# Theoretical background

Gliederung nach Fragestellungen:

1. Stress im Lehrberuf:
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   2. HR ist ein wichtiger Indikator 🡪 Baseline HR, um z-std. HR einzuführen
   3. Wie ist Stress messbar?
2. Am Handgelenk getragene Fitnesstracker als neue Messmethode der HR
   1. Bisheriger Forschungsstand allgemein und
   2. speziell im Bildungs-/Schulkontext: HR-Unterschiede in unterschiedlichen Lehrphasen
3. Prädiktion der HR mittels Lehrerfahrung & self-reported data
   1. Ähnliche Konstrukte wie c.a. 🡪 self-efficacy + HR during teaching (Richter et al.)
   2. was hat Berufserfahrung und cognitive appraisal damit zu tun?

## Stress in the Teaching Profession

Facing a variety of stressors during everyday work, the teaching profession is one of the most stressful professions compared to other occupational groups [@smith2000; @herman2020]. Teacher stress can be defined as “a response of negative affect […] usually accompanied by potentially pathogenic physiological and biochemical changes (such as increased heart rate […]) resulting from aspects of the teacher's job […].” [@kyriacou1978, p. 2]. This definition of teacher stress can be systematized under the integrative framework of the transactional stress model [@lazarus1987; @obbarius2021]. The model highlights the interaction between an individual and its environment. It proposes that personal cognitive appraisal processes have a significant impact on a stress reaction. It is critical to distinguish between two types of cognitive appraisal: When faced with stressors, a person assesses both the stressors' relevance (primary appraisal) and their capacity for overcoming stress (secondary appraisal). How teachers evaluate the demands depends on the interaction between their characteristics and their perception of the demands placed on them. Teachers’ characteristics such as biographical details (e.g., sex, age, teaching experience) may be of high importance in the appraisal. Primary and secondary appraisals are regarded to have an impact on a person's coping mechanisms. The immediate stress reaction, long-term health, psychological well-being, and social functioning are in turn all impacted by coping strategies [@obbarius2021].

Stress as a biopsychosocial phenomenon includes in addition to motivational and cognitive components physiological aspects [@blascovich1999]. Thus, the response of negative affect can be a psychological (e.g., job dissatisfaction), physiological (e.g., increased HR), and behavioral (e.g., absenteeism) stress reaction [huang2022class; @van2001stress]. Psychosomatic stress symptoms such as an increasing HR result from an interaction of situational stressors and person-specific available resources [@rotter2020]. Stressors are considered antecedents of teacher stress and can be classified as physical (e.g., class size), psychological causes (e.g., student misbehavior), or a combination of both physical and psychological (e.g., high workload) [@chen1997teacher].

## HR as an Indicator of Stress

There is scientific support for the use of cardiovascular metrics, such as HR, as an indication of arousal linked to stress, meaning that the higher the HR, the more stressed out the person is [@blascovich1996]. HR indicates the number of heartbeats within a certain time interval, which is usually heartbeats per minute and is therefore expressed in min-1 or beats per minute (BPM) [@hottenrott2007].

Physiologically, HR is regulated and influenced on short-time intervals by the autonomic nervous system which is divided into two distinct components: the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous system [@pham2021]. An increase in the activity of the sympathetic, known as the “quick response” system, results in HR being speeded up ("fight or flight"). On the other hand, an increased activity of the parasympathetic as the counterpart known as the “relaxed response” system, has the effect of slowing down the HR ("rest and digest") [@battipaglia2015].

