

Life Skills and Teaching Performance of Prospective Teachers: A Survey Study with a Focus on Stress Management

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Abstract: Teaching is a unique profession that goes beyond simply sharing knowledge; it involves a combination of expertise in a subject, effective teaching methods, and a range of important life skills to succeed in the classroom. This study is designed to delve into the connection between these life skills and the effectiveness of future teachers, with a specific emphasis on their ability to manage stress. The study employed a normative survey method, utilizing simple random sampling technique to collect data from 300 prospective teachers from four teacher education colleges located in and around Karaikudi, Sivagangai district, Tamil Nadu, India, through standardized tools: the Teaching Performance Scale (TP-S) and the Stress Management Scale (SM-S) constructed and validated by the researcher. Descriptive, differential and correlation statistical analysis were used to analyze the collected data. The findings revealed that gender, locality, and type of institution influence both teaching performance and stress management to varying degrees, while a strong positive correlation between stress management and teaching performance confirms the interdependence of psychological resilience and professional effectiveness.

Key words: life skills, teaching performance, stress management, prospective teachers, teacher education.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Life Skills

Life skills are broadly understood as psychosocial and interpersonal abilities that equip individuals to cope effectively with the everyday demands and challenges of life. The World Health Organization defines them as adaptive and constructive behaviors that support critical areas such as decision-making, problem-solving, creative and critical thinking, effective communication, building interpersonal relationships, self-awareness, empathy, and the regulation of emotions and stress. UNICEF extends this perspective by emphasizing the role of attitudes and socio-emotional competencies in enabling individuals to learn continuously, make informed choices, and contribute meaningfully to society. Recent studies highlight the growing importance of life skills education in enhancing socio-emotional growth, strengthening academic outcomes, fostering resilience, and promoting overall well-being, especially among adolescents and young adults (Balaji & Kapoor, 2025; Hvalby et al., 2024).

Prospective teachers require a constellation of life skills that facilitate not only classroom effectiveness but also psychological resilience in the face of stress. First, emotion regulation is consistently identified as vital: the ability to perceive, understand, and modulate one's emotions helps teachers reduce burnout and maintain well-being (Li, Shanshan, & Others, 2023; Tu, Rao, Jiang, & Dai, 2025). Second, resilience, construed as adaptive coping, bouncing back from

setbacks, and sustaining motivational integrity under pressure, is shown to mediate the effects of stress and support teaching efficacy and lower burnout (Li, 2023; Pozo-Rico, Poveda, Gutiérrez-Fresneda, Castejón, & Gilar-Corbi, 2023). Third, self-efficacy, particularly in instructional planning, classroom management, and belief in one's capacity to meet pedagogical demands, has been demonstrated to act as a protective factor against stress and reduce burnout when teachers perceive themselves as competent (Li, 2023; Pozo-Rico et al., 2023). Fourth, metacognitive skills (such as self-monitoring, reflection, planning) also appear to interweave with emotion regulation: interventions combining emotional awareness with metacognitive strategies enhance preservice teachers' regulation abilities and awareness of thinking about their instruction and emotional state (Gidalevich & Mirkin, 2024). Finally, interpersonal competencies such as communication, empathy, conflict-management, along with self-compassion or supportive self-talk, are emerging as important for co-regulation in teaching contexts, especially during stress-provoking or hybrid/online teaching situations (Chehayeb, Olszynska, & Bhuvaneshwara, 2025; Gavade, Sidotam, & Varanasi, 2023). Collectively, these life skills form a multidimensional framework by which prospective teachers can not only cope with stress but translate their coping and emotional resources into observable teaching performance.

II. STRESS MANAGEMENT

Stress management — understood here as the set of cognitive, behavioural and interpersonal strategies that reduce physiological arousal, limit maladaptive rumination, and restore coping capacity under teaching-related demands — is a core, trainable competency for prospective teachers that directly shapes their classroom functioning and professional longevity. Empirical trials show that structured, evidence-based programs reduce perceived stress and improve proximate mechanisms (problem-solving, emotion regulation, self-compassion) that explain those effects: a large Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) of standard Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for elementary teachers produced substantial reductions in perceived stress and gains in emotion regulation and self-compassion, with downstream benefits for teacher self-efficacy and classroom climate (Lensen et al., 2024). Web-based, indicated stress-management interventions tailored to beginning teachers similarly produced meaningful and sustained reductions in perceived stress while improving problem-solving and emotion-regulation skills that mediated change (Heckendorf & Lehr, 2025). Program evaluations delivered within teacher-education contexts demonstrate that brief, skills-focused emotion-regulation curricula increase coping self-efficacy among preservice teachers across cultural settings (Wang et al., 2025). Systematic and scoping reviews confirm that mindfulness-based interventions, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) -derived approaches, and skills-training (including rational-emotive and problem-solving methods) are the most frequently studied and generally effective strategies for reducing teacher stress and burnout, although variability in outcomes and measurement highlights the need for standardized, classroom-relevant endpoints (Agyapong et al., 2023). Together, these findings indicate that stress-management instruction delivered via in-person, blended, or web-based formats and targeting both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping is an empirically supported component to include in teacher preparation if the goal is to strengthen prospective teachers' resilience and observable teaching performance (Lensen et al., 2024; Heckendorf & Lehr, 2025; Wang et al., 2025; Agyapong et al., 2023).

III. OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the significant difference in teaching performance of prospective teachers with respect to gender, locality and type of college.
2. To find out the significant difference in stress management of prospective teachers with respect to gender, locality and type of college.
3. To find out the correlation between teaching performance and stress management among prospective teachers.

IV. HYPOTHESES

1. There is no significant difference between male and female prospective teachers in their teaching performance.
2. There is no significant difference between rural and urban prospective teachers in their teaching performance.
3. There is no significant difference between government and private college prospective teachers in their teaching performance.
4. There is no significant difference between male and female prospective teachers in their stress management.
5. There is no significant difference between rural and urban prospective teachers in their stress management.
6. There is no significant difference between government and private college prospective teachers in their stress management.
7. There is a no positive relationship between teaching performance and stress management among prospective teachers.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

"Life skills" broadly encompass those psychosocial competencies that enable individuals to adapt well to their environment, manage stress, relate effectively with others, and perform tasks competently (WHO, 1999). Among life skills, stress management and emotion regulation are repeatedly identified as critical. For prospective teachers, who are undergoing training, practicum, assessment pressures, and role transitions, both stressors and required life skills are heightened. Saġar (2021) examined emotion regulation skills and self-control in predicting resilience among teacher candidates. In a sample of 462 teacher education students, emotion regulation and self-control significantly predicted their resilience. This suggests that life skills (emotion regulation) are foundational for stress buffering among prospective teachers.

Li et al. (2022) found that emotion regulation and resilience reduce burnout among EFL teachers, which is known to correlate negatively with teaching effectiveness. A study on work-life balance among teachers in Zhengzhou, China, showed that stress mediates the relationship between resource loss and teacher effectiveness, and that emotional intelligence moderates this. Teachers with stronger emotional intelligence and better stress management (implicit in emotional intelligence) had better outcomes.

The relationship between life skills and teaching performance has gained increasing scholarly attention in recent years, particularly in the context of preparing prospective teachers to manage stress and enhance classroom effectiveness. Life skills such as resilience, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and problem-solving have been widely recognized as essential predictors of teacher competence and well-being. For

instance, Pozo-Rico et al. (2023) emphasized that resilience and emotional intelligence directly contribute to innovative teaching practices and classroom adaptability, positioning them as critical competencies for future educators. Similarly, Li (2023) reported that self-efficacy and resilience act as protective factors against burnout, thereby sustaining teaching performance under stress. Moreover, interventions that explicitly target emotion regulation and metacognitive awareness have been shown to enhance preservice teachers' coping capacity, suggesting that structured training in stress-management can improve not only psychological well-being but also instructional performance (Gidalevich & Mirkin, 2024).

The literature also highlights the mediating role of stress management in linking life skills to teaching effectiveness. Recent empirical studies demonstrate that when teachers engage in mindfulness-based stress reduction or web-based stress interventions, their levels of perceived stress decline significantly, accompanied by improvements in classroom self-efficacy and student outcomes (Lensen et al., 2024; Heckendorf & Lehr, 2025). Wang et al. (2025) found that emotion-regulation training increased coping self-efficacy among preservice teachers, enabling them to manage classroom stressors more effectively. Furthermore, scoping reviews confirm that cognitive-behavioral, mindfulness-based, and rational-emotive interventions remain the most effective frameworks for reducing stress and burnout among teachers (Agyapong et al., 2023). Collectively, these findings suggest that equipping prospective teachers with a broad repertoire of life skills, especially stress management, enhances both their professional resilience and their observable teaching performance.

