



The role of self-care and emotional intelligence in reducing online teaching fatigue among pre-service teachers

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital education, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, has significantly transformed teacher education. While online teaching ensured continuity of academic instruction, it simultaneously imposed psychological, emotional, and physical challenges on pre-service teachers. Prolonged screen exposure, limited social interaction, and increased academic workload have contributed to a growing phenomenon referred to as online teaching fatigue. The present study examines the role of self-care practices and emotional intelligence (EI) in reducing online teaching fatigue among pre-service teachers. Employing a qualitative research design supported by indicative quantitative data, the study draws on reflective journals, semi-structured interviews, and observational records from 60 pre-service teachers. The findings reveal that higher emotional intelligence and consistent self-care practices significantly enhance emotional regulation, resilience, motivation, and teaching effectiveness in virtual environments. The study underscores the need to integrate emotional well-being and self-care frameworks into teacher education programmes.

Keywords: Self-Care, Emotional Intelligence, Online Teaching Fatigue, Pre-Service Teachers, Digital Pedagogy, Teacher Education

Introduction

The digitalization of education has brought unprecedented changes to teaching-learning processes worldwide. Teacher education institutions, in particular, have increasingly relied on online platforms to prepare future educators. Although digital teaching offers flexibility and wider access, it has also resulted in increased emotional stress, cognitive overload, and physical strain among pre-service teachers. These teacher trainees are required to adapt simultaneously to online learning and online teaching practices, often without sufficient emotional or psychological preparation.

Online teaching fatigue, characterized by emotional exhaustion, reduced concentration, and motivational decline, has emerged as a serious concern in teacher education. Addressing this challenge requires more than technological solutions; it demands attention to the emotional and psychological well-being of pre-service teachers. In this context, self-care and emotional intelligence have gained prominence as essential protective factors. This paper explores how self-care practices and emotional intelligence contribute to reducing online teaching fatigue among pre-service teachers.

Concept of Online Teaching Fatigue

Online teaching fatigue refers to a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting from prolonged engagement in virtual teaching-learning activities. For pre-service teachers, this fatigue is intensified due to continuous academic assessments, extended screen time, limited peer interaction, and blurred boundaries between personal and academic life. Persistent fatigue negatively affects teaching confidence, instructional quality, and overall professional development, making it a critical issue in teacher education programs.

Emotional Intelligence and Self-Care: Conceptual Understanding

Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and regulate emotions in oneself and others. According to Goleman (1995) [3], emotional intelligence comprises self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Self-care, on the other hand, involves deliberate activities aimed at maintaining physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. In digital teaching contexts, emotional intelligence enables individuals to cope with stress constructively, while self-care sustains energy, focus, and emotional balance. Together, these constructs serve as effective buffers against online teaching fatigue.

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Model (1995) [3] and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Goleman's model explains how emotional competencies support effective stress management and interpersonal functioning, whereas Maslow's theory emphasizes psychological well-being and self-actualization as prerequisites for optimal performance. Integrating these frameworks provides a holistic understanding of how emotional intelligence and self-care mitigate online teaching fatigue among pre-service teachers.

Review of Related Literature

Previous research highlights the importance of emotional intelligence and self-care in promoting teacher well-being. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) [4] found that emotionally competent teachers experience lower burnout and higher teaching effectiveness. Brackett and Rivers (2014) [2] reported that emotional intelligence enhances mental health and professional resilience among educators. Shoffner (2011) [6] observed that pre-service teachers with higher emotional intelligence are more reflective and less

susceptible to emotional exhaustion. Studies on self-care (Alvord & Grados, 2005) ^[1] further indicate that consistent wellness practices significantly reduce stress and improve coping abilities. However, limited research specifically addresses the combined role of self-care and emotional intelligence in reducing online teaching fatigue among pre-service teachers, thereby justifying the present study.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the nature and extent of online teaching fatigue among pre-service teachers.
- To analyze the role of emotional intelligence in managing online teaching fatigue.
- To examine the contribution of self-care practices in reducing online teaching fatigue.
- To suggest strategies for integrating emotional intelligence and self-care into teacher education programs.

Hypotheses

- **H₀ (Null Hypothesis):** Emotional intelligence and self-care practices have no significant role in reducing online teaching fatigue among pre-service teachers.
- **H₁ (Research Hypothesis):** Emotional intelligence and self-care practices play a significant role in reducing online teaching fatigue among pre-service teachers.

Methodology

1. Research Design: The study adopted a qualitative research design with supportive descriptive data analysis.

2. Sample: The sample comprised 60 pre-service teachers (B.Ed. and M.Ed. students) selected through purposive sampling from three teacher education institutions in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

3. Tools and Data Collection: Data were collected during January-June 2024 using reflective journals, semi-structured interviews, and online practicum observation records. Ethical consent was obtained from all participants.

4. Data Analysis: Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns related to fatigue, emotional responses, emotional intelligence skills, and self-care practices. Indicative quantitative data were used to strengthen interpretation.

Results and Data Analysis

Table 1: Impact of Emotional Intelligence and Self-Care on Online Teaching Fatigue (N = 60)

Variables	High Level (%)	Moderate Level (%)	Low Level (%)
Emotional Intelligence	45	35	20
Self-Care Practices	40	38	22
Online Teaching Fatigue	18	32	50

Interpretation

The data indicate that pre-service teachers with higher levels of emotional intelligence and consistent self-care practices reported significantly lower levels of online teaching fatigue. Participants with lower engagement in self-care and emotional regulation skills experienced higher fatigue, supporting the research hypothesis.

Discussion

The findings confirm that emotional intelligence and self-care act as protective mechanisms against online teaching fatigue. Emotional intelligence enables pre-service teachers to regulate stress, manage emotions, and maintain motivation, while self-care practices help sustain physical and psychological well-being. Institutional support further strengthens these benefits through flexible academic policies, counseling services, and emotionally responsive pedagogy.

Recommendations

- Integrate emotional intelligence and self-care modules into B.Ed. and M.Ed. curricula.
- Establish structured mentorship and counseling services.
- Promote wellness-oriented and reflective assignments.
- Reduce continuous screen exposure through blended and asynchronous learning.
- Sensitize teacher educators to student mental health concerns.

Conclusion

Online teaching fatigue poses a significant challenge to the professional preparation of pre-service teachers in the digital era. The study concludes that emotional intelligence and self-care play a crucial role in reducing fatigue and enhancing emotional resilience and teaching effectiveness. Teacher education institutions must prioritize emotional well-being alongside pedagogical training to develop competent, resilient, and adaptive future educators.

References

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