



BREAKING SILENCE OF PIN-DROP-SILENCE: RESEARCH TREND ON ACADEMIC STRESS OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

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Abstract

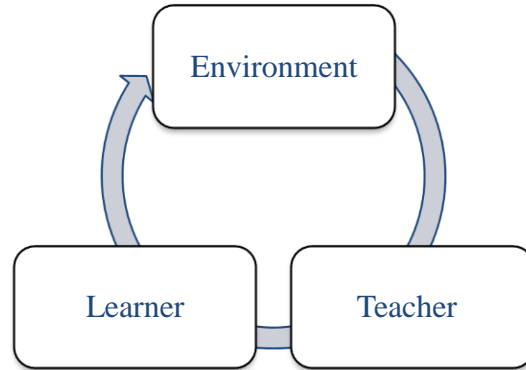
Teacher education as a discipline has emerged in the last few decades. Teacher education consisted of pre-service and in-service teacher education. Pre-service teacher education being specific programmes of study comes with its own set of challenges to overcome. One of the challenges in this direction include academic stress. There have been several studies conducted on the academic stress of candidate teachers throughout the world on different dimensions and themes. The present study aims to analyse the research trend on the themes of academic stress conducted on pre-service teachers. The analysis comprised of 17 manuscripts compiled from peer reviewed and UGC CARE listed journals along with studies derived from the database of Scopus and Web of Science. The study identified eleven potential research themes of academic stress which are already conducted in the field of pre-service teacher education. Out of the eleven research themes, the researcher asserted few emerging sections like personality, intelligence, wellbeing to carry utmost significance in the contemporary time. The study concluded with providing some implications for teacher educators based on the recommendations received from the studies considered in the trend analysis.

Keywords: *Academic Stress, Pre-service Teacher Education, Research Trend, Teacher Training*

Background

Education is the heart of all disciplines and knowledge. It has a key role in shaping the backbone of the country. The education of a human being is, perhaps, the most cherished goal of any human civilization that ever existed or is yet to come in this world.

The educational process is often considered a tripolar process. The three factors contributing to education are Student, Teacher, and Educational Environment. The complex interplay between these 3 factors has a key role in ensuring educational success. Malfunction of one can lead to the failure of the educational process as a whole. The teacher and learner both are influenced by the educational environment.



According to the International Encyclopaedia of Teaching and Teacher education (1987), Teacher education can be considered in three phases: Pre-service, Induction and In-service. The three phases are considered as parts of a continuous process. According to the National Council for Teacher Education (Recognition Norms and Procedure) Regulations, 2014, the pre-service teacher education comprises robust training and classes, based on theoretical sections including perspective courses, pedagogical courses, engagement with the field cum practicum, and school internship (Part-III, Sec-4, Gazette of India: Extraordinary, 2014). These came as per the recommendation of National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education, 2009 which not only abolished the 1-year pre-service teacher education programmes but also made it more comprehensive and complex with providing the opportunities to the pre-service teachers to get their training in a meaningful manner (Srilatha, 2016; Swain & Mishra, 2022). The school internship component itself can serve as the cornerstone of experiences, optimising the learning that preservice teachers gain and helping to shape them into perceptive, thoughtful professionals who represent the future hope of a nation that must make the most use of its human resource base (Kohli, 2017).

However, this curricular reform has posed several challenges in front of the teacher educators and the pre-teachers. Which included issues in implementation of curricular activities, lack of proper facilities, unfavourable experiences in internship programmes etc (Khan, 2017). These issues lead to the uneasiness posed by issues in evaluation, academic results, teachers and peers, competitiveness, academic burden etc. among the pupil-teachers (Berrio & Mazo, 2011). This simply deteriorates the mental health of the pupil-teachers. Mental

health has a significant impact on the academic stress of the individual (Olivera et al., 2023, Gahlawat, 2016). The origin of stress due to these overburdened curricula is one of the common factors visible in the pre-service teachers due to their first-time exposure to the field of education and new learning experiences.

Stress is a popular and flexible term, commonly used in lay discourse. It is difficult to define with any precision as it is a contested concept with a wide range of possible meanings and a variety of evolving explanations. However, the traditional definition of stress is the inability to meet demands at work (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1977). This term is partly used to refer to the amount of pressure or strain placed on an individual by the external physical and social environment (the stressor). It also refers to the way in which we respond to any increase in pressure from the environment (the stress response). Biologically speaking, when the human body is exposed to extra pressure it responds through flight or fight’.

