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STRESSORS AND COPING STRATEGIES AMONG PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS DURING TEACHING PRACTICE

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Abstract. Teaching practice is a critical stage of initial teacher education because it provides pre-service teachers with an opportunity to transfer theoretical knowledge into real classroom contexts. At the same time, this period is frequently accompanied by various academic, professional, emotional, interpersonal, and organizational stressors. The present article examines the major stressors experienced by pre-service teachers during teaching practice and analyzes the coping strategies they employ to manage these challenges. The study is based on a theoretical and analytical review of contemporary research on pre-service teacher stress, coping, resilience, and teaching practicum. Particular attention is given to classroom management difficulties, workload, lack of teaching resources, assessment-related anxiety, mentor relationships, professional self-efficacy, and communication with students and school staff. The analysis indicates that pre-service teachers employ both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies.

Keywords: pre-service teachers, teaching practice, teaching practicum, stressors, coping strategies, stress resilience, classroom management, mentor support, teacher education, psychological well-being.

Introduction. Teaching practice represents one of the most important stages in the professional development of future teachers. During this period, pre-service teachers move from university-based theoretical learning to direct participation in school life and classroom instruction. They are expected to plan lessons, communicate with students, manage classroom behavior, assess learning outcomes, cooperate with experienced teachers, and demonstrate professional competence.

Although teaching practice creates valuable opportunities for professional growth, it may also become a significant source of psychological stress. Pre-service teachers often encounter situations for which their theoretical preparation does not fully prepare them. These may include classroom discipline problems, large numbers of students, limited teaching materials, time pressure, lesson-planning difficulties, assessment requirements, relationships with mentors, and fear of negative evaluation.

A recent systematic review of 19 studies on pre-service teachers during teaching practice identified insufficient resources, classroom management, workload, mentorship problems, cultural and linguistic diversity, evaluation-related anxiety, and self-efficacy challenges among the major stressors. The same review showed that pre-service teachers use both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies to respond to these challenges.

The academic dimension of stress should also be considered. A 2026 systematic review of initial teacher education identified academic stressors and coping strategies as important areas of research and connected them with self-regulated learning, time management, motivation, behavior, and the social environment of pre-service teachers.

Therefore, understanding the sources of stress during teaching practice and the strategies used to manage them is important for improving teacher preparation programs. The purpose of this article is to analyze the principal stressors experienced by pre-service teachers during teaching practice and identify the coping strategies that can support their psychological well-being and professional development.

Teaching practice as a source of professional stress. Teaching practice involves a transition from the relatively controlled environment of university education to the complex and unpredictable environment of school classrooms. This transition may produce discrepancies between pre-service teachers' expectations and actual professional experiences.

Pre-service teachers may enter schools with adequate theoretical knowledge but limited practical experience. Consequently, they may experience uncertainty when dealing with unexpected student behavior, classroom conflicts, diverse learning needs, or time limitations.

Recent research emphasizes that teaching practice should not be considered solely as an opportunity for acquiring practical teaching skills. It is also an important psychological adaptation period during which future teachers develop professional identity, self-efficacy, emotional regulation, and resilience. A 2026 systematic review specifically describes teaching practicum as a critical transition between theoretical preparation and practical teaching experience.

Major stressors during teaching practice. The literature allows several major categories of practicum-related stressors to be identified.

Classroom management is one of the most frequently reported challenges for pre-service teachers. Future teachers may have difficulties maintaining discipline, managing disruptive behavior, organizing classroom activities, and responding to individual differences among students.

The problem is often intensified by the lack of previous classroom experience. A situation that an experienced teacher can resolve automatically may be perceived by a pre-service teacher as highly stressful.

Teaching practice requires simultaneous completion of multiple tasks. Pre-service teachers must prepare lesson plans, develop teaching materials, conduct lessons, assess students, complete university assignments, maintain documentation, and reflect on their teaching.

The combination of academic and professional responsibilities may result in time pressure and emotional exhaustion. Research on initial teacher education similarly identifies academic workload, time management, and self-regulated learning as important dimensions of student stress.

Insufficient teaching materials, technological limitations, inadequate classroom facilities, and limited access to educational resources may create additional difficulties.

Mentorship represents an important resource for pre-service teachers. However, inconsistent guidance, limited feedback, unclear expectations, or excessive evaluation pressure may become sources of stress. The quality of mentor support can influence how pre-service teachers perceive their professional competence. Supportive mentoring can provide psychological security, whereas inadequate supervision may increase uncertainty and anxiety.

Teaching practice frequently involves observation and evaluation by university supervisors and school mentors. Pre-service teachers may worry about making mistakes, receiving negative feedback, or failing to demonstrate sufficient professional competence.

Evaluation-related anxiety may influence classroom behavior and reduce confidence, particularly during the early stages of teaching practice.

Professional self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform specific tasks. Low self-efficacy may cause pre-service teachers to perceive ordinary classroom challenges as more threatening.

Conversely, successful teaching experiences, constructive feedback, and effective mentoring may strengthen professional self-efficacy and consequently reduce perceived stress. Teaching requires continuous interaction with students, colleagues, parents, mentors, and school administrators. Difficulties in communication can therefore become an additional source of stress. Pre-service teachers may be especially vulnerable because they are still developing professional communication skills and learning how to establish appropriate teacher-student relationships.

