

**Exploring Practical Strategies for
Building Resilience in Pre-Service
Teachers**

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Holly Heshmati*, Li Lin**,

*University of Warwick, UK, **British International School Shanghai Puxi, Shanghai, China

Abstract

This paper examines the critical role of resilience for pre-service teachers by exploring effective strategies for its development. It contributes to understanding the importance of resilience for new teachers to overcome daily challenges and navigate the ever-evolving demands of the teaching profession. Teacher resilience is the outcome of interactions between challenges and protective resources in a process involving teachers employing practical strategies to develop motivational, professional, emotional, social, and physical resilience. In this paper, we focus specifically on the development of social resilience. Our findings from interviews with 25 pre-service mathematics teachers participating in this research reveal that, despite the existence of some anti-resilient thinking, most participants attributed their experience of resilience to support from the context and the community surrounding them.

Keywords

Teacher resilience; pre-service mathematics teachers; social resilience.

Introduction

Teaching experiences one of the highest turnover rates within the professional landscape (Harris and Adams, 2007; Worth, et al., 2017). The UK post-COVID government survey report (Long and Danechi, 2022) indicates that the attrition rate of teachers has remained persistently elevated since 2021. Specifically, the survey reveals that 12.5% of recently qualified teachers depart the profession within one year of qualification. This percentage increases to 17.3% for those leaving after two years and escalates to a concerning 40% for teachers who exit the field after ten years since 2011. Teacher attrition and retention are often associated with various factors, either individual or contextual, encompassing burnout, resilience, teacher support, salary, professional development, the nature of the educational environment, student-related challenges, and teacher education (Ainsworth and Oldfield, 2019; Clandinin et al., 2015). Notably, resilience, among all these factors, has proven to be pivotal in enhancing both retention and the well-being of teachers (Beltman and Mansfield, 2018). This research delves into the active role pre-service teachers play in building their own resilience through employing practical strategies. By exploring teachers' perceptions and experiences, we aim to offer a fresh and timely contribution to the field of teacher resilience, expanding on existing literature. By gaining insight into the strategies and processes that foster this important quality, this qualitative study seeks to encourage new teachers to take ownership of their well-being. This exploration opens dialogues about potential implications for both teacher education programmes and the development of self-directed teacher resilience.

Literature Review

This section aims to understand resilience in the context of pre-service mathematics teachers. It begins by reviewing existing research on teacher resilience in general, followed by a specific focus on challenges faced by pre-service and mathematics teachers. Examining both the broader context of teacher education and the specific challenges, the section aims to identify and analyse the impact of these challenges before proposing ways to address them. By acknowledging various factors

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influencing beginning teachers' resilience, the section paves the way for further exploration of these themes, highlighting unanswered questions and existing knowledge gaps.

The notion of teacher resilience as an inherent and fixed quality possessed by some individuals has been challenged and replaced by a more comprehensive and dynamic understanding in the last two decades. Research reveals a multifaceted nature of teacher resilience as a dynamic capacity, evolving in response to various influencing factors (Beltman et al., 2011). This shift necessitates a social-ecological perspective (Gu, 2018) to truly grasp how teachers develop resilience. This perspective emphasises how teachers interact with their environments on multiple levels, influencing their ability to cope with challenges. Individual characteristics, the school environment, and the broader community all play a role in shaping teacher resilience (Day and Gu, 2014). Unlike a static characteristic, teacher resilience is a dynamic capacity, allowing teachers to navigate not only the complex demands of their role but also everyday challenges they face in the teaching profession (Beltman et al., 2011).

There have been significant developments in the conceptualisation of teacher resilience in the last decade, driven by several influential studies (Ainsworth and Oldfield, 2019; Beltman *et al.*, 2011; Day and Gu, 2014; Hascher et al., 2021; Mansfield et al., 2012), which recognise its complexity and the role of contextual factors, alongside individual factors as equally crucial for building teacher resilience. Definitions often highlight individual's ability to positively adjust to new or challenging situations, and bounce back after adversities (Beltman et al., 2011; Day and Gu, 2014). Inherent in this common definition is the existence of a challenge; an extensive body of research highlights direct correlation between experience of challenge and increase in resilience to future challenges (Ainsworth and Oldfield, 2019; Crane et al., 2019).

