



# Building Resilience among Teachers: Challenges and Strategies

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**Abstract:** *Teaching is a profession full of change. Teacher has the responsibility to sharpen the intellect of the students along with controlling the changes occurring in the environment. Some changes are controllable but some can't be controlled; and cause stress among teachers. Teachers can manage their stress by bouncing back the adversity to create its positive impact. Resilience is the way by which a teacher can manage the changes and fulfil his responsibilities towards students and society. Resilience is all about adaptation of a set of individual attributes and positive approach. Building resilience among teachers is a challenging task. This paper is an attempt to identify various challenges in the way of resilience building and also to explore the strategies that can be used to build resilience.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world of modern education and knowledge, a teacher is not only a fountainhead of knowledge-creation and dissemination but is also the instrument required to sharpen the intellect of students. The journey of education has changed over the time to accommodate the fast moving world and so has the role of a teacher. The education system has been reconstructing its variables and a teacher has to pace with it. In today's highly competitive globalised scenario, the institutions of higher education demand the subversion of conventional chains of teaching and its approach. From the mere chains of routine events comprising of curriculum delivery, managing time-tables, examination responsibility and to cover up the syllabus in an assigned duration, the teacher has now expected to conceptualise a phenomenon. It requires new understanding of commitment, dedication and perseverance. Moreover, these new emerging trends, requirements and goals can be stressful to cope up with and hence there is a call for a multidimensional saviour.

Teachers often come across incidents like students misbehaving in class, parents challenging a decision made by a teacher, a colleague not being supportive of an instructional practice. These small actions might not appear to be a problem for a teacher. They are often neglected and at times are not even counted as obvious challenges of this profession. However, if a teacher thinks about them, then these challenges are actually the biggest hindrance to the peace and productivity. By considering these problems and taking required and timely

action, a teacher can discharge his/her duty in a more effective manner. The dynamic factor which will help the teacher in managing his profession and life is resilience. Comprehending the role of resilience in teachers' management of profession and life can help to increase his/her effectiveness and quality of work. Resilience helps teacher to react the challenging circumstances in a positive manner.

Someone has rightly said "Resilience is the capacity to continue to 'bounce back' or to recover strength or spirit quickly and efficiently in the face of adversity; it is closely allied to a strong sense of vocation, self efficacy and motivation to teach, which are fundamental for sustaining a commitment to promote achievement in all the aspects of life".

## 2. CHALLENGES TO BUILD RESILIENCE

Resilience, is both a process of adaptation and a set of individual attributes. Therefore, understanding individual and contextual factors instigating teachers or disturbing their peace become important to explore.

**Individual Challenges:** Individual challenges include problems like negative self-belief, hesitation in asking for help, Individual dilemma about the differences between the one's own beliefs and institutional practices etc. These factors are labelled as risk factors and discussed below:

### 1. *Negative self-belief*

A State of negative self-belief can result in decrease of confidence level. The feeling of 'I am not good enough' can hamper a classroom. It becomes necessary to balance it with the positive beliefs and facts. One should 'back-up' the beliefs with reasoning and trust. Self-assurance, trusting your skills and capabilities are very important. A comment or a complaint will not dishearten a teacher if he is honest with his values of hard work and dedication that are required for a class.

### 2. *Hesitation in asking for help*

It has been witnessed that teachers hesitate in asking for help or clearing their doubts with a fellow colleague, just

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out of the fear of sounding incapable or not-intelligent or incompetent. One should actually understand that there is no harm in asking for assistance, as even the most experienced teachers don't 'know it all'. Knowledge is a vast sea which no one could or can conquer. Moreover, one teacher being cannot be interested in all the sections of society. By reaching out for help, teachers can get the answers they need which would help them to bring out their best in a classroom. Asking for help, will not make you look weak rather you will be seen as someone with great strength.