Theoretical framework. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping developed by Lazarus and Folkman provides an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding stress during teaching practice.

According to this model, stress is not determined exclusively by an external event. Rather, stress develops through the interaction between the individual and the environment and depends on how the individual appraises a particular situation and evaluates available coping resources.

The process can be represented as:

Teaching Practice Stressor → Primary Appraisal → Secondary Appraisal → Coping Strategy → Psychological Outcome

During primary appraisal, a pre-service teacher evaluates whether a particular situation represents a threat, challenge, or potentially manageable demand.

During secondary appraisal, the student evaluates available resources, such as knowledge, skills, mentor support, peer support, time, teaching materials, and emotional resources.

The individual then selects coping strategies.

This model is particularly relevant to teaching practice because the same situation may produce different psychological responses in different pre-service teachers. For example, a difficult classroom may be interpreted by one student as an opportunity to develop classroom management skills, while another may perceive the same situation as evidence of professional inadequacy.

Results and discussion. The literature analysis suggests that teaching-practice stressors can be grouped into five major categories:

Category	Examples of stressors
Professional	Classroom management, lesson planning, assessment
Academic	Assignments, examinations, university requirements
Organizational	Workload, time pressure, documentation
Interpersonal	Mentor relationships, student behavior, peer relationships
Environmental	Lack of resources, large classes, technological limitations

These categories are interconnected. For example, lack of teaching resources may increase lesson-planning difficulties, which can increase time pressure and reduce professional self-efficacy.

Problem-focused coping strategies. Problem-focused coping involves direct efforts to address the source of stress.

For pre-service teachers, these strategies may include:

- modifying lesson plans;
- asking mentors for feedback;
- consulting experienced teachers;
- collaborating with peers;

- searching for additional teaching materials;
- using digital educational resources;
- improving classroom management techniques;
- practicing lessons in advance;
- organizing time more effectively;
- identifying specific solutions to classroom problems.

The 2026 systematic review found that pre-service teachers frequently use improvisation, collaboration, feedback-seeking, technology, and reflective practices to manage practicum-related challenges.

Problem-focused coping is particularly useful when the stressor can be changed or controlled. For example, if a pre-service teacher experiences difficulty preparing a lesson, seeking advice and revising the lesson plan may directly reduce the source of stress.

Emotion-focused coping aims primarily to regulate emotional responses rather than directly eliminate the stressor.

Relevant strategies include:

- emotional self-regulation;
- mindfulness;
- reflective writing;
- relaxation exercises;
- peer discussion;
- seeking emotional support;
- positive self-talk;
- temporary psychological distancing;
- spiritual or meaning-oriented coping.

The reviewed literature indicates that emotion-focused strategies may be particularly important when stressors cannot be immediately changed, such as institutional limitations or unavoidable evaluation requirements.

However, emotion-focused coping should not necessarily be interpreted as avoidance. Adaptive emotional regulation can allow pre-service teachers to reduce excessive emotional arousal and subsequently return to problem-solving.

Social support represents one of the most important protective resources available to pre-service teachers.

Support may come from:

- university supervisors;
- school mentors;
- fellow student teachers;
- classmates;
- family members;
- professional communities.

Supportive relationships can provide practical information, emotional reassurance, feedback, and opportunities for shared problem solving.

The literature indicates that the availability of mentors and peer networks influences how pre-service teachers evaluate their coping resources during teaching practice.

Therefore, teacher education institutions should not view teaching practice as an individual responsibility. A coordinated support system involving universities and partner schools is necessary.

Effective coping can contribute to the development of stress resilience.

The relationship can be represented as:

Stressors → Appraisal → Coping → Adaptation → Resilience

Resilience in this context includes:

- improved professional self-efficacy;
- emotional stability;
- greater confidence;
- adaptive classroom behavior;
- professional reflection;
- persistence in challenging situations;
- improved problem-solving ability.

The recent systematic review found that coping strategies used during teaching practice can contribute to resilience outcomes such as self-efficacy, emotional well-being, and intrapersonal resilience.

Implications for teacher education. The findings have several implications for teacher education institutions.

First, stress management should become an integrated component of teaching practice preparation rather than an optional psychological activity.

Second, pre-service teachers should receive practical preparation in classroom management, communication, conflict resolution, time management, and emotional regulation before entering schools.

Third, mentor teachers should be prepared to provide constructive feedback and psychological support rather than focusing exclusively on evaluation.

Fourth, universities should establish regular reflection sessions in which pre-service teachers discuss difficult classroom experiences and identify effective coping strategies.

Fifth, digital resources can be used to support teaching preparation and reduce some forms of uncertainty. However, technology cannot substitute for effective mentorship and interpersonal support.

Conclusion. Teaching practice is a professionally valuable but psychologically demanding stage of teacher education. Pre-service teachers may experience stress associated with classroom management, workload, time pressure, limited resources, evaluation, mentor relationships, communication difficulties, and professional self-efficacy.

The literature demonstrates that pre-service teachers employ both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. Problem-focused strategies include lesson adaptation, feedback-seeking, collaboration, technological support, and classroom problem solving. Emotion-focused strategies include reflection, mindfulness, emotional regulation, peer support, and other psychological self-regulation techniques.

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