The initial year of teaching often proves to be exceptionally demanding. These challenges encompass a broad range, from a lack of self-confidence in teaching and classroom management (Melnick and Meister, 2008; Peixoto et al., 2018) to a reluctance to seek help (Castro et al., 2010). Teachers might also grapple with disparities between their personal beliefs and classroom practices (Day and Gu, 2014), feelings of not fitting into the practicum environment (Peixoto et al., 2018), school structure and cultural practices mismatches (McCormack et al., 2006), unsupportive leadership and staff (Le-Cornu, 2013), stress and burnout (Tait, 2008), heavy workloads (Beutel et al., 2019), and the challenge of meeting the diverse needs of their pupils (Demetriou et al., 2009).

It is important to note that while prolonged exposure to these challenges can deplete teachers' personal resources and lead to increased stress and burnout (Beltman et al., 2011), such exposure can also potentially fortify resilience by cultivating three key resilience capacities: coping resources, the utilisation of coping strategies, and the cultivation of beliefs that bolster resilience (Crane *et al.*, 2019). In this way, resilience can be cultivated through a process in which teachers exercise agency and proactively respond to challenges rather than reactively receiving them (Castro et al., 2010; Hascher et al., 2021; Mansfield et al., 2012). Moreover, teachers' capacity for resilience evolves in response to the influences of their personal and professional environments (Day and Gu, 2014; Hascher et al., 2021). It is important to recognise that a teacher's resilience is a multifaceted concept influenced by various factors including personal, professional, and contextual challenges and resources surrounding teachers (Ainsworth and Oldfield, 2019; Beltman et al., 2011; Day and Gu, 2014).

The role of human agency in fostering resilience is increasingly acknowledged in the literature, emphasising that resilient individuals actively engage in shaping their environment as part of their interaction with it (Day and Gu, 2014; Kumpfer, 2002). In this perspective, individuals are influenced by their surroundings and social factors, but they also possess the capacity to influence their environment and take control of their situations by assessing and managing their thoughts,

motivations, and actions which can lead to the experience of resilience. With recent years seeing a growing interest in teacher resilience : (Beltman et al., 2011; Day and Gu, 2014; Gu, 2018; Hascher et al., 2021; Mansfield et al., 2012), a more in-depth understanding of factors and strategies contributing to teacher resilience can help refine strategies for retaining talented teachers. This research, therefore, focuses on exploring strategies for developing teacher resilience of pre-service mathematics teachers. Drawing upon findings from a one-year research exploring practical strategies participants used to develop the five aspects of resilience: professional, motivational, social, emotional and physical (Kumpfer, 2002), this paper reports on social aspects and related coping skills in greater detail. Social resilience constitute the core aspects of resilience that most resilience building programmes attempt to foster (Mansfield *et al.*, 2012).

Social factors, which encompass effective functioning within various contexts, have been identified as a significant contributor to resilience (Jordan, 2006a). A teacher's world is surrounded by distinct sets of relationships, involving interactions with students, fellow teachers, parents, and school leaders. A substantial body of research supports the idea that the social dynamics within a school, characterised by supportive, trusting, and collegial relationships among different stakeholders, can enhance teachers' collective capabilities, dedication, effectiveness, and reinforce their professional identity, ultimately contributing to their resilience (Day and Gu, 2014). Nevertheless, research indicates that mathematics teachers often exhibit reluctance in developing social networks or seeking help, in part due to the stereotypical personality traits associated with this profession. Mathematics teachers are more likely to exhibit introverted personality traits, characterised by qualities such as reserve, composure, shyness, thoughtfulness, and a preference for independent work (Per and Beyoğlu, 2011). Building social resilience in novice teachers hinges on the establishment and the development of mutually beneficial, growth-fostering reciprocal relationships (Jordan, 2006b; Le-Cornu, 2013). Jordan (2006a) raises a valid critique of prior resilience models, highlighting their tendency to overly emphasise individual separateness, particularly the notion of a separate self. Instead, she contends that individuals' active participation in empathetic and responsive relationships is more likely to serve as a wellspring of resilience. Such relationships contribute to a heightened sense of belonging, a critical element in fostering individual motivation and self-efficacy. Just like other facets of resilience, social aspects require behavioural action, not just thoughts; individuals may know what they need to do to achieve their goals but lack the necessary social skills to accomplish them. The behavioural actions related to social resilience include: strong interpersonal skills that enable development of social support networks (Le-Cornu, 2013), problem solving and help-seeking skills (Castro *et al.*, 2010), flexibility (Le-Cornu, 2013) and willingness to take risks (Sumsion, 2003). In this paper, we argue that nurturing social resilience can significantly enhance the well-being of teachers and contribute to the retention in the teaching profession. To illustrate this enhancement, we present the findings of interviews conducted with 25 pre-service mathematics teachers in secondary schools in the West Midlands area of England. Drawing from data obtained through one-on-one interviews with these participants, we have identified intriguing patterns related to the participants' experience of resilience that emerged during the analysis of the interview data.

