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Stressors, Coping Strategies, and Achievement During Teaching Practicum in a Nigerian Public University

Mensah Prince Osiesi, PhD
Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria
(iD) https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7660-6127

Udukhomose Suleiman Omokhabi, PhD
Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria
(iD) https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9700-5216

Sunday Ade Adeniran, PhD
Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria
(iD) https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5906-6045

Oluwayemisi Damilola Akomolafe, PhD
Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria
(iD) https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4400-2580

Oluwatoyin Tolu Obateru, PhD
Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria
(iD) https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3774-069x

Chigozie Celestina Oke, PhD
Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria
(iD) https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1555-1257

Adenike Lucia Aruleba, MEd
Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria
(iD) https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1134-5341

Contact: *mensah.osiesi@fuoye.edu.ng*

Abstract

Objectives: This study assessed pre-service teacher stressors, coping strategies, and achievement during teaching practicum in a Nigerian public university.

Method: The study adopted the quantitative case study approach. The population consisted of all 300-level students in the faculty of education in the university who had completed their teaching practicum for the first semester of the 2020–2021 academic session. The quota sampling technique was used in selecting a sample of 130 pre-service teachers. We analysed data using multiple regression.

Results: Findings revealed the stressors and coping strategies, controlling for gender, did not significantly predict achievement in the teaching practicum. Several coping strategies and sources of stress were identified among student teachers.

Conclusion: Although pre-service teachers in many Nigerian teacher training institutions report various stressors and coping strategies, these do not predict their achievement during practicum.

Implication for practice: The results can be useful in curriculum planning and policy design, especially for methodologies of coping and overcoming the various stressors accruing from the teaching profession in general. For universities and colleges of education, teacher trainers have knowledge about the teaching practicum, stressors, and the various coping strategies to be considered and appropriated into pre-service teachers' training for optimal performance.

Recommended Citation

Introduction

Teaching practicum in Nigeria's tertiary institutions may have begun in the early 1960s and is a prerequisite for graduation for all tertiary education students in the country. Practicing teachers in all levels of education likely have completed practicum. Practicum in teaching is a period during which a pre-service teacher is allowed to teach under supervision in a school setting (Mapfumo et al., 2012; Ngidi & Sibaya, 2013). Teaching practice is one of the most vital learning experiences in the professional preparation of teachers (Bichi & Musa, 2017). Teaching practice programmes improve the pedagogical performance and competence of teachers (Khalid, 2014; Mahmud, 2013; Makamure & Jita, 2019; Ulla, 2016). Teaching practicum has become a topical issue for most pre-service teacher education programmes (Hamaidi et al., 2014) while impacting experiential learning (Snyder, 2012; Van den Bos & Brouwer, 2014).

The key objectives of teaching practice in the Nigerian context as highlighted by Bichi and Musa (2017) include providing an opportunity for evaluating student potential and suitability for the teaching profession; providing future teachers with the experience needed to overcome the problems of discipline and enable them to develop control strategies; providing an opportunity for pre-service teachers to apply the right teaching methodologies, and enabling pre-service teachers to acquire desirable traits as is expected of a professional teacher. The teaching practice programme is usually coordinated in many Nigerian colleges of education and universities by a committee on teaching practice that makes decisions and advises the faculty on the programme improvement (Aglazor, 2017). Members of this committee are appointed by the rector of the college or the dean of the university education faculty.

In recent years, pre-service teachers seem to be overwhelmed by stressors involved in their teaching practice training. Teachers encounter stress, which could be caused by the school setting, classroom discipline challenges, poor recognition of teachers in the society, excess workload, lack of support and school bureaucracy, and absence of incentives (Antoniou et al., 2013). Stressors and the presence or absence of coping strategies impact pre-service teacher motivation and commitment to becoming practicing teachers (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014; He & Cooper, 2011). A professional teacher's journey could be emotionally stressful (Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Yuan & Lee, 2016). Poor quality feedback and high

expectations of supervisors and mentors of pre-service teachers, instructing students, meeting the needs of students, and evaluation skills are some factors that cause stress in pre-service teachers (Mahmoudi & ÿzkan, 2016). Teachers experience high-stress levels (Harmsen et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015); the teaching profession is overwhelmed with excess workload, contrary to the case in other professions (Hooftman et al., 2015). Teaching stress also causes attrition from the profession and poor teaching quality (Jones & Youngs, 2012; Klassen & Chiu, 2011; Newberry & Allsop, 2017), and these unfavourably affect student performance (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Studies have also shown that pre-service teacher performance during teaching practicum and the profession in general are affected by the digital skills they possess (Yaw Kwaah et al., 2022); poor recognition by the society (Okeke et al., 2019); inadequate professional training (Okeke et al., 2019); school leadership (Hedrick, 2022); and government, school, and health-related matters (Ige, 2019).