Exercise-induced excitation of the sympathetic nervous system such as learning-teaching-situations results in activation of the cardiovascular system, which is why an increasing HR can be regarded as an indicator of increasing stress on the cardiovascular system [@junker2021; @kyriacou1978]. [[1]](#footnote-1)

The human HR is, in addition to the autonomic nervous system and genetic factors, influenced by numerous external factors such as social, personal, psychological, environmental, and behavioral factors [@wang2022]. Furthermore, it depends significantly on the intensity of the strain. At rest, the average HR (HRrest) of a person is around 70 BPM. The maximum HR (HRmax) of an adult is around 180 BPM and can be reached during physical activity or exertion. During everyday work or strain the HR (HRwork) can reach values between 50 and 100 BPM (Noble et. al, 2017), whereas it is the difference between HRRest and HR values assessed during work. For this purpose, it is necessary to record the HRrest during a resting phase without physical or emotional stress, ideally fifteen minutes before the beginning of the activity, to determine a valid baseline HR. This is a necessary condition when carrying out tests in the laboratory, however, in practice, it can be a challenge to achieve these conditions [@sammito2015guideline] due to time constraints and difficulties in the acquisition of participants. An alternative concept to HRwork will be proposed in this study: To account for individual differences in the baseline HR without measuring the HRrest for 15 minutes, we z-standardized the BPM values from participants’ mean HRs (see ## in the Method Section).

All in all, it can be concluded that the HR “provides information about the strain of the cardiovascular system in response to physical and mental workload.” [@sammito2015guideline, p. 1]. Thus, stress or mental and physical strain are factors that directly influence HR and lead to an increase in it [@lonn2014].

## Assessing HR as an Indicator of Teacher Stress During Teaching

In stress research, there is a particular interest in finding adequate indicators and quantitatively measurable parameters for teacher stress and burnout [@fisher2011; @ junker2021; @runge2020]. Previous research on teacher stress often focused on the psychological experience of stress using self-report questionnaires with single-item measures (“I find teaching to be very stressful‖”) [@chaplain2008; @goker2012] or questionnaires with multiple scales (e. g. Teacher Stress Inventory; @fimian1990; @liu2020].

@fisher2011 for example investigated the extent to which age or teaching experience and job dissatisfaction are associated with an increased risk of burnout and stress among teachers. The results showed that stress had no significant correlation with age or teaching experience, although it was found that teachers with less professional experience had a higher burnout score. @fisher2011 concluded that years of professional experience, burnout, and satisfaction in the teaching profession are statistically significant predictors of teacher stress.

There are only a few studies that investigated physiological indicators such as HR as an indicator of teacher stress during teaching [@sperka1995; @scheuch1997psychophysische; @donker2018; @junker2021; @runge2020; @huang2022class].

@sperka1995 for example recorded the HR of 16 pre-service teachers during their first lesson. The results showed that the first lesson is linked to significantly increased psychophysiological activation in terms of an increased HR, whereas the activation effect was particularly prominent at the beginning of the lesson and decreased in the course of the lesson due to the pre-service teachers’ active coping processes (active management of the interaction with the students).

@scheuch1997psychophysische assessed the HR of 67 teachers during five real lessons, with results showing that the highest HR occurred during organizational activities, followed by teaching activities where the teacher directed the interaction.

@donker2018 investigated 80 teachers’ HR as a proxy for their affective response during a regular classroom lesson and coded their interpersonal behavior during teaching. The results indicated that teachers showed an increased HR when they had a leading role in student-teacher interactions.

@junker2021 recorded the HR of 40 teachers during a real classroom lesson using an electrocardiogram (ECG) to find out to what extent main stressors within the classroom (e.g., low student engagement and motivation, teacher-centered activities) can predict teachers’ HR as an indicator of physiological stress during teaching. @junker2021 were able to prove that teacher stress caused by stressors during teaching can be quantitatively measured by an increase in HR. In particular, teacher-related activities and a lack of engagement and motivation of students were characterized by an increase in teachers’ HR.

In the study by @runge2020, HR was one of several parameters used to identify stress in teachers based on physical characteristics using a Fitbit fitness tracker. Another aim was to find out to what extent affordable fitness trackers and the provided parameters can be used to measure teacher stress. @runge2020 concluded that stress in the teaching profession can be mapped using fitness trackers’ indicators. In particular, it was found that the combination of a high number of steps, a high HR, and short sleep is an indicator of stress and that poor student behavior is the stressor that is perceived most frequently.[[2]](#footnote-2)

@huang2022class conducted a randomized, controlled experiment with 65 pre-service teachers. In a standardized virtual reality classroom, they investigated whether class size has a direct effect on physiological (HR) or psychological (subjective evaluation) stress reactions which could be confirmed for both stress reactions.