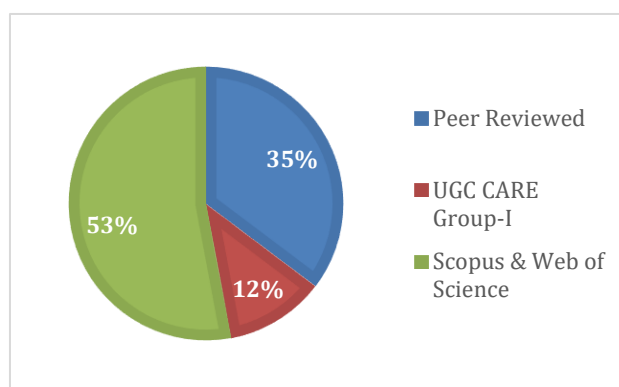
Academic stress is characterised as an emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and physiological response to academic events and stimuli (Berrio & Mazo, 2011). It refers to the pressure and strain experienced by students in relation to their academic pursuits. It is a type of stress that arises from the demands and expectations placed upon students in their educational environments. The purpose of this review is to identify the problems of pre-service teacher trainees with reference to academic stress and the implications for teacher educators to curtail the academic stress of the trainees. The majority of aspiring teachers had a moderate level of self-esteem, and the most prevalent type of intrapersonal/self-stress was seen in them (Aung, 2018).

The dimensions of academic stress include, time management (Vijayalaxmi, 2019), academic related issues (Chandra & Reddy, 2014; Balakrishnan, Bahari & Paul, 2017; Qin et al., 2022), personal factors (Bahubali, Shailaja & Vardhini, 2020), teacher related issues (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009), practising teaching related issues (Gustems-Carnicer, Calderón, & Calderón-Garrido, 2019), and environmental factors (Bahubali, Shailaja & Vardhini, 2020; Mishra & Choudhuri, 2020; Aung, 2018), workload (Qin et al., 2022) etc.

Academic stress and pre-service teacher education is the area which is still unexplored on various arrays despite having much significance in the wellbeing of the candidate teacher who will ultimately shape the future of the society. Keeping the holistic development and wellbeing of pre-teachers, this paper attempts to analyse the research conducted on academic stress among preservice teachers, vital for their well-being and the education system’s future.

This manuscript also identifies different themes on which the studies are conducted on academic stress and teachers issues prior entering into the service. This paper also includes various implications for teacher educators focusing on preservice teachers' mental health and professional development, ultimately benefiting the entire education community.

Data Sources: To conduct this analysis on academic stress in pre-service teachers, manuscripts were collected from databases like Taylor and Francis, Elsevier, Scopus, ERIC, Jstor, and Google Scholar. Apart from this, some peer reviewed manuscripts were collected from the database of UGC CARE and Indianjournals.com. The manuscripts were collected to identify the gap of research in the concerned area and the evolution of trends in the research concerning academic stress among pre-service teachers in their academic phase.



Out of the total of 17 articles being considered in this analysis, 2 articles were published in UGC CARE listed journals, 6 articles were published in peer reviewed journals covering the aspects of Indian studies. On the other hand, 9 scholarly articles were collected from the database of Scopus and Web of Science.

Academic Stress- Indian Context

Chandra & Reddy (2014) investigated the effect of mental health on study habits, teaching aptitude and academic stress among the prospective teachers. The study revealed that prospective teachers who exhibit strong study habits, a positive teaching attitude and experience high levels of academic stress tend to have better mental health compared to those with weak study habits, a negative teaching attitude and low levels of academic stress.

Deb et al. (2014) studied on stress among private school students in India. The purpose of this study was to examine the prevalence of academic stress and exam anxiety among private school students in India as well as the associations with socio-economic and study-related factors. All students reported high levels of academic stress, but those who had lower grades reported higher levels of stress than those with higher grades.

Balakrishnan, Bahari & Paul (2017) in their study identified that pre-service teachers' academic distress to be inversely proportional to smoking and physical exercise. The study highlighted the importance of daily Aerobic practice. Additionally, they claimed that aerobic exercise helps encourage restful sleep, which is frequently disturbed by stress and anxiety. It can help by reducing stress and granting you a sense of mastery over your body and mind.

