

# The Fear of Success Threat: A Challenge in Teacher Education

Leena George P<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Dr. Siby G Netto<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, School of Pedagogical Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University,  
Kottayam, Kerala, India

<sup>2</sup>Director & HOD School of Distance and online education, Mahatma Gandhi University,  
Kottayam, Kerala, India

**Abstract**—In teacher education, success is often seen as a goal to work toward. However, you may be surprised to know that success can sometimes create unexpected problems. This paper looks at the fear of Success a situation where student teachers, after doing well, begin to feel pressure, fear of failure, or anxiety about living up to future expectations. The phenomenon of Fear of Success (FoS) presents a specific psychological barrier that is often overlooked in the context of teacher education. While the student teachers are expected to acquire growth, confidence, and professional ambition, many struggle with inner fears that success may lead to isolation, increased expectations, or a departure from social and cultural norms and relations. This paper explores the Fear of Success as a psychological threat within teacher trainees, examining its impact on their motivation, performance level, and identity formation. Through collecting data's this paper tries to analyse the level of fear of success among teacher trainees. The study also asks for the development of a resilience focused frameworks, mentoring practices, and support systems to help the trainees to overcome the fear of success.

**Index Terms**—Fear of Success, Threat, Challenge, Teacher Education

## I. INTRODUCTION

Achievement motivation plays a key role in academic and professional success. However, research studies have shown that individuals may sometimes perceive success not only as rewarding but also as threatening; a phenomenon termed “fear of success.” First proposed by Horner (1972), fear of success refers to the apprehension that accomplishment may lead to undesirable social, personal, or professional consequences. In teacher education, such fears may

undermine trainees’ confidence, willingness to assume leadership roles, and their motivation to excel in their future profession. This study aimed to assess the levels of fear of success among teacher trainees using the Hyland and Dann Scale and to interpret the implications for educational practice.

### 1.1 Need and Significance of the Study

As the educational scenario is changing after the post covid phase, all the educational institutions, including the teacher training centres are in need for the empowerment of its candidates that is, teacher trainees. Majority of the education sectors are confronted by the lack of mentally strong candidates to face the changing environment as many of them are affected by various psychological issues. The major psychological factor that seemed to affect the education field is the Fear of Success in teachers.

Teacher trainees often have to face dual expectations: excelling academically while conforming to cultural, institutional, and gender norms. They always have a concern that being too successful may create jealousy, isolation, or added responsibilities. They also fear of standing out in a competitive training environment. There will be conflict between personal aspirations and the expectations of peers, mentors, or family. In some cases, trainees may unconsciously limit their performance to maintain social harmony.

The causes of fear of success among teacher trainees can be classified into three categories, such as social factors, psychological factors and institutional factors. Social factors include Gender stereotypes and peer pressure to conform. Psychological factors include Low self-esteem and anxiety about sustaining performance. The major institutional factors are

highly competitive assessment systems and lack of supportive mentorship.

All this will affect teacher trainees by causing harmful academic Impact, decreased professional growth, poor personal well-being and long-term effect on their achievement.

### 1.2 Statement of the Study

As the world we inhabit are changing socially, culturally and politically, our teacher trainees are passing through a stage of stress and strain. Their attitudes and motivations towards achievement and fear of Success will surely affect the younger generation whom they are going to teach. It is essential to find out how motivated our prospective teachers are, and the study is entitled as “The Fear of Success Threat: A Challenge in Teacher Education”

### 1.3 Definition of the key Terms

#### 1) Fear of success

Matina Honer (1972) refers Fear of Success to a psychological condition where individuals avoid achieving success because they anticipate negative consequences such as increased expectations, social rejection, or loss of relationships. In teacher education, student teachers may hesitate to perform well due to fear of added responsibilities or peer judgment.

#### 2) Threat (Psychological Threat)

A psychological threat (Claude Steele 1997) refers to a perceived danger to one’s self-concept, identity, or emotional well-being. When success is seen as a threat, individuals may feel pressure, fear of evaluation, or anxiety about maintaining high standards. In Teacher educational settings, such threats can hinder learning and professional growth of the prospective teachers.

#### 3) Teacher Education

Teacher education is the structured process of preparing individuals to become effective educators through theoretical knowledge, pedagogical skills, and practical training (NCTE, 2009). However, psychological barriers like fear of success can impact trainee performance.

#### 4) Challenge

A challenge (Fullan M,2007) refers to a difficulty or barrier that requires effort to overcome. In teacher

education, fear of success becomes a challenge because it can hinder student teachers from reaching their full potential and performing confidently.

### 1.4 Objectives of the study

1. To measure the level of fear of Success among the prospective teachers
2. To measure the significant difference among the subsamples based on gender

### Hypothesis

1. There will be significant level of fear of Success among the prospective teachers
2. There will be significant difference between the subsamples based on gender.