## Wrist-Worn Devices as a New Approach to Assess Physiological Stress Reactions

In all but one of the studies listed [@runge2020], the HR was recorded using very expensive and invasive electrocardiographs (ECG devices), which contributes to accurate measurements.

However, since the 1970s, increasing efforts have been made to realize precise measurements of HR in mobile form, as it was only possible with the ECG at that time. These efforts were driven in particular by competitive sport, resulting in the first portable HR measuring devices in the form of chest straps and wristbands being used only in this field. In the meantime, HR measurements and the associated monitoring of individual stress levels have become established both in the fitness sector and in competitive sports [@hottenrott2007].

This development has led to commercial wearable fitness trackers becoming increasingly popular among the wider population in the last decade to record physical activity in everyday life or in the context of health-promoting research [@jachymek2021; @gagnon2022; @feehan2018accuracy; @fuller2020; @jo2016; @hajj2023]. This can be explained by the low costs compared to complex laboratory methods for determining vital parameters (e.g., HR, blood pressure, skin temperature, physical activity), the portable, non-invasive nature of these devices, and the ease of use [@hajj2023]. The majority of fitness trackers on the market assess HR using photoplethysmography (PPG)[[3]](#footnote-3), whereas Fitbit devices are one of the most popular and studied fitness trackers [@fuller2020].

In teaching-learning contexts, physiological measurements such as HR provide researchers with objective insights into teachers’ affectivity without interrupting the teaching process [@donker2018]. Thus, it is important to monitor HR accurately since this marker may be used to identify an individual’s level of experienced stress during an activity. As a result, there are a large number of scientific publications that deal with the validity and reliability of the parameters measured by fitness trackers [@montoye2017comparative; @muggeridge2021measurement; @gagnon2022; @fuller2020; @jo2016; @hajj2023; @jachymek2021]. Research on the reliability of Fitbit devices for the measurement of HR showed that this brand is accurate in controlled settings, depending on the activity level [@wallen2016accuracy; @hajj2023; @fuller2020; @jo2016]. For example, the Fitbit fitness tracker showed good measurement accuracy during resting phases [@jo2016; @muggeridge2021measurement] and for activities such as walking, jogging, and running [@hajj2023]. Findings in some studies indicate that the Fitbit fitness tracker showed a decrease in accuracy by underestimating the HR, especially at higher exercise intensities such as cycling [@thomson2019heart; @montoye2017comparative; @jo2016; @jachymek2021].

However, @chevance2022accuracy concluded in their systematic review and meta-analysis of Fitbit fitness tracker measures that the underestimation of HR has an acceptable range and that the accuracy depends on the context (e.g., quality of the study, type of activity). @gagnon2022 also sums up in his study that Fitbit devices can be used in research to detect stress-induced HR variation, but they cannot replace an ECG machine when precision is of greatest importance.

Most of the studies were conducted in the context of sport and health to evaluate the accuracy of wrist-worn fitness trackers. To date, there have only been a few studies using wrist-worn fitness trackers in the field of education to examine the relation between physiological, psychological, and other phenomena experienced by teachers and (college) students.

Ertzberger & Martin (2016) for example investigated the effects of fitness trackers on the teaching practice, whereby 28 teachers were equipped with Fitbit fitness trackers for 35 days in the field. The researchers came to the conclusion that teachers were more motivated to engage in physical activity when wearing the fitness tracker. However, it is important to note that no HRs were measured or evaluated in the study.

Darnell & Krieg (2019) measured the HRs of 15 medical college students using wrist-worn devices during lecture classes. The analysis revealed a constant decrease in HR from the beginning to the end of a lecture, whereas the HR peak was reached during active learning sessions. The researchers proposed the first robust measurements of HR changes during lectures and recommended using personal fitness trackers during various phases of learning and teaching.