VI. RESEARCH GAP

Despite growing recognition of the role of life skills in teacher education, there is a noticeable gap in research that systematically examines the relationship between stress management and teaching performance of prospective teachers across demographic and institutional variables. While prior studies have explored teaching performance or stress management separately, very few have compared how these dimensions vary with respect to gender, locality, and type of college, or investigated whether these factors significantly influence the acquisition and application of life skills. Similarly, the correlation between stress management and teaching performance remains underexplored, particularly in the context of prospective teachers who face unique challenges such as practicum pressures, assessment demands, and professional role transitions. Most existing studies either generalize findings without considering these contextual variables or neglect to integrate psychosocial competencies with teaching outcomes. This gap highlights the need for focused empirical

research that not only analyzes differences in teaching performance and stress management across subgroups but also investigates their interrelationship, thereby providing insights to strengthen teacher education programs in preparing resilient, adaptable, and effective future educators.

VII. METHODOLOGY

Sample

A total of 300 prospective teachers from four teacher education colleges located in and around Karaikudi, Sivagangai district, Tamil Nadu, India were selected as sample using simple random sampling technique.

Tools Used

1. Teaching Performance Scale (TP-S): Used to evaluate prospective teachers' effectiveness in the classroom.
2. Stress Management Scale (SM-S): Used to assess prospective teachers' abilities to manage stress.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the collected data once it had been methodically coded. The analytical processes were included.

- ✓ *Descriptive Statistics*: Mean and standard deviation to determine the levels of teaching performance and stress management.
- ✓ *Differential Analysis*: t-test to examine differences across demographic variables.
- ✓ *Correlation Analysis*: To investigate the relationship between teaching performance and stress management among prospective teachers.

VIII. DATA ANALYSIS

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between male and female prospective teachers in their teaching performance.

Table 1: Teaching performance level of male and female prospective teachers

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t - value	Level of Significance
Male	106	108.48	42.04	3.49	Significant at the level of 0.05
Female	194	91.96	33.27		

Table 1 indicates that the mean scores for male and female prospective teachers are 108.48 and 91.96, respectively, with standard deviations of 42.04 and 33.27. The calculated t-value of 3.49 exceeds the critical value of 1.96, which corresponds to the 0.05 level of significance with $df = 298$. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This concludes that there is a significant difference in teaching performance levels between male and female prospective teachers.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between rural and urban prospective teachers in their teaching performance.

Table: 2 Teaching performance level of rural and urban prospective teachers

Locality	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Level of Significance
Rural	126	96.98	30.01	1.67	Not Significant at the level of 0.05
Urban	174	96.78	36.17		

Table 2 indicates that the mean values for rural and urban prospective teachers are 96.98 and 96.78, respectively, with standard deviations of 30.01 and 36.17. The calculated 't' value is 1.67, which is below the critical value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance with $df = 298$. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This concludes that there is no significant difference in the teaching performance levels of rural and urban prospective teachers.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference between government and private college prospective teachers in their teaching performance.

Table: 3 Teaching performance level of government and private college prospective teachers

Type of Colleges	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Level of Significance
Private College	195	99.57	32.02	2.42	Significant at the level of 0.05
Govt. College	105	104.50	45.71		

Table 3 indicates that the mean scores for prospective teachers from government and private colleges are 99.57 and 104.50, respectively, with standard deviations of 32.02 and 45.71. The calculated 't' value of 2.42 exceeds the critical value of 1.96, which is significant at the 0.05 level with $df = 298$. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This concludes that there is a significant difference in the teaching performance levels between prospective teachers from government and private colleges.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference between male and female prospective teachers in their stress management.

Table 4: Stress management level of male and female prospective teachers

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Level of Significance
Male	110	115.04	46.04	4.38	Significant at the level of 0.05
Female	190	93.56	39.07		

Table 4 indicates that the mean stress management levels for male and female prospective teachers are 115.04 and 93.56, respectively, with standard deviations of 46.04 and 39.07. The calculated 't' value of 4.38 exceeds the critical table value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance, with $df = 298$. Therefore, the

null hypothesis is rejected. This concludes that there is a significant difference in stress management levels between male and female prospective teachers.

Hypothesis 5: There is no significant difference between rural and urban prospective teachers in their stress management.

Table: 5 Stress management level of rural and urban prospective teachers

Locality	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Level of Significance
Rural	138	106.05	42.68	2.79	Significant at the level of 0.05
Urban	162	109.68	36.17		

Table 5 indicates that the mean values for rural and urban prospective teachers are 106.05 and 109.68, respectively, with standard deviations of 42.68 and 36.17. The calculated t-value of 2.79 exceeds the critical value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance, with $df = 298$. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This leads to the conclusion that there is a significant difference in the stress management levels of rural and urban prospective teachers.

Hypothesis 6: There is no significant difference between government and private college prospective teachers in their stress management.

