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# Role of Self-Care Practices in the Professional Growth of Teachers in Higher Education

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## Abstract

This paper is an attempt to analyze the role of self-care practices in the professional growth of teachers in higher education. A teacher plays a significant role in shaping the destination of an individual, society or nation. That is why all the aspects of a teacher should be developed in a balanced manner to deliver the quality services effectively. The daily demands in the profession of teaching are increasing day by day specifically in higher education. This has resulted into burnout, job dissatisfaction and professional declination. In this scenario self-care practices may prove as a vital strategy for overcoming these challenges. The self-care practices are needed to keep a teacher fit, happy and healthy. These practices may include yoga, meditation, mindfulness, walking, exercises, proper diet, quality sleep, work-life balance etc. These are the keys to happiness and play a significant role in leading a quality life. In the field of higher education professional pressure, workload and expectation are growing gradually for a teacher. Therefore, work-life balance is crucial to lead a balanced, quality and happy life.

**Keywords:** Self-care, quality life, work-life balance, higher education, professional development.

## Introduction

The world has changed a lot. We are living in an era of globalisation driven by changing social values, transforming lifestyles and diffusing cultural patterns. Technological advancement has changed the entire lifestyle, social connections and behavioural patterns of teachers, practitioners and administrators in higher education. The education system is going through a paradigm shift throughout the world. This has caused a drastic change in the stress level of the teachers. Self-care matters a lot. Self-care practices play a significant role in the life of an individual. These practices have a direct impact on every aspect of life including physical, mental, social, emotional and economical. Self-care is the need of the hour. It includes the actions taken intentionally to preserve and facilitate the overall well-being (Becker, 2020) <sup>[1]</sup>. Self-care practices must be given priority to improve the quality of personal as well as professional life. They also help a teacher maintain his or her work-life balance. They contribute to increase the professional growth, efficiency and productivity. The life of a teacher is not as simple as it seems to the people. A teacher has to handle not only the academic aspect of life, but also the social, moral, emotional, financial and administrative aspect. He or she has to deal not only with the students, but also the parents, guardians and community. The role of a teacher is not confined to the institution alone specifically in Indian context. In India a teacher is a teacher inside as well as outside the institution. The life of a teacher is a role model for the students, guardians and the entire society.

Each and every aspect of the life of a teacher influences a large section of the society. This situation leads to increase in the stress level of the teachers many times. If the stress level crosses a certain limit, then it may cause serious problems to the well-being of the teachers (Shankar & Thapa, 2019) <sup>[8]</sup>. To avoid such kind of situation it is essential to indulge into the self-care practices. These self-care practices may lead to lower the stress level, enhance self-awareness and improve the mental health of the teachers.

## Notion of Self-Care Practices in the Present Context

With the increasing pressures and daily demands of modern life, self-care has become indispensable for reducing stress, betterment of health and overall well-being. The idea or notion of self-care practices has emerged to cover a holistic, multifaceted and comprehensive approach to one's wellness or well-being. It focuses on the all-round development of personality. Self-care practices refer to planned, deliberate and intentional actions taken to protect, preserve and promote one's physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being (Dray & Palmer, 2019) <sup>[3]</sup>. These practices prioritize happiness, fulfillment and personal health, enabling individuals to manage their own stress, build resilience and maintain overall quality of life. They include a wide range of practices such as yoga, meditation, mindfulness, regular exercises, relaxation techniques etc. They also include the activities like hobbies, creative work, spending time with nature etc. that bring joyfulness, satisfaction and happiness.

By prioritizing self-care practices, teachers can develop a deeper sense of self-love, self-compassion and self-awareness leading to a more balanced, reasonable, harmonious, meaningful and purposeful life. In the present era of fast-paced and technology-driven world self-care practices also include creating healthy boundaries, limiting screen time and making meaningful associations with others (Becker, 2020) <sup>[1]</sup>.