In a study, Runge et al. (2020) investigated the suitability of Fitbit fitness trackers for measuring stress and coping with stress in four teachers in the field over 12 weeks and concluded that increased HR in teachers can be interpreted as an indicator of increased stress.

In a pilot study, Pakhomov et al. (2020) examined the HR data of college students using Fitbit devices. In addition to the HR data, the subjective self-assessment of everyday stressors was collected and evaluated. @pakhomov2020 showed, using Fitbit fitness trackers, that inexpensive smartwatch wearables are suitable for detecting both standardized and naturally occurring psychosocial stress.

In their study, Wang et al. (2022) researched the influence of social, psychological, personality-related, and behavioral factors on the HR measured with Fitbit fitness trackers of over 600 college students and concluded that HR increased with a higher number of social contacts, indicating that HR is not only a physiological but also a social-psychological phenomenon.

@shachter2022 investigated the relationship between HR recorded via Fitbit fitness trackers and self-reported data in foreign language speaking performance in 10 university language students during three seminar sessions and found that there were correlations between self-reported negative feelings and increased HR in students.

@chalmers2021 examined the usability of the average HR measured with a Fitbit fitness tracker of 30 medical students and 30 normative participants to identify physiological changes during stress tasks, whereas HR was significantly higher in medical students than in the general population. Furthermore, the average HR increased significantly between the resting and stress phases for both groups.

## Classroom disruptions as a stressor and its subjective cognitive appraisal

The relevance of measuring HR as an indicator of teacher stress is obvious: If teachers are exposed to a teaching-learning environment that they evaluate as stressful or disruptive (subjective disruption appraisal) over a long period and if they do not feel confident to deal with or overcome these disruptive situations (subjective confidence appraisal) because they have no sufficient resources and coping strategies, it can lead to negative personal and vocational consequences such as burnout, high turnover, and premature retirement [@jalongo2006; @unterbrink2007; @aloe2014]. Teacher stress is therefore an important aspect in the way teachers behave and react in the classroom.

However, according to the biopsychosocial model, an increased HR is an indicator of a situation that is judged by an individual to be goal-relevant and that requires attention as well as overt or cognitive action [motivated performance situations; @blascovich1996]. It is therefore difficult using HR alone to distinguish between positive and negative psychological reactions to a situation. For this reason, it is necessary to assess other parameters, such as self-assessments of the cognitive appraisal of situations, to be able to distinguish whether participants in a study felt threatened or positively challenged in a situation [@blascovich1996].

Student misbehaviors such as classroom disruptions, disrespect, and disciplinary problems are some of the most influential stressors [@boyle1995structural; @aloe2014multivariate]. In contrast to disciplinary conflicts and disrespect, classroom disruptions are linked to the teaching process and can be defined as “events that impair, interrupt or make the teaching-learning process impossible by partially or completely overriding the conditions under which teaching and learning can take place” [own translation, @lohmann2007schulern, p. 13]. Classroom disruptions can be differentiated according to various aspects (e.g., intensity and severity (Steins & Welling, 2010); active and passive disruptions (Nolting, 2017). @lohmann2007schulern distinguished four categories: verbal disruptive behavior (e.g., chatting, heckling), lack of eagerness to learn (e.g., looking at the phone, putting the head on the table), physical disruptive (e.g., clicking with a pen, drumming with the hands on the table), and aggressive behavior (e.g., attacking or insulting classmates).

### Subjective Disruption Appraisal of Classroom Events

@ALDRUP2018 found in their research that teachers who perceive more misbehavior also reported decreased work enthusiasm and increased emotional exhaustion. This leads to the conclusion that a positive relationship between teachers and students is crucial for the professional well-being of teachers and thus also influences the perception of stress and strain [@ALDRUP2018].