Pre-service teachers are expected to prepare lesson notes and create or improvise teaching aids, deliver lessons, mark exercises and assignments, and manage their classrooms. They are also expected to be regular and punctual at school, exhibit acceptable personality traits, and develop good interpersonal relationships with school staff, mentees, and assigned supervisors (Bhargava, 2009). Teacher stress also emanates from classroom management, lesson planning, heavy workload, school timetable, poor timing of the practicum, and evaluation criteria of supervisors. These stressors could play a role in determining whether pre-service teachers join the profession at the end of their training and graduation. Stressors among teachers have been extensively studied (Mundia, 2010), and these studies have shown that in-service and pre-service teachers do not effectively handle the stressors associated with teaching (Mapfumo et al., 2012). Mapfumo and colleagues affirmed that stressors such as financial challenges, heavy workload, discipline issues, and shortage of teaching and learning resources are common among teachers. Kokkinos and Stavropoulos (2016) examined the relationship among practicum-related stressors, perceived general practicum stress, personal variables, and burnout dimensions among pre-service teachers in Greece. The findings of the study revealed high-stress levels and emotional exhaustion among the pre-service teachers.

Pre-service teachers adopt strategies to cope with the various stresses they face, especially during teaching practice. Through this, pre-service teachers develop adaptive ways of handling stress (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014). Extant literature according to Mapfumo et al. (2012) lists some coping strategies used by pre-service teachers, such as cognitive restructuring; self-instruction; forming support networks; developing interpersonal skills; informing supervisors and cooperating teachers about stressors; exercising; relaxing; avoidance; social resources; reading; movement; hobbies; meditation; eating; and alcohol consumption. Socialising with relatives and friends, attending religious services, creating fun time, absenting from work, and punishing/beating students were other coping strategies adopted by the pre-service teacher during teaching practice.

Studies of teachers and how they cope with tensions in the profession as well as doing their best at ameliorating these tensions abound (Hong et al., 2018; Lanas & Kelchtermans, 2015; Pillen et al., 2013). Mapfumo et al. (2012), and Mahmoudi and ÿzkan (2016) examined the stressors caused by teaching practice and the coping mechanisms adopted by pre-service teachers in Zimbabwe. The results revealed that the main stressors among teachers include low allowances, problems with difficult learners, heavy workload, shortage of teaching and learning aids, supervision-related stress, and strike actions; while classroom management and school-related sources, lesson planning, appropriate teaching style, time control, and motivating learners were revealed to be the minor stressors. Interaction with family and other social support networks were the coping strategies adopted to manage stress.

Han and Tulgar (2019) investigated anxiety feelings of pre-service teachers before, during, and after teaching English lessons. The findings revealed that classroom management was the main source of teaching anxiety while the coping strategy usually adopted was for pre-service teachers to consult their mentors and cooperating teachers. Lampadan (2014) showed that stressors experienced by pre-service teachers are

teaching preparation, classroom management, and interaction with students and school staff. Coping strategies included good interaction with peers and mentors, lesson preparation, adaptation, and a positive attitude. Çakmak et al. (2019) examined the challenges encountered by pre-service teachers and the coping strategies adopted in overcoming these challenges. The results revealed that pre-service teachers face many challenges and used the problem-solving skills they acquired during practicum as a coping strategy. Al-Naimi et al. (2020) studied challenges and coping strategies faced by pre-service teachers in Qatari government schools. They found that professional, classroom, government, administrative, and teaching challenges were the main sources of stress for novice teachers. Coping strategies used included active communication, internal peace strategies, and changing the environment. In another study of pre-service teachers, Gutierrez et al. (2014) found that stressors included excess workload, financial challenge, uneasy cooperating teachers, students' bad behaviours, and lesson period for each subject. Teachers used several personal, social, and behavioural coping strategies. Finally, Gustems-Carnicer et al. (2019) conducted a study on pre-service teacher stress, coping strategies, and academic achievement. Results showed that academic achievement among these teacher trainees was a function of how they perceived and coped with stressors. These results are consistent with those of Gustems and Calderon (2013), Pietarinen et al. (2013), and Deasy et al. (2014a).