Sharma (2018) in his study on academic stress of D.El.Ed. students, identified stressors as too many assignments, competition with other students, failures, lack of pocket money (Fairbrother and Warn, 2003 as cited in Sharma, 2018), and poor relationships with other students or lecturers and family problems at home. Institutional level stresses are overcrowded lecture halls, semester system, and inadequate resources to perform academic work. Stress and its manifestations, such as anxiety, depression, and burnout, are always a common problem among people in different professions and occupations.

Gopal (2020) assessed the ability of coping academic stress among student teachers and also compared it among the male and female student teachers at secondary school level. The study highlights the significance of utilising adaptive strategies to respond positively to persistent and intense academic stress. Findings reveal that there is no notable disparity in coping abilities between male and female student teachers, with an overall moderate level of coping observed. It underscores the importance of offering guidance and counselling to student teachers from multiple sources, including parents, teachers, and experts.

Prabha & Vasanthpriyadharsan (2020) in their study aimed to analyse the level of stress among the prospective teachers with respect to their background variables like gender, locality, marital status, type of family, age group, type of management and monthly income of the family. The result of the study indicated that the prospective teachers stress differs in terms of sex, marital status, and type of management. They also concluded that understanding one's stress level is crucial for achieving overall wellbeing.

Prasanna & Thiyaagu (2021) in their study determined the perception of pre-service teachers towards virtual internships. One of the dimensions in the research tool developed by the researcher was "Virtual internship reduces stress and anxiety". The researchers' data indicated that virtual internship is stressful for the pre-service teachers in case of technical problems. The researchers claimed that more stress decreases the confidence of the pre-service teachers during their practice teaching. The researchers also recommended on conducting in-depth studies on the identification of stressful factors of virtual internships.

Kalita & Gayary (2023) in their study highlighted on the B.Ed. interns and their awareness on inclusive education. One of their findings revealed that main concerns of teacher trainees included increased workload and stress as a major factor towards inclusive education. Additionally, the researchers highlighted on making courses of teacher training more inclusive in all its components in order to impart stress free education in an inclusive classroom.

Academic Stress- Global Context

Head (1996) in his study described a case study of one cohort of student teachers taking a postgraduate teacher training course in a British University. It examines the degree to which students are likely to self-report levels of stress. The stress experienced by the students and the effects this has on their physical and emotional health and their performance in school reported. The paper charted the (healthy and unhealthy) coping strategies employed by the students. *Tait (2008)* affirmed that the teacher trainees face issues like burnout, depression ultimately resulting in dropping out from the teacher education programme. The article suggested that school boards, individual schools, and education departments all have a part to play in assisting new teachers in developing the resilience, effectiveness, and commitment to teaching as a career. This theoretical analysis also recommended making measures of resilience as an indicator for admission into the teacher education programme to identify the successful teachers of the future. Along with this, the researcher also addressed making training of resilience as an inherent part of the curriculum of the programme.

According to *Fantilli & McDougall (2009)*, it has been reported that an alarming number of teachers are leaving the profession in the first three years after graduation from a pre-service program. This phenomenon is common in North America, and it is essential that educators identify the challenges surrounding new teachers and provide support to assist them. The study found administrative leadership, refining the mentorship selection process, hiring practices, and district sponsored supports as positive factors necessary for them to grow into the profession.

Csaszar, Curry & Lastrapes (2018) worked on identifying the effect of LKM (Loving Kindness Meditation) on coping pre-service teachers' stress levels. Their study asserted that the pre-service teachers are often under much stress with least knowledge of stress management skills. The experimental study was based on providing LKM to the two groups with different time limits. The sessions were taken on propagating the effect of meditation on reducing stress. Their study concluded that the level of stress was reportedly low on the candidates who practised LKM compared to the control group. The results also reported higher levels of

empathy among the candidate teachers. Hence, LKM was a useful tool in reducing the stress level among the pre-service teachers of the States.