However, the moment when an action or behavior in the classroom is considered disruptive depends on the subjective perception of the respective actors (Große Siestrup, 2010). Therefore, the transition between “normal” and “disruptive” behavior in the classroom is fluid (Nolting, 2017). Verbal comments or glances can be disruptive for one person, while another misses them (Steins & Welling, 2010). Eckstein et al. (2022) emphasize in this regard that the term *classroom disruption* can be used when at least one person involved in the teaching-learning process is disturbed in their thought process or emotional experience. A teaching disruption can therefore be regarded as a co-constructivist phenomenon (Eckstein et al., 2022).[[4]](#footnote-4) Classroom disruption can occur in the context of a multifactorial structure, whereby two fundamental processes interact with each other: behavior that deviates from the norm and the subjective perception of disruption. Whether an incident is perceived as a classroom disruption depends on the subjective appraisal of the recipient, whereas the context, the teaching experience, and the personality traits of the disrupted and the disruptive person need to be taken into account (Eckstein et al., 2016).

### Self-Efficacy and Subjective Confidence Appraisal of Classroom Events

Students, while equally likely to feel disturbed, are on average less sensitive than teachers (Infantino & Little, 2005; Montuoro & Lewis, 2015). The explanation for this lies in the linkage of actors' perceptual patterns to their roles (Wettstein et al., 2016) and personal and contextual factors (Eckstein, 2018; Makarova et al., 2014).

Personal characteristics on the teacher's side can be a low sense of self-efficacy, which refers to the subjective evaluation of the controllability of situations. In general, self-efficacy should be assessed in a domain-specific context. As a result, assessing teachers' job-related self-efficacy becomes crucial, gauging their subjective confidence in meeting the typical demands of their profession. Consequently, teachers with high self-efficacy are less susceptible to job-related stress and strain, as they are confident in their ability to perform successfully [@schwerdtfeger2008self].

Teaching self-efficacy in classroom management (as a sub-component of self-efficacy) means among other things the confidence and capability in dealing with misbehaving students [@emmer1991teacher]. Research has shown that self-efficacy is an important protective factor in preventing stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout [@friedman2003self; @dicke2014self].

To date, only a few studies examined the relation between teachers’ HR as an indicator of physiological stress and teaching self-efficacy.

@schwerdtfeger2008self for example investigated the psychobiological relation of self-efficacy in 58 teachers and found that teacher self-efficacy positively correlated with higher HR during school time.

In a virtual reality classroom session, bardach2023revisiting analyzed the effect of 56 pre-service teachers’ classroom management self-efficacy skills on stress responses. They assessed physiological stress as HR during the session and psychological stress as self-reported stress after the session, while the results revealed no significant effect.

### Teaching Experience as a Predictor of Stress

As already mentioned, professional experience as part of individual characteristics plays a crucial role when teachers are faced with stressors and need to appraise the stressors' relevance (primary appraisal) and their capacity for overcoming stress (secondary appraisal).

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In particular the first five years, between 40 and 50 percent of beginning teachers change careers for a variety of reasons such as disciplinary problems with students [@ingersoll2003].

All in all, in research on stress among teachers, self-reported data is often used to assess teachers’ subjective psychological stress levels [@chan2010self; @mcintyre2016longitudinal] which leads to various obstacles such as social desirability, reporting, and retrospective bias. For this reason, Wettstein et al. (2021) recommend further research on the combination of subjective and physiological measures of stress to improve the understanding of teacher stress. Especially, they pointed out that future research “should also include investigating teacher stress on a physiological level, for example, by assessing teachers’ cortisol levels before, during, and after lessons” [p.3].

1. As described by @junker2021, during short-term or acute psychological stress, the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis is activated. The production of glucocorticoids by the adrenal glands then stimulates the cardiovascular tissue and provides feedback to the central nervous system to prevent activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, whereas the stimulation of the cardiovascular tissue during stress causes an increased HR. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It should be noted that the generalizability of the results is limited due to the small sample size of four participants. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This optical method is an inexpensive and non-invasive technique to assess the HR by flashing green lights to measure changes in blood volume (Allen, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This explanatory approach is illustrated in the interactionist theory model according to Eckstein et al. (2016). The model is based on the transactional model of the teacher-student relationship, which was developed by Nickel (1985) in the course of his analytical consideration of this relationship and contains various factors of the interaction processes of both teacher and students. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)