Methodology

Qualitative methods offer a rich source of in-depth and detailed data about a limited number of individuals or cases (Patton, 2003). This data delves into the experiences, perspectives, and motivations of participants, allowing researchers to gain valuable insights beyond mere numerical representation. It is important to acknowledge that qualitative methods do not aim to establish absolute truth, but rather provide partial and contextualised information about participants' experiences and thoughts (Longhurst, 2003). Amongst qualitative data, interviews are regarded as valuable in gathering rich data (Denscombe, 2010).

To delve into the complexity of teacher resilience and identify processes that can foster it, we adopted interviews as the primary research method in order to explore participants' experience of resilience. While large-scale surveys often rely on structured interviews to gather pre-defined information, smaller studies typically utilise unstructured or semi-structured interviews to construct deeper, participant-driven knowledge (Shah, 2004). Recognising this, we opted for semi-structured interviews. This approach involved open-ended, pre-defined questions, encouraging participants to delve into their experiences.

Although interviews generate depth and nuance through direct quotations and insightful descriptions of participants' opinions and attitudes, any interview about teacher resilience may involve participants discussing professionally challenging situations, sensitive issues, emotions, and experiences that will need to be explored in depth and in detail. Additionally, when research covers issues that might be considered sensitive or personal, there is a case to be made for using one-to-one interviews (Denscombe, 2010). Therefore, to encourage participants to discuss personal and sensitive issues in an open, honest manner and mitigate unethical causes of embarrassment or exposure (Longhurst, 2003), for the current research, we decided to use one-to-one and semi-structured interviews, where participants were encouraged to answer predetermined open-ended questions. Key interview topic areas included:

- personal, professional, and contextual challenges faced by participants during their pre-service year.
- key strategies contributing to participants' social resilience at the time.

In this study, we invited participants to pinpoint particular instances of challenging situations they had encountered and to elucidate how they had responded. The aim was to extract insights into the process of building resilience. We asked participants to recollect specific examples of factors and strategies they believed had contributed to their resilience. The structure of our questions was intentional, designed to prompt participants to specify concrete experiences rather than offer general or vague responses. This was important because teacher resilience is an abstract concept and, as a result, can be difficult to measure.

The research involved participation of 13 female pre-service secondary mathematics teachers and 12 males (Table 1.), predominantly between 20 to 30 years of age (20-25, n=13; 26-30, n=6; >30, n=6). Following the ethical guidelines of BERA (2018), prior to commencing the research, we obtained both institutional ethical approval and informed consent from participants. This included obtaining participants' consent to record interviews and their right to withdraw at any point. Additionally, we employed pseudonyms to ensure participants' confidentiality and anonymity.

Table 1. Participants' Profiles.

Alias	Male/ female	Age
Daniel, Naomi, Sarah, Sofia, Fran, Kye, Laura, Shirley, Hannah, Ava, James, Stephen, Megan,	M,F,F,F,F,M,F,F,F,F, M,M,F	21-25
Jack, Levi, Alex, Tim, Stacey, Dave	M,M,M,M,F,M,	26-30
Adam, Dana, Joseph, Kim, Rory, Helen	M,F,M,F,M,F	30+

For data analysis, we employed thematic analysis, a widely used method for uncovering patterns and meaning within qualitative data (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Thematic analysis offers significant advantages including flexibility and adaptability to various research questions and theoretical perspectives (Clarke and Braun, 2013). It goes beyond simply summarising data, allowing researchers to interpret and make sense of the underlying narratives and perspectives revealed by participants

(Clarke and Braun, 2013). This was crucial in understanding the rich information gathered through interviews in this particular study. Braun and Clarke (2006) differentiate between two levels of thematic analysis: semantic and latent. We adopted semantic analysis, focusing on the explicit meanings participants conveyed through their responses, without delving into deeper, potentially underlying interpretations.