Gustems-Carnicer, Calderón, & Calderón-Garrido (2019) examined stress in teacher education students and had three objectives: to describe different degrees of stress and coping styles; to study the relationship between stress, coping strategies and academic achievement; and to examine whether increased age can moderate the effects of stress on academic achievement. There were three main findings: many students experienced stress and used avoidance coping strategies; the students who were under less stress and engaged less in cognitive avoidance and more in problem-focused coping were also the students who made more academic achievement; and students under more stress performed worse, but with age stress affected performance less. In teacher education students, it is important to recognize and address the harmful effects of stress on well-being and academic achievement, to avoid long-term problems in professional and personal life.

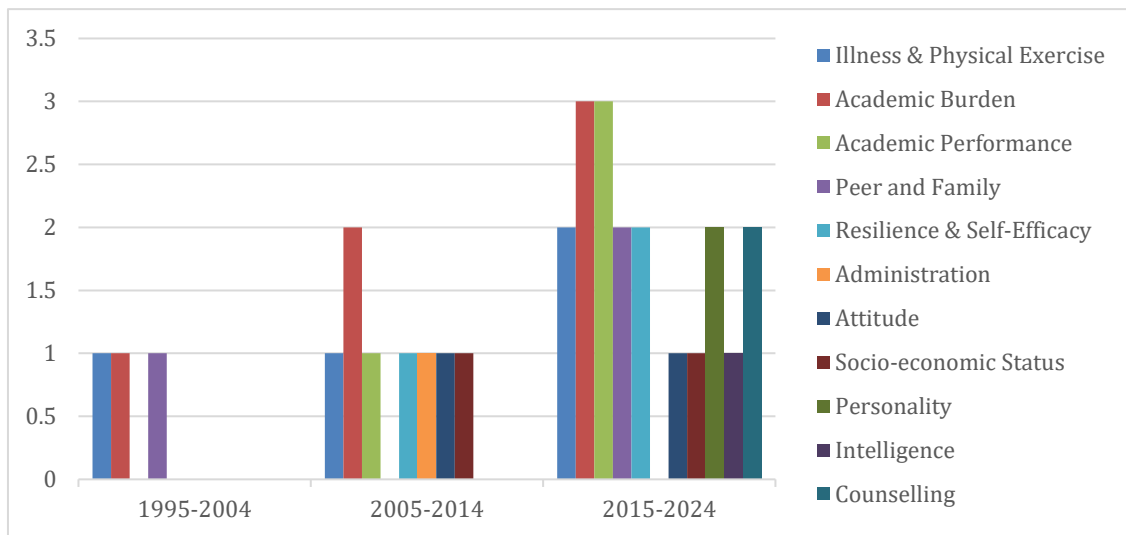
Braun (2020) in his study investigated stress-inducing cognitions of teacher trainees from different types of schools in Germany in order to identify a particular body of future teachers who lack appropriate coping strategies. The study concluded that higher stress-inducing thoughts were linked to lower self-efficacy – with the exception of perfectionism which seemed to have adaptive or maladaptive effects.

García-Martínez, et al. (2021) in their study aimed to analyse the academic stress of pre-service teachers according to their self-concept and personality. The results of the study indicated that as the studies progress, academic stress and self-concept become inversely proportional. The study also revealed that the pre-service teachers possess high academic stress during their training phase which may have an impact on their academic performance and classroom teaching skills in their coming time. They concluded their study on the fact that the academic stress experienced by aspiring teachers is significantly influenced by social-emotional factors and neuroticism.

Qin et al. (2022) conducted their study of academic burnout in China. Their study indicated that perfectionism, excessive self-efficacy, and workload being the main indicators of academic stress and burnout among the pre-service teachers. The study claimed that Chinese pre-service mathematics teachers feel incapable of finishing tasks, lack interest in learning, and find tests and assignments challenging. They may also experience stress, burnout, and a lack of empathy. Study-related stress and burnout result in subpar learning results, absenteeism from class, and low learning accomplishment.

Saw & Han (2022) stated that studying successful intelligence and personality traits that influence academic achievement helps to realise the underlying abilities of students with high intelligence in teacher education programmes who have low academic achievement. Factors that do not influence academic achievement are probably important factors for life success. He also opined that teacher education exams do not encourage creative and practical intelligence. Students who are interested in social affairs have low academic achievement; however, they are likely to become successful due to their social ability.

