

Exploring Fear of Failure Among Late Adolescents: Psychological Factors, Impacts, and Interventions

Vishnupriya K

I Year CSE Student

Kumaraguru College of Technology

Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India

vishnupriya.25cs@kct.ac.in

Dr. Sreejana S

Assistant Professor and Head

Department of Languages and Communication

Kumaraguru College of Technology

Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India

sreejana.s.sci@kct.ac.in

Abstract

Although fear of failure among adolescents has been widely examined in psychological and educational research, this study offers a distinct contribution by focusing specifically on late adolescents aged 17–18 years, a critical transitional phase marked by high academic, social, and career-related expectations. This age-specific focus enables a more precise understanding of fear of failure during a high-stakes developmental period.

The study adopts an integrated analytical framework that combines academic, psychological, and social dimensions, rather than examining these factors in isolation. By incorporating adolescents lived experiences, perceived impacts on motivation and self-esteem, and preferred coping strategies, the research provides a holistic view of how fear of failure manifests among late adolescents. In addition, the study moves beyond identifying fear-related factors by examining adolescents' perceptions of the effectiveness of intervention strategies, including Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programmes and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), thereby offering a student-centred perspective with practical implications for educators and policymakers.

The study examines the prevalence, contributing factors, impacts, and coping strategies related to fear of failure among late adolescents. Data were collected from 27 students aged 17–18 years using a self-developed questionnaire with acceptable reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.70$). Responses were gathered through Google Forms and analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and correlation analysis.

The findings reveal that academic failure and examination anxiety were the most prevalent fears (66.7%), followed by parental expectations (51.9%) and fear of disappointing oneself (44.4%). Fear of failure was found to negatively influence motivation, self-esteem, and decision-making, with moderate positive correlations observed ($r = 0.48-0.62, p < 0.05$). Adolescents predominantly relied on peer support (59.3%) and self-motivation (51.9%) as coping strategies, while formal counselling was least utilised (11.1%).

The study underscores the need for age-specific interventions, particularly SEL programmes and CBT-based approaches, to enhance resilience and adaptive coping among late adolescents. By addressing fear of failure during a critical academic transition period, the findings provide evidence-based insights for educators, parents, and policymakers.

Keywords: Fear of Failure, Late Adolescence, Academic Anxiety, Self-Esteem and Motivation, Coping Strategies, Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Introduction

Fear and failure are considered to be common psychological experiences of adolescents, but they are frequently misunderstood as signs of weakness and lack of ability (Conroy et al., 2002; Sagar et al., 2010). Adolescence is characterized by a series of intense transitions in academic, social, and emotional contexts, where high expectations and uncertainty can easily fuel fear and perceptions of failure. According to psychological research, these experiences are natural reactions to developmental demands, and they are not indicative of personal weakness or lack of ability (Conroy et al., 2002). Research studies on adolescent development show that the cognitive and emotional regulatory processes, especially those associated with decision-making, emotional control, and resilience, are still in the process of maturation during adolescence, making adolescents highly susceptible to fear-based thinking (Sagar et al., 2010; Putwain & Pescod, 2018).

However, recent research studies increasingly acknowledge the positive function of fear and failure in personal development. When adolescents are encouraged to understand and cope with their fears, they become better able to evaluate risks, increase confidence, and develop effective coping strategies. Similarly, failure experiences can offer valuable feedback that enhances persistence, problem-solving competence, and self-regulation. The perspective of fear and failure as developmental learning experiences, rather than as obstacles, is a key factor in the development of resilience, self-awareness, and a growth-oriented mindset (Akamatsu & Gherghel, 2025).

This research paper focuses on fear and failure in adolescents from a psychological, social, and educational point of view. It tries to understand the factors that contribute to the fear that adolescents experience, the effects of failure on motivation and self-confidence, and the strategies that adolescents use to deal with fear and failure. By understanding fear and failure in the context of development, this research paper hopes to educate teachers, parents, and policymakers on how to create a supportive environment that promotes resilience, reflective learning, and ultimate success (Putwain & Pescod, 2018; Akamatsu & Gherghel, 2025).