To facilitate analysis, we transcribed responses from the interviews into a Word document. Following transcription, we shared the interview transcripts with the participants for their review and confirmation of content accuracy to ensure credibility and trustworthiness (Zohrabi, 2013). In our analysis using NVivo12, we employed a systematic approach. We began by identifying and documenting codes that were common across all participants, as well as those that were unique to specific individuals. We then proceeded to categorise the responses based on their theoretical relevance to the social aspects of resilience. This involved an iterative coding process, where we continuously reviewed and refined the codes as we progressed. To measure the prevalence of each code, we recorded the number of participants who articulated that particular code. After coding all the datasets, we engaged in a thorough review and further refinement of the codes. During this stage, we re-read all the collected data extracts to ensure that the groupings were organised in a manner that presented consistent patterns throughout the entire dataset. This phase of the analysis also prompted the development of additional codes to capture the challenges and strategies employed by the participants. When we identified a new code, we revisited each transcript to determine if other relevant quotations could be coded in line with this new code. This rigorous process helped us ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of our analysis.

In the subsequent phase of our thematic data analysis approach, we incorporated peer review as a crucial step to ensure research rigour and trustworthiness (Denscombe, 2010). We conducted discussions about the identified codes during meetings involving three researchers and two practitioner-researchers. The primary objective of these meetings was to collectively assess and deliberate on how the identified codes related to the facets of resilience. This collaborative review process added valuable perspectives and ensured a robust and comprehensive understanding of the data and its interpretation.

Results and Discussion

In this section, we present the findings from semi-structured interviews, investigating participants' perceptions of a resilient teacher, aligning with the research questions. We present the findings thematically, based on the codes identified during analysis. Rich descriptions of these themes are illustrated through diverse participant quotations, ensuring the credibility and independent verification of the data. While tables present key themes alongside representative excerpts, our focus is not solely on descriptive analysis. This approach, often associated with quantitative methods, implies statistical validity that is not claimed by this qualitative research. Instead, we employ frequency descriptions, highlighting prevalent themes using terms like 'many', 'most', and 'some'.

Social Challenges

In Table 2. below, we have identified seven themes of challenges from our number of responses. The most frequent social challenges stated by participants were building and managing relationships, reluctance to seek help, family-related challenges, lack of school support, feelings of isolation at school and building professional networks.

Experiences within this category involved situations where participants struggled with building or managing relationships with other professionals including their school mentors, other teachers, peer pre-service teachers and pupils.

I used to hang out with people who were like me, but when I started university, I struggled to make friends at first

(Daniel, 21-25 years old).

Additionally, participants reported experiencing difficulties building class relationships when moving to a new school. Some participants spoke about difficulties building class relationships in the presence of the classroom teacher:

It was difficult for me to build relationships with the students because I was not their regular teacher. When their class teachers were present in the classroom, I felt like the students knew that they did not have to respect me

(Hannah, 21-25 years old)

Participants were also concerned about the impact of their effort to build positive relationships with their pupils on their class management:

Table 2. Sub-Themes and Corresponding Responses Exploring Challenges Faced by Participants in Pre-service Year.

Sub-Themes: Challenges Faced by the Participants in the Pre-service Year	Codes and Number of Responses
Social	building and managing relationships (9), reluctance to seek help (8), family related challenges (6), lack of school support (5), feeling of isolation at school (3), building professional network (2), communications (1)

One of the big challenges of building relationships with students is dealing with those who will try to exploit the situation

(James, 21-25 years old).

Another challenge was participants' reluctance to seek help. The explanations suggest that participants' perceptions of help-seeking as a personal and professional weakness had a deterrent effect on their willingness to seek help. These participants considered independent efforts to overcome their professional challenges as a strength and part of professionalism:

I sometimes avoid asking for help because I want to be seen as a strong and independent person. This may be a male thing, but it's like asking for directions: sometimes it's just easier to do it myself

(Adam, 30+ years old).

I found it difficult to ask for help from my school mentor because I didn't want to burden her. I preferred to work harder on my own and overcome problems independently. I think it's because I want people to see me as a capable and self-sufficient person

(Stephen, 21-25 years old).