Trend Analysis



The researchers identified possible areas of investigation in academic stress of pupil teachers conducted throughout the time frame of 1995 till present. The possible themes of academic stress identified include illness and physical exercise (Head, 1996; Tait, 2008; Balakrishnan, Bahari & Paul, 2017), academic burden (Head, 1996; Tait, 2008; Chandra & Reddy, 2014; Sharma, 2018; García-Martínez et al., 2021; Qin et al., 2022), academic performance (Deb et al., 2014; Gustems-Carnicer, Calderón, & Calderón-Garrido, 2019; García-Martínez et al., 2021; Qin et al., 2022), peer and family (Head, 1996; Sharma, 2018; Gopal, 2020), resilience and self-efficacy (Tait, 2008; Braun, 2020; Qin et al., 2022), administrative support (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009), attitude (Chandra & Reddy, 2014; Csaszar, Curry & Lastrapes, 2018), socio-economic status (Deb et al., 2014; Sharma, 2018), personality (García-Martínez et al., 2021; Saw & Han, 2022), intelligence (Saw & Han, 2022), and guidance & counselling (Gopal, 2020; Prabha & Vasanthapriyadarsan, 2020).

The analysis revealed that majority of the study conducted on academic stress of teacher trainees were based on academic burden, academic performance and peer and family interaction. In the last decade few themes of research studies on academic stress of candidate teacher have emerged which included personality, intelligence, and guidance & counselling.

Implications for Teacher Educators: Teacher educators, who play a critical role in preparing future teachers, are affected by student academic stress. By identifying and managing academic stress, teachers can better equip their students with the knowledge and skills that they need to support their well-being. A few of the implications identified from the available literature are as follows,

1. **Knowledge of stress management-** Teacher educators should make sure that their students are aware of academic stress, its origins, and how it affects their learning and wellbeing through mentoring and detailed feedback (Braun, Weiss & Kiel, 2020). They can offer instruction and materials on stress-reduction techniques that instructors can use in the classroom.
2. **Stressing student-centred approaches-** Teacher educators should advocate for teaching strategies that place an emphasis on the needs and assets of each individual student. Future educators can aid in lowering academic stress and fostering good mental health by fostering inclusive, supportive learning environments, communication skills (Bahubali, Shailaja, & Vardhini, 2020).
3. **Teaching methods for stress reduction-** Programmes for teacher educators might include methods for reducing stress, such as mindfulness exercises (Csaszar, Curry & Lastrapes, 2018), relaxation techniques, and self-care routines. These methods can assist aspiring educators in strengthening their own resilience and successfully assisting learners in stress management (Tait, 2008).
4. **Promoting student motivation and engagement-** Teacher educators can place a strong emphasis on teaching methods that improve student motivation and engagement. Academic stress can be reduced, and a pleasant learning environment can be fostered when students are actively engaged in their education and see the relevance of what they are learning (Mishra & Choudhuri, 2020).
5. **Collaboration with other professionals-** To effectively handle academic stress, teacher educators can work with counsellors, mental health specialists, and school administrators (Gopal, 2020). Working together, they can create plans and solutions that promote student motivation and engagement: Teacher educators can place a strong emphasis on teaching methods that improve student motivation and engagement. Academic stress can be reduced, and a pleasant learning environment can be fostered when students are actively engaged in their education and see the relevance of what they are learning.

6. **Fostering teacher empathy and support-** Teacher educators can stress the significance of understanding and empathy in interactions with students (Csaszar, Curry & Lastrapes, 2018). Future educators may establish a safe environment for students to express their worries and lessen academic stress by advising them to develop close relationships with their students and offer emotional support (Sharma, 2018).

Conclusion

This article has delved into the intricate dynamics of academic stress within preservice teacher education. Through an exploration of various dimensions and a review of both Indian and global contexts, the researchers have illuminated the pervasive nature of academic stress and its impact on aspiring educators. By fostering teacher empathy and support, collaborating with other professionals, and advocating for student-centred approaches, teacher educators can play a pivotal role in creating supportive learning environments that prioritise both student well-being and academic achievement. In the direction of curtailing the issue of academic stress, teacher educators have the opportunity to shape the attitudes and practices of future teachers. By equipping them with knowledge, skills, and strategies to address academic stress, teacher educators can contribute to creating supportive learning environments that prioritise student well-being and academic achievement.

In essence, tackling academic stress requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders involved in teacher education. By working together, we can empower preservice teachers to thrive in their academic pursuits and contribute positively to the education profession.

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