Table: 6 Stress management level of government and private college prospective teachers

Type of Colleges	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Level of Significance
Private College	165	118.21	39.56	1.23	Not Significant at the level of 0.05
Govt. College	135	118.35	41.23		

Table 6 indicates that the mean values for prospective teachers from government and private colleges are 118.21 and 118.35, respectively, with standard deviations of 39.56 and 41.23. The computed 't' value of 1.23 is less than the critical value of 1.96, which is associated with a significance level of 0.05 and $df = 298$. Consequently, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, it is concluded that there is no significant difference in stress management levels between prospective teachers from government and private colleges.

Hypothesis 7: There is a no positive relationship between teaching performance and stress management among prospective teachers.

Table7: Correlation between teaching performance on stress management among prospective teacher.

Variables	N	'r' Value	Level of Significance
Teaching Performance and Stress Management	300	.764	Significant at the level of 0.01

Table 7 illustrates that the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.764$) between teaching performance and stress management is significant at the 0.01 level. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected. This finding indicates a robust positive relationship between teaching performance and stress management among prospective teachers.

IX. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results for Hypothesis 1 show that male prospective teachers ($N = 106$, $M = 108.48$, $SD = 42.04$) scored significantly higher on teaching performance than female prospective teachers ($N = 194$, $M = 91.96$, $SD = 33.27$). The independent-samples t-test produced a t-value of 3.49, which exceeds the critical value at the 0.05 significance level for $df = 298$, allowing rejection of the null hypothesis. Thus, there is a significant gender difference in teaching performance, with males outperforming females in the sample. The results showing that male prospective teachers outperform female counterparts in teaching performance (Hypothesis 1) and show higher levels of stress management (Hypothesis 4) may appear counterintuitive to some literature. Many studies indicate that females report higher stress, but also that females often use more adaptive coping strategies (e.g., seeking social support) (Geng, Disney, Midford, & Buckworth, 2022). In contrast, the current findings suggest that the male group in this sample may have better average self-regulation or benefit from different institutional or social supports. Gender differences in both teaching performance and stress management may also reflect cultural, pedagogical, or assessment biases favoring traits more prevalent or encouraged in male candidates.

For Hypothesis 2, comparing rural ($N = 126$, $M = 96.98$, $SD = 30.01$) and urban ($N = 174$, $M = 96.78$, $SD = 36.17$) prospective teachers, the t-value of 1.67 did not exceed the critical value of 1.96. The mean difference is negligible. Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected; there is no significant difference in teaching performance levels between rural and urban prospective teachers. The absence of a locality difference in teaching performance (Hypothesis 2) aligns with some findings in recent literature showing that urban vs rural status does not always yield consistent performance gaps when teacher preparation programs or resources are relatively balanced (e.g., in well-resourced settings). However, the significant difference in stress management (Hypothesis 5), favoring urban prospective teachers, suggests urban trainees may have greater access to stress-management resources (e.g., counselling, extracurricular supports, peer networks) or be more exposed to coping models. Research in teacher well-being shows that contextual supports (urban vs rural) can affect coping strategies and perceived stress (e.g., availability of mentorship, social support) (Zito, Petrovic, Böke, Sadowski, Carsley & Heath, 2024).

Testing Hypothesis 3, prospective teachers from private colleges ($N = 195$, $M = 99.57$, $SD = 32.02$) were compared with those from government colleges ($N = 105$, $M = 104.50$, $SD = 45.71$). The t-value of 2.42 is greater than 1.96, indicating a significant difference. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected: teaching performance differs significantly by college type, with government college students having a higher mean score. The significant difference in teaching performance by college type (Hypothesis 3), favoring government college students, but the non-significant difference in stress management (Hypothesis 6), imply that while institutional factors (such as curriculum rigor, faculty experience, resources) may influence performance, they may not significantly affect students' self-reported stress-management abilities in the same way. These findings resonate with studies showing that institutional resources influence teaching performance (e.g., access to facilities, mentoring, practicums), but that individual psychological skills (like coping, emotion regulation) are more distributed and less institution-bound.

For Hypothesis 4, male prospective teachers ($N = 110$, $M = 115.04$, $SD = 46.04$) versus female teachers ($N = 190$, $M = 93.56$, $SD = 39.07$) show a significant difference in stress management levels. The t-value is 4.38, which is well above 1.96, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates males have higher stress management scores than females in this sample. Hypothesis 7's strong correlation ($r = .764$, $p < .01$) supports the proposition that stress management is closely linked with teaching performance. This is consistent with research showing that teachers who better cope with stress (through emotion regulation, problem solving, support seeking) tend to maintain higher self-efficacy, lower burnout, and better classroom management and pedagogy (Emeljanovas, Sabaliauskas, Mežienė, & Istomina, 2023).