Some participants displayed hesitancy in seeking help due to negative past experiences related to this practice. Their reluctance stemmed from perceiving help-seeking as a sign of professional weakness, as well as from instances where help-seeking had proved to be ineffective. These negative experiences

surrounding help-seeking played a significant role in discouraging some participants from reaching out for help. These experiences were particularly noteworthy because they could work in conjunction with other reasons that compelled participants to believe they needed to overcome their professional challenges independently. Participants, through their firsthand experiences over time, were best positioned to comprehend this intricate interplay between negative help-seeking experiences and their own sense of self-reliance:

It's just no-one can help. You can only- and you have to deal with it yourself. Since I'm the only one who takes this class, no one else can help me in that sense. Unless someone is going to join the class and help me, but that's not going to happen. So, I have to deal with it myself
(Sofia, 21-25 years old).

Unfortunately, I've learned through experience that people at work often show sympathy initially, but then they get busy and lose interest. I also believe that part of being professional is keeping your personal struggles to yourself
(Shirley, 21-25 years old).

Another reason for reluctance to seek help lies in some participants describing themselves as introverts. Fran argued that this factor hindered her from approaching others to seek help:

I am a private person, and I find it difficult to approach others or ask for assistance
(Fran, 21-25 years old).

In total, six participants stated experiencing family-related challenges. All experiences within this category involved situations where participants felt conflict between family and professional responsibilities. Dana, for example, discussed the pull between family needs and career:

Because I have a large family and there are always issues, I decided to leave my town and focus on my studies in a different place
(Dana, 30+ years old).

Lack of support and feelings of isolation in school were indicated as challenging by some participants:

My previous school didn't accept me for who I am. They tried to control me by telling me who I could and couldn't hang out with. I felt very restricted there
(Daniel, 21-25 years old).

Being isolated was, for some participants, related to the issue of not being a permanent member of staff and staff attitudes towards them as a result:

During my first placement, I felt isolated and looked down upon by some of the permanent teachers in the department. They didn't take me seriously or consider me a colleague, simply because I was a student teacher. This was frustrating
(Fran, 21-25 years old).

Participants also stated that not having another peer pre-service teacher in their department increased feelings of isolation:

Now that you're the only maths trainee in your new department, you feel isolated and behind. You don't know what other trainees are doing, so you worry that you're doing something wrong
(Naomi, 21-25 years old).

Table 3. Sub-Themes and corresponding responses exploring strategies used by participants.

Sub-Themes: Strategies Used by Participants in the Pre-service year	Codes and Number of Responses
Social	mentor and peer support (17), family support (9), seeking help (5), developing professional network, and managing relationships at two different school placements (12)

Strategies for Social Resilience

During interviews, participants described and reflected upon personal experiences and strategies to overcome their challenges. Table 3. reports the strategies used by participants to experience teacher resilience.

The following section provides an account of the strategies used by participants to enhance their experience of social resilience. In the process of comparing the practical strategies employed by participants, three fundamental cognitive processes emerged as central to facilitating teacher resilience: social support, seeking help, and building and managing relationships. Responses from the participants pointed to the significance of building relationships and actively seeking help, both of which were strategies employed by most of the participants. Participants found support from mentors and family particularly valuable in addressing emotional challenges and fostering social resilience. Additionally, the descriptions of these strategies and experiences underlined the importance of the ability to seek help and receive advice from fellow pre-service teachers. This collective effort toward building and sustaining supportive relationships and promoting help-seeking emerged as essential components of social resilience among teachers.

Responses revealed that participants viewed mentors' support and advice as important in dealing with daily challenges:

One day, during a lesson I was being observed by my mentor. All the students were being naughty, and I felt like giving up. I just wanted to leave, but I stayed until the end. After the class, my mentor said, "Just go home, don't worry about it. Tomorrow they will be different, you will see. Don't even plan anything, look at anything, or think about school. Just go home straight after this

(Dana, 30+ years old).

The key message from participants' responses regarding this code was having someone as a mentor in their setting that they could go to when they struggled and having confidence that the mentor would support them while struggling. Like Dana, Stacey discussed how the empathetic relationship she had developed with her mentors helped her get through one of her professional challenges:

My two subject mentors at school have been very helpful. Whenever I have problems, I talk to them. They have both been very supportive. One morning this week, I was feeling stressed about my upcoming assignments. One of my mentors told me to take a break and relax. I did, and it helped me to feel better

(Stacey, 21-25 years old).

