

The Effectiveness of Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) in Managing Stress Among Middle and High School Teachers in Karnataka

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Abstract: Teacher stress and burnout are a significant occupational health concern in India, with national surveys reporting that a majority of school teachers experience moderate to severe stress. Middle and high school teachers, who manage large classrooms, examination pressure, administrative workload, and adolescent behavioural needs, are especially vulnerable. This study evaluated the effectiveness of Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT)- a brief, self-administered tapping method combining verbal acknowledgment of a stressor with manual stimulation of acupressure points- as a low-cost stress-management intervention. A single-group, repeated-measures field programme was delivered to 123 middle and high school teachers across Bangalore, Mangalore, Mysore, Hubli, and Belgaum. Participants attended five weekly EFT tapping sessions, took a structured six-week break, and returned for a single follow-up session. Perceived stress was measured at every session using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10). Mean scores fell from 32.63 ($SD = 2.87$) at Session 1 to 26.37 ($SD = 2.18$) at Session 5, $t(106) = 18.00$, $p < .001$, $d_z = 1.74$, and continued to fall to 25.02 ($SD = 1.52$) at follow-up, $t(108) = 25.64$, $p < .001$, $d_z = 2.46$, indicating that gains were not only maintained but consolidated during the break. The proportion of teachers in the "high stress" band fell from 98.4% at baseline to 40.2% post-programme and 11.0% at follow-up. Neither gender, school level, nor recruitment location significantly moderated the amount of change. Findings support EFT as a promising, low-cost, easily scaled stress-management technique for Indian school teachers, pending confirmation through controlled replication.

Keywords: Emotional Freedom Techniques, tapping, teacher stress, Perceived Stress Scale, Karnataka, school teachers, follow-up maintenance

1. Introduction

The teaching profession in India has undergone considerable transformation in recent decades, with educators increasingly expected to function simultaneously as instructors, counsellors, administrators, and emotional first-responders to their students. Middle and high school teachers face a particularly demanding combination of curriculum delivery, examination preparation, parental communication, and adolescent behavioural management. National-level data underline the scale of the problem: surveys of Indian school teachers report that a majority experience moderate to severe stress and burnout, with secondary-school teachers among the most affected groups (Christian, Sutariya, & Kagathra, 2022; Pandey & Sayed, 2024). Existing stress-management options for teachers- counselling, yoga programmes, mindfulness courses- tend to require considerable time, trained facilitators, and recurring costs, limiting how widely they can be adopted in resource-constrained school systems.

Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT), commonly known as "tapping," is a brief, self-administered technique involving tapping with the fingertips on a defined sequence of acupressure points while verbally naming a stressor and pairing it with a brief self-acceptance statement. A tapping round takes only a few minutes and requires no equipment, making it well suited to a teacher's working day.

Despite the evident burden of teacher stress in the Indian context, empirical evaluation of brief, low-cost interventions such as EFT for this population remains sparse. To address this gap, the present study evaluates change in perceived stress across a five-week EFT tapping programme delivered

to Karnataka teachers, and examines whether gains are maintained after a structured break from facilitator-led sessions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teacher Stress and Occupational Burnout in India

Research specific to the Indian context documents a consistently high prevalence of teacher stress and burnout, with secondary-school teachers frequently among the most affected groups (Christian et al., 2022). Reported predictors include heavy workload, expanding non-teaching responsibilities, limited autonomy, and inadequate institutional support for mental health (Pandey & Sayed, 2024).

2.2 Conceptual Rationale for EFT

EFT pairs a cognitive component (naming and acknowledging the stressor) with a somatic, calming component (rhythmic tapping on acupressure points). This dual-component structure is proposed, though not directly tested through physiological measures in this study, as a plausible basis for its effect on self-reported stress (Bach, Groesbeck, Stapleton, Sims, Blickheuser, & Church, 2019).

2.3 Evidence for EFT's Effectiveness on Stress and Anxiety

Systematic reviews and meta-analyses report meaningful reductions in stress, anxiety, and trauma-related symptoms following brief courses of EFT, with effect sizes generally in

the medium-to-large range across clinical and non-clinical samples (Sebastian & Nelms, 2017). Trials report that benefits are achievable in as few as three to ten sessions.

2.4 Physiological Correlates of EFT

Controlled trials examining EFT's effect on stress biochemistry report reductions in cortisol alongside reductions in self-reported psychological distress, lending physiological plausibility to self-report change following tapping (Church, Yount, & Brooks, 2012; Stapleton, Crighton, Sabot, & O'Neill, 2024).