In Hypothesis 5, rural ($N = 138$, $M = 106.05$, $SD = 42.68$) and urban ($N = 162$, $M = 109.68$, $SD = 36.17$) prospective teachers are compared. The t-value obtained is 2.79, exceeding the critical value at 0.05, so the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a significant difference in stress management between rural and urban prospective teachers, with urban teachers showing slightly higher mean stress management levels. The gender difference observed in stress management mirrors findings by Geng, Disney, Midford, & Buckworth (2022) who found male pre-service teachers report higher stress levels than females, but less is said in that study about performance. The performance gap by gender here might tie in with research on teaching anxiety and self-efficacy: academic anxiety tends to reduce performance, and such anxiety can differ by gender (Gorospe, 2022). The strong positive association between stress management and performance echoes results in other settings where interventions in stress

management (e.g., emotion regulation, mindfulness) have improved teaching outcomes.

Hypothesis 6 compares private college ($N = 165$, $M = 118.21$, $SD = 39.56$) and government college ($N = 135$, $M = 118.35$, $SD = 41.23$) prospective teachers on stress management. The t -value of 1.23 is lower than 1.96, so the null hypothesis is accepted. There is no significant difference in stress management between private vs government college prospective teachers. These results suggest that teacher education programs need to attend to both performance skills (pedagogical, content) and psychological skills (stress management) because they are strongly linked. Specifically, programs may need to incorporate gender-sensitive support, perhaps giving additional help or mentoring to female prospective teachers to bolster their performance and stress regulation. For rural trainees, increasing access to resources and supports available in urban centers may help reduce differences in stress management. Also, given that government college trainees in this sample seem to perform better on average, there is value in investigating what structural or curricular features in those colleges contribute, and whether they can be adopted by private colleges.

Finally, Hypothesis 7 examines the relationship between teaching performance and stress management among all prospective teachers ($N = 300$). The Pearson correlation coefficient $r = 0.764$ ($p < 0.01$) indicates a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship. This means that higher stress management scores are associated with higher teaching performance.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, causality cannot be established from cross-sectional comparisons; although teaching performance and stress management are strongly correlated, we cannot determine whether better stress management leads to better performance, or vice versa, or whether there is a reciprocal relationship. Second, self-report measures (especially of stress management) may be subject to social desirability or response bias. Third, other variables (such as prior teaching experience, socio-economic status, personality traits) that might moderate the differences by gender, locality, or institution type were not controlled. Future research should include longitudinal designs to examine how changes in stress-management skills map onto growth in teaching performance, and possibly experimental interventions (for example, mentoring, mindfulness-based stress training) along with diverse samples to examine whether the observed gender and institutional differences hold across cultures.

X. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. The study is geographically limited to Karaikudi and nearby areas in Sivagangai district, Tamil Nadu, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts.

2. The sample size of 300, though adequate, may not fully capture the diversity of prospective teachers across different regions, cultural backgrounds, or institutional settings.
3. The use of a normative survey method captures self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias or personal subjectivity rather than reflecting actual behavior in classroom contexts.
4. The study relies on standardized tools (TP-S and SM-S) developed and validated by the researcher, which, despite validation, may still limit comparability with studies using internationally established measures.
5. Only three demographic variables—gender, locality, and type of institution—were considered, leaving out other potentially influential factors such as socioeconomic status, academic background, or prior teaching experience.
6. The cross-sectional design provides a snapshot of stress management and teaching performance at one point in time but does not capture changes over time or causal relationships.
7. The study primarily uses quantitative methods, and the absence of qualitative insights limits understanding of the deeper, contextual reasons behind differences in stress management and teaching performance.

XI. CONCLUSION

The present study underscores the significant role of life skills, particularly stress management, in shaping the teaching performance of prospective teachers. The findings revealed a strong positive relationship between teaching performance and stress management among prospective teachers at the 0.01 significance level, with noteworthy differences in the variables based on gender, type of residence, and type of college. The importance of life skills in preparing the future teacher to deal with the complexities of modern education and the subsequent improvement in professional effectiveness and personal well-being are underlined by this study. These results suggest that teacher education programs should not only focus on pedagogical and content knowledge but also prioritize the integration of life skills training, with special emphasis on stress management strategies. By cultivating adaptive coping mechanisms, emotional regulation, and resilience, prospective teachers can enhance their teaching competencies and sustain professional growth. The study highlights the need for gender-sensitive and context-responsive interventions, ensuring equitable support across diverse educational settings. Ultimately, equipping future educators with robust life skills will strengthen both their personal well-being and their ability to foster effective, student-centered learning environments.

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