While help-seeking and professional support played key roles in developing participants' strategies to overcome challenges, support went beyond professional networks and, for a group of participants, family support was key. Laura described this, reflecting on her experience:

Many members of my family are also teachers, so they can provide valuable advice on both teaching and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. My mother is particularly good at this because she has learned from her own mistakes and is determined to help me avoid them
(Laura, 21-25 years old).

Building relationships was highlighted not only as a valuable quality but also as a strategic approach for navigating challenges and difficult situations. Those participants who identified themselves as highly resilient seemed to recognise the significance of cultivating robust networks, as well as establishing and nurturing professional relationships within and outside their immediate work environment. Helen, for example, shared her narrative, illustrating how building positive relationships with fellow professionals played a pivotal role in her successful completion of the pre-service year. However, Helen also emphasised that she viewed the process of developing professional networks as requiring extra time and effort, rather than occurring naturally or automatically. This perspective reflected her awareness of the deliberate effort and investment needed to build and maintain these relationships, especially in the context of teacher resilience.

When I began to connect with my colleagues, my mentors and teachers became more positive and encouraging, which helped me to cope better with the challenges I was facing
(Helen, 30+ years old).

The findings from this study uncovered a diverse array of factors and strategies employed by the participants to address the day-to-day challenges within the teaching profession (Beltman *et al.*, 2011). These findings emphasise the intricate and multifaceted nature of teacher resilience, which depends on an interplay of various personal, professional, and contextual factors (GU, 2018). The multifaceted nature of teacher resilience (Ainsworth and Oldfield, 2019) is clearly evident in the diverse strategies and factors that the participants draw upon to navigate the demands and difficulties of their profession.

The study revealed that, for some participants, negative experiences with attempting to build relationships during their initial school placements led to a reluctance to seek help. These experiences seemed to create a fear of being judged by others as professionally weak if they were to seek help, as highlighted in Le-Cornu (2013). This apprehension about seeking help as a sign of professional weakness was compounded by other underlying reasons for their reluctance. For example, Fran described herself as a reserved teacher who found it challenging to approach others for help, shedding light on the diverse personal factors that can influence teachers' willingness to seek help.

The responses from the participants strongly indicated that the strategies of building relationships and seeking help were commonly employed by those who considered themselves highly resilient. This finding aligns with prior research that highlights the importance of strong interpersonal skills in teachers' resilience. As Le-Cornu (2013) suggests, the development of resilience among teachers involves their active engagement in a social practice. Through this bi-directional relationship, teachers build their self-efficacy by fostering a sense of connection and belonging, ultimately enhancing their capacity to withstand challenges and thrive in the teaching profession.

While resilience resides in the context and environment surrounding individuals, it needs development through teachers' exercise of agency in interactions with the environment (Castro *et al.*, 2010; Day and Gu, 2014), for example, Stacey discussed how she was supported by her mentors when she used personal agency, speaking to her mentors about feelings of stress and anxiety when her university assignment was due. The study's findings indicate that when there was a disconnect between the prevailing notions of what it meant to be a competent teacher and the actions necessary to build teacher resilience, participants were potentially less equipped to effectively cope with

challenging situations. This highlights the need for alignment between the perceived ideals of teaching competence and the strategies employed to enhance resilience, as incongruences may hinder teachers' capacity to navigate adversity successfully.

The wide range of challenges and strategies stated by the participants affirms that understanding teacher resilience as multifaceted and relational is crucial for sustaining teacher quality (Ainsworth and Oldfield, 2019; Beltman *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, these findings have significant implications for pre-service programmes. They suggest the need for future-oriented approaches to resilience-building processes, such as incorporating instruction and activities that encourage new teachers to view help-seeking strategies as a vital component of resilient teaching. Additionally, the development of reflective capabilities can potentially empower new teachers to thrive in diverse educational settings. By addressing these aspects, pre-service programmes can better prepare student teachers to face the challenges of the teaching profession and ultimately contribute to the sustainability of teacher quality.

The findings suggest that strong personal agency plays a crucial role in facilitating teacher resilience. Participants' responses revealed that the exercise of agency empowered them to develop new practical strategies and engage in discussions about their professional challenges with other professionals, peers, and family members. These insights shed light on the intricate relationship between teacher agency and the school context. The findings emphasise the validity of existing literature, which emphasises the significance of exercising agency in promoting teacher resilience. They stress the notion that teachers must actively interact with their environment to build resilience, as highlighted in the work of Castro *et al.* (2010) and Day and Gu (2014). However, the study also indicates that for teachers to effectively harness the support provided, they need to feel encouraged to do so. Without this encouragement, it is unlikely that the school culture will truly facilitate teacher resilience. The findings suggest that for the participants, this encouragement involved working within a school culture that embraced flexibility, where mentors were attentive, and the entire department adapted to minimise the likelihood of participants encountering similar challenging situations in the future. This dynamic interaction between personal agency and the school environment is pivotal in fostering teacher resilience.