Stressors and coping strategies employed by pre-service teachers could be gender related. Pre-service teacher academic performance is dependent on how they perceive and cope with teaching stress (Deasy et al., 2014a; Gustems & Calderon, 2013; Pietarinen et al., 2013). Mapfumo et al. (2012) revealed that female pre-service teachers were more stressed than the male teachers. Salehi et al. (2017) examined the effect of stress and coping strategies on Iranian teachers. Results showed a significant difference in the gender of pre-service teachers concerning their stress and coping strategies, reaffirming that female students adopt emotion and avoidance strategies more frequently than males, while male students tend to adopt task-related coping strategies. Previous studies have depicted contrasting findings regarding the relationship between stress and gender. Beilock et al. (2010), Klassen and Ming (2010), and Antoniou et al. (2013) found that female pre-service teachers were more academically stressed. However, Prabu (2015) found no significant difference by gender in academic stress. Alipour and Safaie (2018) investigated the relationship among perceived stress, behaviour, and instructional management. Results showed that both males and females perceived that stress and behaviour management were related.

Theoretical Framework

This study's foundation is pragmatism as expounded by scholars such as Dewey, Pierce, Mead, and James (Charmaz, 2014). Teaching is practice-oriented, and, as such, pragmatism, as exemplified in this study focused on the interconnections among stressors, coping strategies, and achievement. Pre-service teachers reflect upon the teaching profession and tasks and the various inherent problems therein, and they strive to solve these problems during experiential learning (Charmaz, 2014). Generally, a pragmatic view of coping emphasizes individual capacity to emotionally overcome stressful situations and the necessary actions to adopt in mitigating such stressful situations (Linköping, 2019). Pre-service teachers over time reflect on what constitutes a stressor in the discharge of their pre-service teaching duties and their ability to develop coping strategies for overcoming the stressors during the practicum exercise (Charmaz, 2017). Pre-service teachers require both past and current teaching experiences in overcoming this stress in the profession.

Statement of the Problem and Research Question

Education stakeholders expect that pre-service teachers join the teaching profession after graduation and provide the needed quality, standard, and professionalism. However, this is not the reality in Nigeria, where for every 400 pre-service teachers, only about 29% are likely to end up in the teaching profession (Oyetoro et al., 2019). This is because many pre-service teachers, immediately after completion of academic and teacher training courses, aspire for other professions besides teaching. This is an undesired trend and may have been

caused by poor knowledge and understanding of the various stressors and the coping strategies they could employ during and after the teaching practicum, as well as the impact of these on their achievement in teaching (Harmsen et al., 2019; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Ryan et al., 2017). To retain pre-service teachers in the teaching profession, teacher training institutions need to prepare and impart these pre-service teachers with the necessary knowledge and understanding of the various stressors inherent in the profession, and the coping strategies in overcoming these stressors, as these are expected to influence their general performance in the profession.

Studies have examined teacher stress and gender (Alduais et al., 2022; Antoniou et al., 2013; Beilock et al., 2010; Klassen & Ming, 2010); stress and academic performance (Bharti, 2013; Sohail, 2013); sources of stress and the coping strategies (Han & Tulgar, 2019; Mahmoudi & ÿzkan, 2016); stress, coping strategies and test anxiety (Alduais et al., 2022; Salehi et al., 2017); and perceived stress, behaviour, and instructional management (Alipour & Safaie, 2018). However, none of these studies considered the extent to which pre-service teacher stressors, coping strategies, and gender predict their achievement in the teaching practicum. Hence, this study assessed the extent to which pre-service teachers' stressors, coping strategies, and gender predict their achievement during teaching practicum in a Nigerian public university. Thus, the research question involved understanding the extent to which gender, sources of stress, and coping strategies predict achievement in the teaching practicum.

