p < .001$), as shown in table 2, indicating that more experienced teachers reported higher resilience. Also, age was positively correlated with resilience ($r = .41, p < .001$). These findings suggest that resilience may strengthen with greater exposure to professional challenges and maturity over time- a pattern not observed in previous literature. Contrary to the findings of previous literature such as noted in the mixed method study on EFL teachers in China (Liu & Chu, 2022) found no significant difference in resilience by years of teaching experience and age of teachers, this contrasting result could be explained by difference in culture, the teaching infrastructure, teaching environment, etc in the Indian context.

Furthermore, one-way ANOVA confirmed a clear difference in resilience across teaching-experience groups as shown in table 3. Teachers with 16–20 years and 21+ years of experience reported much higher resilience than those with 3–5, 6–10, or 11–15 years of experience. This supports the idea that resilience develops over time as teachers gain more practice managing classroom demands and navigating challenges. Previous studies also suggest that experienced teachers build stronger coping skills, emotional regulation, and confidence through long-term exposure to the profession (Gu & Day, 2013; Beltman et al., 2011). These findings also align with Gu and Day (2007), who showed that teacher resilience develops over time through evolving personal efficacy, professional identity, and supportive school contexts. Their longitudinal work reinforces how experience and workplace conditions together shape sustained resilience.

In contrast, early-career teachers often face higher stress and uncertainty, which may explain their lower resilience levels (Hong, 2012). The lack of difference between the 16–20 and 21+ year groups suggests that resilience reaches a stable level after a certain amount of experience. Overall, these results support the hypothesis that teaching experience contributes to stronger resilience and highlight the significance of assisting and training for teachers in the early stages of their careers.

Gender, Marital Status, and Type of School:

In contrast, no significant differences were observed in resilience scores across **gender, marital status, or type of school**. This indicates that resilience may not be strongly influenced by these demographic characteristics, but rather by professional and developmental factors such as age and teaching experience. These findings differ from Barnová et al. (2024), who reported gendered patterns in resilience—female teachers tended to use relational and emotionally oriented coping, whereas male teachers relied more on problem-focused strategies. This suggests that gendered coping styles may vary across cultural contexts.

INSIGHTS FROM QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The qualitative phase of the study provided deeper insight into how resilient teachers sustain their strength in daily practice. Two major themes emerged: (Theme 1- Support systems aid resilience) and (Theme 2- Patience built through experience), highlighting the role of support systems and patience in being resilient. Both themes align strongly with established resilience theory, particularly Masten’s (2001) conceptualization of resilience as “ordinary magic,” arising from everyday adaptive systems rather than extraordinary traits.



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Theme 1: Support Systems Aid Resilience

Teachers consistently described family support, collegial encouragement, and a positive school climate as central to maintaining their resilience. These findings closely reflect Masten's (2001) assertion that relationships with caring and competent adults form the most powerful adaptive system underlying resilience. In line with this, the teachers in this study appeared to draw strength from relational resources—whether in the form of supportive family members who help them decompress, colleagues who provide understanding and shared problem-solving, or administrators who cultivate a respectful environment.

Masten argues that resilience emerges from ordinary but robust systems, including attachment relationships, caregiving environments, and wider community networks. Teachers' experiences echo this principle: their emotional strength was not portrayed as individual invulnerability, but as a product of stable relational support that reduced the impact of daily stressors. The findings reinforce the broader resilience literature showing that supportive social networks enhance coping, reduce emotional exhaustion, and protect teachers from burnout. Thus, consistent with Masten's ordinary adaptive systems, resilience among teachers is sustained by the presence of meaningful, dependable relationships, which act as protective factors in a demanding profession.

Theme 2: Patience Built Through Experience

Teachers described patience as a skill that strengthened with time, professional exposure, and repeated engagement with challenging situations. This developmental perspective is strongly aligned with Masten's (2001) emphasis on self-regulation, problem-solving, and executive functioning as core internal systems that underlie resilience. According to Masten, these skills are learned, refined, and strengthened through normal developmental processes and exposure to challenges aligning with the teachers' narratives. As teachers accumulate experience—handling diverse learners, navigating conflicts, managing classroom stress—they develop better emotional regulation and more adaptive responses. This mirrors Masten's view of resilience as a developmental process shaped over time through everyday challenges, not through extraordinary circumstances. This also aligns with Lewis (1999), who highlighted that classroom discipline challenges are a major source of teacher stress, particularly for those prioritizing pupil empowerment. Such demanding situations require patience and emotional regulation, which Teachers' descriptions of becoming "more patient with experience" in the present study highlight how exposure paired with reflection strengthens their adaptive functioning.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings suggest that schools and administrators should strengthen supportive work environments, as relational support plays a key role in teacher resilience. Training programs may include basic modules on emotional regulation and stress-management, especially for early-career teachers who showed lower resilience. Counselors and mental-health practitioners can offer short, skills-based workshops to help teachers manage emotional demands. At the policy level, integrating teacher well-being and resilience-building elements into professional development frameworks may help sustain long-term teacher effectiveness.

LIMITATIONS

The study has certain constraints. The sample of 113 school teachers, drawn from similar cultural backgrounds, limits the generalizability of the findings, a more geographically and institutionally diverse sample would enhance external validity. Additionally, reliance on self-report instruments raises the possibility of response bias such as socially desirable answering patterns or subjective misjudgment. The cross-sectional design captures resilience at a single point in time, restricting causal interpretations and limiting insight into changes over time. Important variables such as personality traits, social support,



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income level, and workload were not examined, which may have provided deeper understanding. The qualitative component included only four participants, reducing the breadth of perspectives and potentially limiting open discussion of sensitive experiences.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Future research can build on the findings of the present study in several ways. First, a broader and more heterogeneous samples across different regions and institutional settings in India to strengthen generalizability. Second, employing a longitudinal design could provide deeper insights into how resilience evolves throughout different stages of a teacher’s career, rather than being limited to a single point in time. Third, incorporating additional variables such as personality traits, school environment, and workload to construct a more multidimensional understanding of resilience. Moreover, mixed-method approaches with more extensive qualitative interviews could uncover detailed experiences of teachers that may not be captured through self-report scales alone.

In conclusion, the present study adds to the growing body of literature on resilience of teachers by highlighting the overall moderate to high levels of resilience among school teachers in the Indian context and by identifying significant associations with age and teaching experience. Importantly, the study revealed that resilience appears to develop with professional maturity and years of service, while demographic factors such as gender, marital status, school type do not play a significant role. Thus underscoring that resilience is a developmental process shaped more by professional experiences than static demographic characteristics. The study emphasizes the importance of targeted interventions, supportive policies, and professional development programs that strengthen resilience, especially among young and less experienced teachers. Ultimately, enhancing resilience is effective for teachers’ personal well-being and for sustaining the quality of education and fostering positive student outcomes.

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