Participants shared instances where their actions had the potential to influence not only themselves but also all the teachers in their department by instigating systemic changes in the school's culture. Stacey, for instance, described a challenging situation in which her department offered her time off when she was feeling stressed. Her response highlighted a dynamic interaction between the department and Stacey, with both parties responding and adapting to each other in real-time. Rather than adhering to fixed teacher identities and unchanging school cultures, the participants and their school environments continued to evolve and learn through their ongoing interaction. This adaptability and mutual influence between teachers and their educational contexts accentuate the dynamic and evolving nature of teacher resilience and its relationship with the environment in which it operates.

Conclusion

The unique and challenging nature of the teaching profession necessitates a dedicated focus on the factors that contribute to teachers' resilience. This paper underlines the importance of operationalising pre-service teacher resilience by investigating the strategies for building social resilience. These strategies include developing professional networks, recruiting support, and learning coping mechanisms to navigate challenging situations. The study highlights that numerous factors can influence the depletion of resilience in teachers including fixed mindsets, anti-resilient thinking and the emphasise on self-sufficiency. Importantly, the data suggest that the initial teacher education (ITE) programme is not the sole determinant of teacher resilience. This implies that the keys to fostering teacher resilience may extend beyond the ITE programme and into the school environment.

While the findings from this research provide valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. Firstly, the study is constrained by its relatively small sample size, which comprises participants from the same ITE programme. This limits the generalisability of the findings to a broader population of teachers who may have different experiences in various ITE programmes or educational contexts. Secondly, while the participants varied in terms of their prior work experiences, the age composition of the participants was not diverse enough to allow an exploration of potential differences between younger and older participants. This limitation highlights the need for further research to systematically investigate the role of age in teacher attrition. A further limitation pertains to the timing of data collection. The participants' responses were gathered at a single point in time, making it challenging to discern the influence of temporal factors on their resilience. Longitudinal research is necessary to ensure higher validity and to elucidate the long-term impact of temporal factors on participants' resilience and to gain a better understanding of the reciprocal effects that evolve over time between resilience and retention.

Recommendations

New teachers' experience is still seen to hang largely on quality of support received in the school placement. It is essential to consider redefining the nature of the mentor role. Rather than a one-on-one relationship that primarily focuses on procedures and progress, a team-based approach could be a way forward. This approach can be instrumental in fostering the development of competent and resilient teacher identities, enabling new teachers to thrive in the profession. Personalised intervention programmes, developed collaboratively with schools to cater to a wide range of pre-service teachers, could be a valuable approach to address individual needs effectively.

Furthermore, ITE programmes should evolve to incorporate specific modules dedicated to teacher resilience. These modules can cover areas such as co-planning and team-teaching, which can equip new teachers with the knowledge and practical experience needed to feel confident and competent in their professional environment. By implementing these changes, much of this preparation can be achieved before the completion of the pre-service programme, better equipping new teachers to navigate the challenges of their early career with confidence and resilience.

The findings also indicated the significant impact of family support on teacher resilience. Future research can shed further light on how family support can be harnessed to enhance the experience of teacher resilience, further illuminating the multifaceted nature of resilience within teachers' lives.

An important finding that should concern policymakers is that most new teachers experience the pressure of excessive workloads, even as they are still in the process of developing competence and confidence in their teaching skills and professional resilience. The insights from this research suggest that instead of solely advocating for teachers to achieve work-life balance, it may be more practical to focus on policies and approaches that promote the development of teachers' professional resilience, which includes workload reduction, fostering a supportive school culture, and providing flexibility for teachers to work part-time.

The data from this research suggests that issues related to a lack of leadership support and professional challenges, such as classroom management, should be addressed by schools. These challenges can directly impact teachers' decisions to leave. Schools aiming to retain their teaching workforce need to cultivate supportive cultures and implement specific strategies that grant teachers a degree of autonomy, particularly in managing their classroom effectively. This multifaceted approach can go a long way in retaining and supporting new teachers in their careers.

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