### 3. *Conflict between perceived beliefs and practices in use*

Conflict between perceived beliefs and actual practices might create a state of disequilibrium. For example, a teacher might view teaching as transformation of knowledge and may not be very comfortable with static curriculum. In fact, the teacher will want the authority to change the pre-defined content and bring some dynamism in the class in form of contemporary and contextual content and modern methodologies. The conflict might also arise because of the differences in understanding of the various definitions like progress, time management, protocol and values like punctuality. Sharing between colleagues, teachers and students can help to reduce conflict and then teacher's stress.

### 4. *Ego*

When teachers are of an opinion that they know everything, they have solutions to all the problems, their word in the class is the last, then ego problems can originate. Statements like 'Which language do you understand in?', 'how many times do you expect me to explain the same thing?' are often heard in a classroom but a teacher should not use such statements. A teacher must work in the class with the objective of building mutual trust and strive to understand the perspective of students. Teachers' ego must not be fed by the virtue of authority they enjoy in the class. Teachers should also critically analyze his/her behaviour and should inculcate the habit of listening and confirming with the students.

**Contextual Challenges:** Our environment also creates a number of challenges which are beyond the control of a teacher like unsuitable/outdated course structure, timetable issues, delegation of improper work, unavailability of proper space etc. Such issues also affect the resilience of a teacher leading to negative consequences. Imagine the frustration of teaching nature, flowers and love in a closed wall classroom or teaching commerce to a student who is studying it only because he/she could not get admission into science stream or a teacher asked to

organise a fresher's party when he/she is at the last stages of a publication of a journal.

### 1. *Classroom challenges*

One of the most frequent factors associated with the teacher resilience is behaviour of students in the classroom. Students' misbehaviour become unacceptable and cause anger to the teacher. Sometime students' more disruptive behaviour occur in the classroom like an act of violence, disorder and verbal abuse, smashing door while leaving the classroom or kicking etc. All these might result in teacher losing his/her confidence or calm.

### 2. *Diversity among students*

Now the education is happening in global world, students are coming from various segments and sections of society. The students in this diverse group have different belief system, understanding & knowledge. It becomes important for a teacher to have broad mindedness, compassion and inclusiveness to incorporate the diverse belief and value system of students. Some actions of teacher in the classroom like a teacher calling a male student more frequently than female counterparts, supporting one culture and religion, raising voice while talking about a particular phenomenon, pointing out a blind student repeatedly etc can result in negativity among students. Although these actions are insignificant and remain unnoticed many time but sometime they can work as catalyst to the aggression of students.

### 3. *Lack of resources/equipments*

Poor infrastructural facilities can be stressful for both teachers and students. A poorly ventilated, dark and dirty classroom drastically affect the performance of both the teacher and students. Other facilities like well-maintained washrooms, availability of drinking water are also necessary. It has been found that facilities at an institution affect students' health, behaviour in terms of engagement in class, learning and their achievements. Ultimately, poor quality resources and services do also result in increase in absenteeism and sickness, low test scores and decrease in productivity. All these will affect a teacher's confidence and morale.

### 4. *Professional work environment*

The professional work environment can also give rise to a lot of challenges like heavy workload, executing administrative duties, strict and rigid hierarchies. For instance, superficial ego and prejudices of senior peers can hinder the workings and peace of junior colleagues. The junior teachers feel pressure of work and duty and this hampers their performance in the classroom

### 5. *Other factors*

Poor hiring practices, lack of job security, low salary, unsupportive leader/mentor. All these can also lead to unsatisfactory work environment for teachers.

### 3. STRATEGIES TO BUILD RESILIENCE

All the discussed factors pose serious challenges to teachers' resilience. These have to be overcome in order to ensure teachers' efficacy in classrooms. To mitigate the risk factors, protective factors come to rescue. Protective factors help an individual to view or convert adverse situations into positive measures that help in building resilience. In the further part of the paper the key strategies are discussed to build resilience and establish a stress free and happy working place for teachers.