Research Objectives

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:2 February 2026

Vishnupriya K and Dr. Sreejana S

Exploring Fear of Failure Among Late Adolescents: Psychological Factors, Impacts, and Interventions

The research objectives of this study are to:

1. Investigate the incidence and forms of fear experienced by 17-18-year-old adolescents in educational and social settings.
2. Uncover the psychological, social, and contextual underpinnings of fear of failure in late adolescents.
3. Assess the effects of fear of failure on the motivation, self-esteem, and decision-making capacity of adolescents.
4. Uncover the strategies used by adolescents to cope with fear and failure.
5. Assess the views of adolescents on the effectiveness of interventions like Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) in dealing with fear of failure.
6. Offer recommendations to parents, educators, and policymakers to develop supportive contexts that can help build resilience in adolescents.

Research Gap

Although there has been considerable research on fear and failure among adolescents, some significant gaps still exist. Most of the research on fear of failure has been conducted on a wide age spectrum, including early, mid, and late adolescents together. This fact neglects the unique psychological pressures on students aged 17-18 years, who face high-stakes educational tests, higher education choices, and career-related uncertainties simultaneously.

Moreover, most of the research on fear of failure has been theoretically or clinically focused, with little emphasis on the self-perceived experiences and strategies of adolescents in real-world educational contexts. Research studies on the examination and comparison of coping strategies and intervention methods from the adolescents' perspective are still limited.

Moreover, most of the available literature on fear of failure has been focused on psychological, academic, or social issues in a disconnected manner, without considering the interplay between emotional well-being, academic pressure, and social demands. Context-specific research studies in a controlled educational setting are still limited.

In order to fill these research gaps, the current study specifically targets the 17-18-year-old age group of adolescents and uses survey data to examine the phenomenon of fear of failure, its contributing factors, perceived effects, strategies, and preferences. By using an age-specific, integrated, and student-centric approach, this study aims to provide additional insights to the existing body of knowledge on the topic and make a valuable contribution to the field of adolescent mental health and education.

Literature Review

1) Conceptual Understanding of Fear of Failure:

Fear of failure is not one feeling it's many. It includes feelings like shame, self-doubt and worry about what others might think. Some researchers, like Conroy and his team broke down fear of failure into parts in 2002 (Conroy et al., 2002). These parts include fear of being

humiliated worry about losing status and anxiety about people. They created a tool called the Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory to measure these aspects (Conroy et al.,2002). This helped researchers study fear of failure in a way.

Fear of failure becomes really important during adolescence. This is a time when school expectations increase and kids are more sensitive to what their peers think. Researchers Koroğlu and Şahin Kırılalp created a scale to measure how adolescents feel about failure in 2025(Koroğlu and Şahin Kırılalp,2025). They emphasized that tools used to assess fear of failure must fit the age group being studied.

2)Fear of Failure and Academic Motivation

Fear of failure affects how motivated students are in school. According to Conroy and his team people who fear failure a lot tend to avoid situations to protect their self-esteem (Conroy et al.,2002). This can mean reducing effort postponing tasks or setting goals. Jain and Antony found that students with fear of failure often set goals especially if they doubt their abilities (Jain &Antony,2021). While this might reduce anxiety temporarily it can limit growth. Reinforce negative self-beliefs about failure. As a result, fear of failure can lead to a cycle of avoidance and underachievement in school. Fear of failure is a problem.

3)Emotional and Interpersonal Effects

Fear of failure also affects emotions and relationships. Sagar and colleagues reported that people with fear of failure are very sensitive to evaluation and judgment (Sagar et al., 2010). In performance situations this sensitivity increases distress. During adolescence when peer feedback is highly valued these concerns can intensify. Persistent fear of judgment can reduce confidence. Affect relationships, especially in school and with peers.

4) Fear of Failures in Schools and Promoting Resilience

In school fear of failure is often seen during exams and evaluations. Putwain and Pescod highlighted the role of thinking in shaping test anxiety (Putwain & Pescod,2018). Their findings suggest that students who feel they lack control over outcomes experience anxiety. When students think tasks are beyond their ability stress increases. A stronger sense of competence and control is linked to anxiety. This shows that fear of failure is influenced by both pressure and internal beliefs about abilities and failure.