Methodology

Context

Prior to conducting the study, we obtained the informed consent and written approval of the Education Faculty Officer (EFO) and the Teaching Practice Coordinator (TPC) of the sampled university for the use of their students in the faculty as study participants. Informed consent of the sampled respondents in the faculty was also sought and obtained. The practicum usually lasts for six weeks in the university in which this study was conducted, and participation is strictly for pre-service teachers in their third and fourth years. While in their partnership schools, which are mostly the choice of the student, pre-service teachers are expected to teach subjects in their area of specialisation by training. Assigned supervisors (two supervisors to one pre-service teacher) from the training institutions are expected to visit the pre-service teachers in the first week of their experience to familiarize themselves with the pre-service teacher and the partnership school. The supervisors' next visit is to assess and evaluate the pre-service teacher for 20–30 minutes and provide feedback for an additional 10–15 minutes (Asaya, 2010).

Population and Sample

This is a case study research type of the quantitative design. We drew the sample from all students in their third year from the faculty of education who completed their teaching practicum in the first semester of the 2020–2021 academic session. The quota sampling technique was used to select 130 students across the departments in the faculty (Library and Information Science, $N = 30$; Business Education, $N = 25$; Educational Management, $N = 25$; Biology Education, $N = 25$; Chemistry Education, $N = 25$).

Instrumentation

The Pre-service Teachers Stressors and Coping Strategies During Teaching Practicum Questionnaire (PTSCSTPQ) and the teaching practice students' achievement score record sheet for the 2020–2021 academic session formed the data for the study. The items in the instrument were adapted from the Teachers' Stress Inventory (Boyle et al., 1995) and the Ways of Coping Questionnaire (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). Studies (e.g., Austin et al., 2005; Zhao et al., 2022) affirmed the validity and reliability of these instruments. The

PTSCSTPQ was first presented to two experts in educational evaluation at the university to assess its face and construct validities. Their suggestions were used in revising the instrument. The PTSCSTPQ was then piloted with 52 pre-service teachers from the department who were not included in the main study. The instrument has three sections.

Biographical Data
Section A contains student biographical data, which include matriculation number, academic department, teaching subject, and the class taught in the teaching practicum.

Stressors and Coping Strategies
Section B of the instrument includes 22 items measuring the stressors experienced while teaching practicum. Items were assessed using a 4-point Likert scale (High stressor = 4, Moderate stressor = 3, Low stressor = 2, and Not a stressor = 1). The individual items in the scale were transformed into a single score ranging from 26 (lowest score) to 56 (highest score). Scores greater than 50 signify more experienced stressors, scores between 40 and 50 moderately experienced stressors, and scores less than or equal to 39 signify fewer experienced stressors. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was adequate at 0.74. Section C contained 22 items measuring the different coping strategies that pre-service teachers adopted during teaching practicum. These items were also placed on a 4-point Likert scale (Never = 1, Sometimes = 2, Most of the time = 3, and Always = 4). Similarly, scores greater than 50 represent greater ability to cope, scores between 40 and 50 depict a moderate ability to cope, and scores less than 39 depict lesser ability to cope. Cronbach alpha reliability of Section C items was 0.83. Exploratory factor analysis was used to further validate the scales. The Kaiser-Olkin Measure of sampling adequacy value obtained were ≥ 0.6, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .05$).

Achievement
Achievement scores of the sampled pre-service teachers were obtained from the score bank of the faculty teaching practice committee after the completion of the teaching practicum in the first semester of 2020–2021 academic session. The range of achievement scores was 25, with a maximum score of 70, a minimum score of 45, median score of 60, and variance of 28.74. These scores were written on the matched PTSCSTPQ of each respondent by the researchers.

Statistical Analysis
SPSS V23 was used to analyze the data. Data were thoroughly checked for completeness before entering it into the software package and were cleaned for errors or missing data before analysis. Mean and standard deviation statistics were used to characterize stressors and coping strategies. Multiple regression was used to analyze hypothesized relationships at a 0.05 level of significance. The independent variables are pre-Gender, Source of Stress, and Coping Strategies. The Enter procedure was used to guide how variables were included in the model. To test for multicollinearity, we used the variance inflation factor (VIF) values. Variables with a VIF of less than 5 depict that the independent variables are not multicollinear and should be included in the model (Kock & Lynn, 2012); independent variables in this study met this criterion (See Table 4). Analysis of variance was used as the test of significance for the regression. The test is used to determine whether the dependent variable and at least one of the independent variables have a linear statistical relationship. More so, we examined the normal predicted probability (P-P) plot to determine if the residuals are normally distributed. Analytical results obtained revealed that the residuals conform to the diagonal normality line; that is, residuals were normally distributed.