1. Teachers should be sure about the values that are important to them and the beliefs that they value the most. These values and beliefs are substantial part of their social identity and thus, identifying them will help them analyse what are their expectations from their students/ colleagues/ institution and how will that be kept in front of the class or their colleagues. It will further assist them in challenging times. For example, punctuality is a very significant value for some teachers and they cannot compromise on it. So, before going to the class, the teacher should be very clear about how he/she will ensure the same from the students. Discussing it openly with the students, will help the teacher to prevent future arguments over it.
2. The second important thing is to understand the emotions. A teacher has to retrospect and think about the various ways in which a teacher has expressed a particular emotion, which emotion engulfs him more. Read them and see if emotions like anger and frustration have been productive or destructive. Compare the expressed emotions of past, whether it is compassion, anger or kindness that helped to build a positive environment. This comparison will help him to understand the difference of good and bad emotions and their degrees. This will further assist to control certain emotions. For instance, at times it is easier to sort out things with a discussion rather than strict actions.
3. Another thing is to understand the gap between action and its interpretation. For example, if a student is sitting with a dull face, it does not necessarily mean that the teacher's content or methodology is boring, rather, it is possible that the student is tensed because of some personal problem. So, how a teacher interprets an action or situation increases the power of resilience.
4. Bonding with colleagues and students can be a big strength. Healthy relationships give the space to express emotions, discuss problems and expectations freely. This leaves a teacher more balanced for a class and hence stress free. Many studies have proved that an introvert person remains in stress more time than an extrovert counterpart.
5. Understanding that 'No other can decide my reality, I know who am I' will make acceptance easier to teacher. If a student is reading a teacher to be strict in a situation, then it is based on his understanding of strictness. For example if a student calls you strict teacher because you did not let your student smoke in the class then it is definitely not being strict but being a dutiful teacher.
6. Give yourself some time. Continuous speaking, managing, arranging, organizing, counselling, sorting can be tiresome at times. Hence, it should not be always about narrating the experiences of being in the mountains but sometimes, a teacher should be actually in the mountains. Fresh air, daffodils and bright light can definitely relax and rejuvenate any being.
7. Understanding diversity can also add to the power of resilience. Students come from different cultures and backgrounds with different value systems. Identifying and accepting the differences and behaving accordingly without hurting the feeling of others will give power to resilience.
8. Be open to learning. Exploring the unknown depths will help to answer more questions of students. Also, the students and the younger colleagues may be more aware about the changing contemporary trends, they are also more tech-friendly, so it is always good to appreciate and learn them, they can make the class both easier and interesting. This way you can also be friends with them.
9. Change your methodology. Be creative. One should sit back, analyse week point and try to reconstruct actions, ways and reactions to enhance resilience. Relate the theoretical concepts with realities by taking them out. Let them experience the phenomenon by meeting, talking and observing the things. Be a facilitator and not merely the tutor.
10. Appreciate yourself. Applauds and appreciation are the best resources to develop resilience. Teachers work hard not only to improve their students' skills and concepts but also immensely contribute to their social and personal growth. Therefore, it is very important to recognise and congratulate yourself for the effort that you put in shaping student's right behaviour and mental attitude. A

teacher works hard for many events in their institutes like cultural fests, sports meet, annual day, it's a team work, he and his colleagues have made this day successful after dedication and hard work of many days. So, celebrate the successful completion of the event. Recognise each other's work, it spreads happiness.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Fast changing environment and increasing expectations of students and abandons of responsibilities have created many challenges for a teachers. Many Individual and contextual challenges come in the way of fulfilling his/her responsibilities and coping up with the changing environment. If these challenges remain unchecked, it may effects his/her performance and cause many misunderstandings, loss of confidence, lack of motivation and stress among teachers. It not only deteriorates teachers' performance but also hinders the growth of students which might surface in form of negative actions, low academic scores, low self-esteem. Building teachers' resilience can ensure excellent performance of the teacher and students. Self appreciation, managing diversity, evaluating his/her past emotions, discussion with friends and colleagues, self confidence, being close to reality are some of the strategies which can be used to build resilience. Practice makes a man perfect and so a teacher can perfectly handle the risk factors by practising the resilience strategies.

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