### **The Role of Self-Care Practices in Enhancing Professional Well-Being**

For teachers in higher education, integrating self-care practices into their daily lives is crucial not only for personal well-being, but also for achieving long-term success in the professional life. Teachers should be facilitated to ask for therapy or counselling, if required. They should also engage in mindfulness practices and involve in reflective practices such as meditation or journaling. These actions can help teachers handle stress, manage issues related to mental health and develop emotional resilience. Institutions can have a critical, decisive and vital role by giving access to mental health services, creating spaces for reflection and nurturing a culture where asking for help is supported and normalized. Physical health is closely connected to mental and emotional well-being. Teachers should prioritize regular exercise, maintain a balanced diet and make sure that they get sufficient sleep. Physical exercises can change mood, reduce stress and improve energy levels (Becker, 2020) <sup>[1]</sup>. Self-care practices play a crucial, critical and vital role in fulfilling the daily demands of teaching practices and profession.

Higher education institutions can facilitate physical self-care practices by giving access to fitness facilities, organizing wellness programmes and encouraging active breaks during the long working hours (Douglass, 2017) <sup>[2]</sup>. Further, time management is an important dimension of self-care practices for the teachers. By setting clear restrictions to working hours, teachers can ensure that they reserve enough time for family, relaxation and personal activities. Taking time away from work allows for revival, prohibits overwork and promotes the idea of a balanced life. Furthermore, teachers should prioritize tasks and allot the tasks whenever possible, thus overcoming the stress on their time, energy and resources. Creating a support network is one more crucial constituent of self-care practices. Teachers should seek out friends, colleagues and family who can provide emotional support, advice and encouragement. Moreover, organizations can cultivate a sense of community by facilitating collaborative work, organizing peer support programmes and taking professional development measures that give emphasis on self-care and well-being (Dray & Palmer, 2019) <sup>[3]</sup>.

### **Self-Care Practices as the Need of the Hour for Teachers in Higher Education**

Self-care matters a lot. It affects all the aspects of life including physical, mental, social, emotional as well as economical. In the field of higher education it serves as a crucial instrument of nullifying the pressures of academia. Teachers of higher education play a vital role in shaping the destiny of country, society and future generations. They share knowledge, guide students and create a learning environment. In the present time the demanding nature of teaching profession alongwith administrative tasks, research expectations and learners' need may lead to burnout of teachers. Hence, it is necessary for teachers to prioritize self-care practices to maintain their own overall well-being

(Becker, 2020) <sup>[1]</sup>. Self-care is not a luxury, but an urgent need for the teachers in higher education. By prioritizing self-care practices, teachers can experience several advantages that can facilitate their personal as well as professional lives. These self-care practices play a crucial and critical role in handling the stress of daily demands, maintaining the work-life balance and leading a quality life with peace, happiness and satisfaction (Douglass, 2017) <sup>[2]</sup>.

Self-care practices such as yoga, meditation and deep breathing can help reduce stress, strain and burnout. Chronic stress can lead to physical, mental and emotional health related problems including nervousness, hopelessness and cardio-vascular diseases. Other self-care practices such as therapy, journaling and social support can help teachers manage their mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, frustration etc. Furthermore, self-care practices such as physical exercises, healthy eating and quality sleep can help teachers develop resilience, making them capable to cope up with stress, setbacks and challenges of life in a better way. Moreover, self-care practices such as meditation, mindfulness and self-compassion can help teachers become much more effective, creative and productive teachers improving their ability to connect with the learners, manage classrooms and create engaging learning designs (Pritchard & Wilson, 2019) <sup>[7]</sup>. Self-care practices such as prioritization, boundary-setting and time management can help teachers accomplish a better balance between their work and personal lives.

### **Challenges Faced by the Teachers in Higher Education**

In the increasingly demanding landscape of higher education, teachers frequently find themselves under much pressure because of the increasing complexities of teaching, guidance, research, administration and interactions with learners. The role of a teacher in higher education is multidimensional. It demands not only expertise in subject area, but also the ability to engage with learners, involve in academic research and participate in administrative duties along with fulfilling the growing expectations of institutions. As the extent, burden and depth of these accountabilities increase, teachers are increasingly finding themselves at risk of stress, burnout and mental health disorders (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) <sup>[6]</sup>. These issues can negatively affect their personal as well as professional lives. In spite of these issues, there is a continuing cultural shift that neglects the personal well-being of teachers and frequently placing academic and institutional expectations above the individual needs.