Results

Descriptive Analyses

The sample consisted of 47 male (36.2%) and 83 female (63.8) pre-service teachers. Table 1 reveals the major stressors of pre-service teachers. The top five high stressors as reported by the pre-service teachers, in descending order of the mean, are students not listening during lessons, unfriendly cooperating teacher, students' low self-esteem, other staff indiscipline and laziness, and conducting extra classes for students.

Table 1. *Mean Responses on the Major Stressors*

S/No	Statements	Mean	SD
1	Students not listening during lessons	1.94	1.83
2	Unfriendly cooperating teacher	1.94	0.27
3	Student low self esteem	1.84	0.43
4	Other staff indiscipline and laziness	1.78	0.48
5	Conducting extra classes for students	1.76	0.45
6	Language barriers	1.75	0.45
7	Student coming late to class	1.74	0.44
8	School workload	1.74	0.51
9	Lack of teaching aids	1.72	0.45
10	Accommodation problem	1.69	0.48
11	Supervisors from the university	1.66	0.99
12	Engaging in other school activities	1.66	0.49
13	Writing lesson plan and notes	1.65	0.49
14	Marking students' assignment and notes	1.64	0.48
15	Lack of learning aids	1.63	0.48
16	Relationship with other school staff	1.62	0.53
17	Student's unruly behaviour	1.58	0.54
18	Dullness on the part of students	1.54	0.50
19	Student noise making	1.53	0.56
20	Stubborn and difficult students	1.52	0.50
21	Students poor study habit	1.48	0.55
22	Financial challenge	1.46	0.50
	Pooled mean	**1.68**	

Table 2 depicts the various coping strategies pre-service teachers adopt in overcoming stress during the teaching practicum. The top five coping strategies adopted by students in descending order of the mean include socializing with friends; giving students additional assignments/class work; meditating and praying; attending religious programmes; and learning how to live with it.

Table 2. *Coping Strategies Pre-Service Teachers Adopt in Overcoming Stressors*

S/No	Statements	Mean	S. D

1	Socializing with friends	3.21	3.75
2	Giving students additional assignments/ class work	3.06	0.95
3	Meditating and praying	3.01	0.99
4	Attending religious programmes	2.84	1.07
5	Learned how to live with it	2.61	1.07
6	Getting help and advice from other people.	2.55	0.20
7	Engaging in leisure activities	2.53	1.06
8	Taking a walk within the school	2.49	0.91
9	Concentrated their efforts on doing something about the situation	2.45	1.09
10	Made fun of the situation	2.27	3.41
11	Reporting unruly students to the school authority	2.18	0.99
12	Getting emotional support from others	1.90	0.90
13	Reading novels and magazines	1.89	0.79
14	Listening to music	1.86	0.95
15	Punishing student	1.85	1.10
16	Sleeping	1.82	2.00
17	Playing with phones	1.74	0.86
18	Used alcohol or other drugs to make them feel better	1.52	0.95
19	Going to movies, or clubs	1.47	0.85
20	Watching television	1.45	0.92
21	Beating students	1.43	0.68
22	Absenting from duties	1.22	0.72
	Pooled mean	**2.16**	

Research Question: To What Extent do Gender, Sources of Stress, and Coping Strategies Predict Achievement in the Teaching Practicum?

Table 3 depicts the correlation matrix that shows how the independent variables (gender, stressor, and coping strategies) and the dependent variable (achievement in teaching practicum) correlate when not controlling for other variables.

Table 3. *Correlations Among Gender, Stressors, Coping, and Achievement (*N = *130)*

	1	2	3	4
1. Gender	-			
2. Sources of stress	.070*	-		
3. Coping strategies	.050	-.264*	-	
4. Achievement	.127	-.037	-.081	-
Mean	1.64	36.67	46.09	59.56
S.D.	0.48	4.49	7.74	5.36

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

The result of the multiple regression analysis showed that sources of stress (B = -.090, t $_{(119)}$ = -.822, p> 0.05) and coping strategies (B = -.075, t $_{(119)}$=.063; p> 0.05) did not significantly predict achievement in the teaching practicum.