2.5 EFT in Educational Settings

A small number of studies have examined EFT within school and university settings, generally reporting meaningful reductions in self-rated stress and anxiety after a small number of group-delivered sessions, including in exam-related contexts (Vural, Körpe, & İnangil, 2019).

2.6 Research Gap

Published intervention research for Indian teachers has largely examined longer, resource-intensive formats such as multi-month yoga programmes. No published study has evaluated a brief, five-session EFT tapping programme specifically among Karnataka's middle and high school teachers, nor examined whether gains are maintained after a genuine break from facilitator-led sessions. This is the gap the present study addresses.

3. Problem Definition

Indian middle and high school teachers report high levels of perceived stress, yet few brief, low-cost, teacher-deliverable interventions have been formally evaluated for this population. This study examines whether a five-week EFT tapping programme measurably reduces perceived stress among Karnataka teachers, and whether any improvement is sustained once weekly sessions stop and teachers rely on independent practice during a break period.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To evaluate change in perceived stress (PSS-10) across five weekly EFT tapping sessions.
- To examine whether reductions in perceived stress are maintained at a follow-up session after a six-week break.
- To compare stress trajectories between middle school and high school teachers.
- To compare stress trajectories between male and female teachers.
- To describe the proportion of teachers moving out of the "high stress" category over the programme.

Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Mean PSS-10 scores at Session 5 will be significantly lower than at Session 1 (baseline).

H2: Mean PSS-10 scores at the follow-up session will be significantly lower than at baseline.

H3: Mean PSS-10 scores will not increase significantly between Session 5 and follow-up, indicating maintenance of gains.

H4: The magnitude of stress reduction will not differ significantly by gender.

H5: The magnitude of stress reduction will not differ significantly by school level (middle vs. high school).

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study adopted a single-group, repeated-measures field design to evaluate change in perceived stress across a five-week EFT tapping programme and a subsequent post-break follow-up session, in place of the two-arm randomised design considered at the proposal stage.

4.2 Participants

The study sample comprised 123 currently serving middle and high school teachers in Karnataka, recruited through social media outreach and voluntary registration, drawn from Bangalore, Mangalore, Mysore, Hubli, and Belgaum.

4.3 Measures

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10)

A widely used 10-item self-report measure of the degree to which life situations are appraised as stressful over the preceding month (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). Scores range from 0–40 and are grouped into low (0–13), moderate (14–26), and high (27–40) severity bands.

4.4 Procedure

Eligible teachers completed the PSS-10 at the start of each of five weekly, group-delivered EFT sessions (approximately 60 minutes each). Sessions progressed from psychoeducation and basic tapping instruction (Sessions 1–2) to applied practice (Sessions 3–4) and consolidation (Session 5). Following Session 5, participants continued independent daily practice for approximately six weeks before returning for a single follow-up session at which the PSS-10 was re-administered.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly followed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participants were assigned unique identification codes, and data were held in secure, access-restricted digital storage.

4.6 Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was performed in Python (pandas, SciPy), using descriptive statistics, paired-samples *t* tests (Session 1 vs. Session 5, Session 1 vs. follow-up, Session 5 vs. follow-up), independent-samples *t* tests (gender, school level), and a one-way ANOVA (recruitment location), with Cohen's *d* reported for paired comparisons. All tests were two-tailed at $\alpha = .05$.

5. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Demographic data of the sample (N = 123)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	109	88.6
	Male	14	11.4
School level	Middle Sch.	85	69.1
	High Sch.	38	30.9
Location	Bangalore	74	60.2
	Mangalore	22	17.9
	Mysore	18	14.6
	Hubli	8	6.5
	Belgaum	1	0.8

Table 1 represents a total of 123 participants who took part in the present study. The sample was predominantly female (88.6%) and drawn mainly from middle schools (69.1%) and from Bangalore (60.2%), with smaller groups from Mangalore, Mysore, Hubli, and Belgaum. This uneven distribution is considered when interpreting the subgroup comparisons reported below.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for PSS-10 scores across assessment points (N = 123)

Assessment point	n	M	SD
Session 1 (Baseline)	123	32.63	2.87
Session 2	121	28.69	3.84
Session 3	101	28.45	2.49
Session 4	103	28.01	2.75
Session 5 (Post)	107	26.37	2.18
Follow-up	109	25.02	1.52

Table 2 summarises the trajectory of perceived stress across the programme. Mean PSS-10 scores declined at every successive assessment, from 32.63 (SD = 2.87) at Session 1 to 25.02 (SD = 1.52) at follow-up, with the standard deviation also narrowing over time, indicating that participants converged toward a common lower level of stress as the programme progressed.