In spite of the significance of self-care practices, lots of teachers face challenges that stop them from prioritizing their own health, happiness and well-being. Teachers in higher education frequently have heavy teaching loads, research accountabilities and service compulsions, leaving little time for self-care practices (Koch, 2019) <sup>[5]</sup>. They are often expected to be accessible all the time, respond to e-mails and messages quickly and maintain a high level of productivity. Many teachers lack access to resources such as mental health support, wellness programmes and professional growth opportunities. Unfortunately, there is still a stigma around mental health issues in academia, which can prevent teachers from asking for help or prioritizing self-care practices. The pressure to publish research and secure funding can be devastating, leading teachers to overlook their own health and well-being. Lack of time, focus on career and high professional expectations are some of the important challenges in front of the teachers working in higher education.

## Strategies for Integrating Self-Care Practices into Busy Lives of Teachers

In spite of the challenges, there are many strategies that teachers in higher education can utilize to integrate self-care practices into their busy, hectic and demanding lives. They may commence with small, simple and convenient self-care practices such as taking a few deep breaths, going for a short walk or practicing gratitude (Field & Diego 2017) <sup>[4]</sup>. They can involve self-care practices into their everyday schedule as an important part of life. They can also create a support network of friends, colleagues, well-wishers, relatives and family members who can offer practical help, emotional support and unconditional acceptance. Taking regular breaks throughout the day to rest, recharge and refocus also play a crucial role in relaxation and increasing the efficiency, creativity and productivity (Koch, 2019) <sup>[5]</sup>. Practicing mindfulness techniques such as yoga, meditation or deep breathing to decrease stress and increase resilience may be used. If the teachers are struggling with mental health issues or burnout, they may ask for professional help from a therapist, counsellor or mental health professional. Self-care is indispensable for teachers in the field of higher education. By prioritizing self-care practices, teachers can reduce their stress, enhance their mental health and improve their teaching performance. In this way they can achieve a better work-life balance. By starting with small steps like prioritizing self-care, seeking support, taking breaks, practicing mindfulness and seeking professional help, teachers in higher education can sustain their overall well-being and efficiency in the classroom. Self-care practices are not only crucial for the personal well-being of teachers in the field of higher education, but also significant for their professional growth and development. By prioritizing mental health, physical well-being and emotional resilience, teachers can reduce the risks of burnout and maintain a high degree of professional competence (Koch, 2019) <sup>[5]</sup>. Moreover, organizations must recognize the significance of supporting self-care initiatives through flexible policies, wellness programmes and a culture that values the health and well-being of its faculties. Eventually, there is a need of a comprehensive approach to self-care practices which can lead to more efficient teaching, better learning outcomes and a more sustainable and rewarding career in the field of higher education.

## Conclusion

Health is wealth. Self-care plays a critical role in keeping an individual healthy. Self-care practices are essential to make a teacher physically fit, mentally alert and emotionally stable. These practices lead to healthy lifestyle, charming personality and cordial relationships with others. Self-care helps a teacher maintain his or her mental health, physical fitness and work-life balance as well. A teacher with balanced personality is able to deliver quality services in the form of effective, creative and productive teaching and learning practices. He or she can serve the people, society and nation to the fullest. The work load, academic stress and administrative pressure, continuous monitoring and political challenges of teachers in higher education are increasing gradually. This results into burnout, frustration, emotional outburst many times. Self-care practices on regular basis can play a critical, decisive and significant role to handle such kind of situation in an effective manner. That is why it is the responsibility of the institution, management and policy makers to facilitate the idea of self-

care practices amongst the teachers of higher education as much as possible.

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