Discussion

The highest sources of stress reported by students were consistent with those found in other studies (e.g., Lampadan, 2014). Also, the finding partly corroborates Mahmoudi and yokan's (2016) study that pre-service teachers' stressors included classroom management, school, affective, supervisors and mentor-related factors; students in our study did not report mentor-related factors, however. The present study revealed other sources of stress among pre-service teachers found by other authors (Gutierrez et al., 2014; Han & Tulgar, 2019; Hooftman et al., 2015; Issakahet al., 2021; Mahmoudi & ÿzkan, 2016; Mapfumo et al., 2012; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Coping strategies were consistent with those in the extant literature (e.g., Çakmak et al., 2019; Han & Tulgar, 2019; Lampadan, 2014; Mapfumo et al., 2012; Mahmoudi & ÿzkan, 2016).

In addition, this study revealed that sources of stress among pre-service teachers and the coping strategies adopted do not significantly predict their achievement in the teaching practicum; this held true controlling for gender. Irrespective of how stressed pre-service teachers are or how well they cope, student teachers still seem to perform well during practicum. Thus, student performance in the practicum may be dependent on other factors not considered in the present study. It is understandable that stressors demoralize and caused disinterest and burnout among pre-service teachers. More so, stressors could be the cause of fidgeting, lack of confidence, signs of unpreparedness, poor teaching, communication, classroom management, and assessment skills exhibited by these teachers when their faculty assigned supervisors and examiners come to assess and rate them with an achievement score while they teach their classes. The finding that no relationship exists among pre-service teachers' stressors, coping strategies, and achievement is inconsistent with those found by previous authors (Gustems & Calderon, 2013; Deasy et al., 2014a; Pietarinen et al., 2013), whose finding revealed that pre-service teacher academic performance is dependent on how they perceive and cope with stress. However, the finding that pre-service teacher coping strategy score is not correlated with achievement in the teaching practicum is at odds with studies reporting a positive association prediction (Gustems & Calderon, 2013; Deasy et al., 2014a; Pietarinen et al., 2013). Similarly, the present study provides a significant insight into other pre-service teachers' stressors and the coping strategies adopted than what exists in the extant literature.

Research Limitations

This study was limited to only one public university in southwest Nigeria and included a small sample (130 pre-service teachers). Thus, the results from this study may not be generalisable. Also, the variable of concern in the study were limited to pre-service teacher gender, stressors, coping strategies, and achievement in the

teaching practicum; other factors exist that impact achievement. Consequently, we implore future researchers to conduct similar studies with a larger geographical scope, utilise other research methods (qualitative or mixed methods), larger sample sizes, and consider other variables outside this study that can affect achievement in the teaching practicum.

Implications for Teacher Training and Practice

The outcomes of this study would be of immense benefit to the various teacher training institutions, especially in Nigeria, regarding understanding pre-service teacher sources of stress. This knowledge could be useful in curriculum planning and policy design, especially on methodologies of coping and overcoming the various stressors accruing from the teaching profession in general. For universities and colleges of education, teacher trainers have the knowledge about the teaching practicum, stressors, and the various coping strategies to be considered and appropriated into pre-service teachers' training for optimal performance. Also, the study provides enlightenment for education stakeholders on the stressors faced by the Nigerian pre-service teachers, viz-a-viz the coping strategies (ways by which they can be curbed), to have a unified force regarding pre-service teachers' training, supports, posting for the practicum, and eventual recruitment and promotion even in their in-service years. The findings provide insight into how the government and its agencies, training institutions, and the partnership schools can intervene in providing every necessary assistance to pre-service teachers; these may take the form of placing them on stipends and/or providing accommodation (housing) for them at the partnership schools.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Teaching practicum in many Nigerian teacher training institutions is enmeshed with several stressors, and pre-service teachers adopt a variety of coping strategies to help them be successful in practicum. While the stress and coping strategies were not related to achievement, several sources and stress and coping strategies were identified that can be helpful to student teachers and educators who design the training curriculum.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure: There is no conflict of interest whatsoever concerning this study.

Ethics statements: The authors declare that all ethical considerations were fully adhered to in this study. A written approval for the use of the actual pre-service teachers teaching practicum achievement scores was obtained from the Coordinator of the Teaching Practicum Committee of the sampled Faculty.

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