### 1.5 Methodology

- Sample: Teacher trainees enrolled in the B.Ed. program of a teacher education institution in Marangattupilly, Kottayam, Kerala
- Tool Used: Hyland and Dann Fear of Success Scale.
- Procedure: M. E. Hyland and S.J. Dann scale is a psychological assessment tool designed to measure the degree to which individuals experience fear of success- the anxiety or avoidance behavior linked to achieving success, often due to anticipated negative consequences. The scale was administered to hundred students of a B.Ed. college in Kottayam district and the scores were categorized into three levels: below 30 (low fear), 30–40 (moderate fear), and above 40 (high fear). Items are scored based on agreement and disagreement towards the statement. Higher scores indicate greater fear of success and lower scores indicate low or absent fear of success. Two subsamples based on gender also were selected and their levels of fear of success were compared.

### 1.6 Analysis of the study

Frequency and percentage distribution were calculated to interpret the prevalence of fear of success among the prospective teacher trainees

Sl. No	Frequency of students with 30 below scores	Frequency of students with 30 – 40 range scores	Frequency of students with 40 above scores
1	11	80	9

## II. FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION SHOWING FEAR OF SUCCESS

Welch’s t-test (two – tailed) was conducted to compare the fear of success difference among prospective teachers based on gender. Out of the 100-sample population 80 were girls and 20 were boys. The Fear of Success of both groups were compared, as the samples were of unequal variances and sizes. The analysis yielded a p – value of 0.4908. This value is greater than the standard significance level of 0.05.

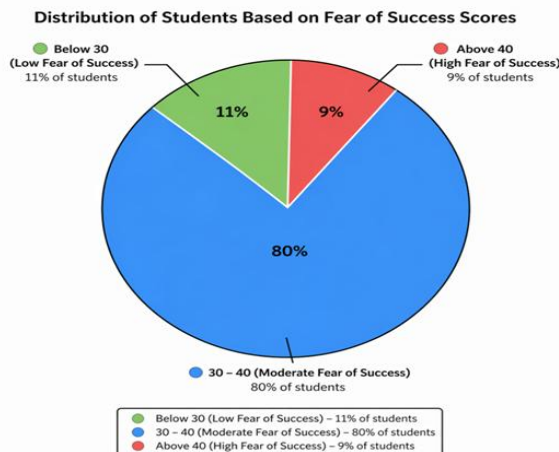
### Interpretation

Fear of success has been recognized as a silent yet significant psychological barrier that harmfully affects students from reaching their full potential. This study explored the prevalence and intensity of fear of success among teacher trainees using the Hyland and Dann Fear of Success Scale. The findings revealed that 11% of the participants demonstrated low fear of success (scores below 30), 80% exhibited moderate levels (scores between 30–40), and 9% reflected high fear of success (scores above 40).

Sl. No	Percentage of students with 30 below scores	Percentage of students with 30 – 40 range scores	Percentage of students with 40 above scores
1	11%	80%	9%

### 2.1 Percentage of Fear of Success

- 11% of students scored below 30, indicating low fear of success.
- 80% of students scored between 30 and 40, suggesting moderate fear of success.
- 9% scored above 40, reflecting high fear of success



The distribution of scores indicates that the majority of students experience a moderate level of fear of success, as reflected by the 80% who scored between 30 and 40. This suggests that while most students are not severely hindered by this fear, it is still present to a noticeable extent and may influence their motivation, confidence, and willingness to take on challenging tasks. The 11% of students scoring below 30 demonstrate low fear of success, implying that they are relatively confident, achievement-oriented, and less likely to avoid opportunities due to anxiety about success. On the other hand, the 9% who scored above 40 exhibit a high fear of success, which may lead to self-doubt, avoidance behaviors, or underperformance despite having the ability to succeed. Overall, the findings highlight that although extreme levels of fear are limited to a small proportion, a significant number of students fall within the moderate range, indicating the need for supportive interventions such as counseling, confidence-building activities, and skill development programs to help reduce this fear and enhance students’ academic and professional growth. So, Hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Welch’s t-test analysis yielded p value of 0.4908. As this p- value is greater than the standard significant level of 0.05, it can be interpreted as no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the both groups. The comparative study shows that there is no significant difference regarding the fear of success between male and female prospective teachers. So, Hypothesis two is rejected.

### 2.2 Suggestions

- Awareness & Counseling: Helping teacher trainees recognize the signs of fear of success through workshops, reflective journals, and psychological support.
- Mentorship: Creating a culture where achievement is celebrated not feared.
- Peer Support Systems: Encouraging collaboration rather than competition among the teacher trainees
- Positive Reinforcement: Rewarding effort and innovation rather than just end results.

### 2.3 Limitations of the Study

- As the duration was very small, the sample size selected for the study was only 100, which is actually not a true representative of the population
- Since it is a subjective barrier, it changes from one student to another based on their optional subjects.
- Since the scale presents a self-reporting, some students may not report fears to appear confident

### III. CONCLUSION

This study shows that fear of success, though not very high, is a significant concern among teacher trainees. By addressing these fears through supportive educational practices, institutions can nurture confident, achievement-oriented future educators who are well-prepared for professional challenges and will become responsible citizens of the society

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