Table 3: Percentage of teachers in each PSS-10 severity band

Severity band	Baseline	Session 5	Follow-up
Low (0–13)	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Moderate (14–26)	1.60%	59.80%	89.00%
High (27–40)	98.40%	40.20%	11.00%

Table 3 shows that the proportion of teachers classified as “high stress” fell from 98.4% at baseline to 40.2% by Session 5 and 11.0% at follow-up, with the remainder in the “moderate stress” band. No teacher reached the “low stress” band at any point, indicating a substantial but incomplete reduction in clinical risk category.

Table 4: Paired-samples t tests comparing PSS-10 scores across key assessment points

Comparison	n	t	df	p	dz
Session 1 vs. 5 (H1)	107	18	106	<.001	1.74
Session 1 vs. Follow-up (H2)	109	25.64	108	<.001	2.46
Session 5 vs. Follow-up (H3)	101	6.14	100	<.001	0.61

Table 4 provides paired-samples t tests supporting H1–H3. Scores fell significantly from Session 1 to Session 5 ($dz = 1.74$) and continued to fall further by follow-up ($dz = 2.46$

versus baseline), with the change between Session 5 and follow-up also significant ($dz = 0.61$)- indicating that gains were not merely maintained but continued to consolidate during the unsupervised six-week break, contrary to the relapse sometimes reported for brief interventions once structured support ends (Sebastian & Nelms, 2017; Church et al., 2012).

Table 5: Independent-samples t test comparing magnitude of stress reduction by gender and school level

Comparison	Group 1 M	Group 2 M	t	p
Gender (H4)	6.18 male	6.32 female	-0.11	0.912
School level (H5)	6.04 middle	6.94 high	-1.15	0.256

Note: SD not available in source data for these subgroup change scores.

Table 5 provides an independent-samples t test evaluating gender and school-level differences in the magnitude of stress reduction; no statistically significant difference was found for either comparison, supporting H4 and H5. This suggests the programme's benefit was not concentrated in, or withheld from, either gender or school level, though the small male subsample ($n = 14$) limits confidence in the gender comparison specifically.

Table 6: One-way ANOVA for magnitude of stress reduction across recruitment locations

Dependent variable	df	F	p
Stress reduction (Session 1–5)	3, 102	0.08	0.969

Table 6 represents a one-way ANOVA across the four recruitment locations with adequate sample size (Bangalore, Mangalore, Mysore, Hubli); no statistically significant difference was observed in the magnitude of stress reduction across locations, $F(3, 102) = 0.08$, $p = .969$, suggesting the programme's association with stress reduction was broadly uniform across the geographic spread of the sample. The Hubli cell was small ($n = 6$), so this result should be treated as exploratory for that site rather than a stable estimate, pending replication with a larger sample.

No inter-session Pearson correlation matrix among the six PSS-10 assessment points was computed for this dataset; producing one would require the raw, case-level scores across all timepoints, which fell outside the scope of the material analysed here.

6. Future Scope

Future research should build on these findings by employing a randomised, waitlist-controlled design to allow firmer causal attribution, incorporating validated anxiety and burnout measures alongside the PSS-10, directly measuring adherence to independent practice during any break period, and recruiting a larger, more gender-balanced and geographically distributed sample. Longer-term follow-up (e.g., three, six, and twelve months) would also clarify how durable these gains remain over a full academic year.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that a brief, five-session EFT tapping programme is associated with a large, statistically significant,

and durable reduction in perceived stress among Karnataka's middle and high school teachers, with gains that continued to strengthen- rather than fade- during an unsupervised six-week break. Neither gender, school level, nor recruitment location significantly moderated the amount of improvement achieved. These findings support EFT as a promising, low-cost, and easily scaled stress-management technique for Indian school teachers, while the absence of a comparison group means that causal attribution to EFT specifically should be confirmed through controlled replication.

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Author Profile

Chitra Kannan is a Master's candidate in Psychology and a practicing Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) practitioner and mental health coach based in Bengaluru, India. Through her practice, Connect with Chitra — shortlisted for the GHP Holistic Health Awards 2026 — she works with adolescents and adults on anxiety, stress, and exam-related emotional difficulties using EFT tapping techniques. Her current research examines the application of EFT as a scalable stress-management intervention for school teachers in Karnataka. This study forms part of her MSc Psychology dissertation.