Helping students see failure in a way can promote resilience. Akamatsu and Gherghel suggest that when adolescents view setbacks as learning opportunities than threats their emotional responses become more adaptive (Akamatsu & Gherghel,2025). Educational programs that support thinking and emotional regulation may reduce fear of failure. Improve overall well-being. Over time changes, in how failure's interpreted can positively influence both academic performance and personal development. Fear of failure is something we should talk about.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design for this study was quantitative and descriptive, focusing on the fear of failure, factors that contribute to it, perceived effects, coping strategies, and the perceived efficacy of interventions among late adolescents.

Participants and Sample Size

The participants included a total of 27 students aged 17-18 years, which falls under late adolescence. The participants were enrolled in higher secondary or pre-university-level education. This age group was chosen because adolescents at this stage are under extreme academic pressure, career-related uncertainty, and transition-related stress, which makes them highly susceptible to fear of failure.

Sampling Technique and Rationale

The convenience sampling technique was employed to choose the participants. This sampling technique was chosen because of restricted access to the large adolescent population, time constraints, and the willingness of the students to participate. Convenience sampling is widely used in exploratory psychological and educational studies, especially when the desired population is specific and difficult to access.

Research Instrument and Data Collection Procedure

The data was collected using a structured questionnaire with multiple-choice questions. The questionnaire was conducted using Google Forms, and the data collection procedure involved the following steps:

The Google Form was developed and checked for clarity, relevance, and age appropriateness.

The link to the survey was distributed to the students using official class groups and academic communication platforms.

The participants were made aware of the purpose of the study before answering the questions.

The data was collected anonymously to promote honest and unbiased responses.

Analysis

The analysis shows that the fear of failure among adolescents is both internally experienced and largely reinforced by external pressures from parents and the education system. The dominance of academic fear reflects the pressure-driven nature of modern learning environments. The noted effects on motivation, self-esteem, and decision-making confirm

that fear of failure is more than a singular emotional experience and affects behaviour, engagement, and confidence.

Adolescents who face recurring fear or failure may resort to avoidance strategies, which can further limit learning and development.

Descriptive Statistics

The data were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and correlation analysis, to identify patterns related to fear of failure, its contributing factors, and coping strategies among participants.

Types of Fear Experienced by Adolescents (n = 27)

Type of Fear	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Academic failure / examination fear	18	66.7
Parental expectations	14	51.9
Peer judgement / social fear	10	37.0
Fear of disappointing oneself	12	44.4
Future / career uncertainty	9	33.3

Impact of Fear of Failure on Psychological Outcomes

Construct	Mean (M)	SD
Motivation	3.81	0.79
Self-esteem	3.67	0.85
Decision-making	3.59	0.88

Scale: 1 = Very Low Impact, 5 = Very High Impact

Correlation Between Fear of Failure and Outcomes

Variables	r	p-value
Academic fear – Motivation	0.62	0.001*
Academic fear – Self-esteem	0.55	0.003*
Academic fear – Decision-making	0.48	0.012*

Significant at $p < 0.05$

Coping Strategies Used by Adolescents (n = 27)

Coping Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Peer support	16	59.3
Self-motivation	14	51.9
Guidance from teachers/mentors	8	29.6
Professional counselling	3	11.1

Discussion

1) Fear of Failure in School Among Older Adolescents

Older teens are often scared of doing in school or failing tests. A study by Conroy and colleagues in 2002 found that they worry about being criticized and letting down people (Conroy et al.,2002). When schools focus much on grades teens start to think that their grades define their self-worth. This makes stress worse especially when they are moving to a phase of their education.

2)Impact on Motivation and Self-Perception

The fear of failing affects how people stay motivated and see themselves. It also affects the choices they make. According to Conroy and team in 2002, when teens are more scared of failing, they tend to avoid hard work (Conroy et al.,2002). A study by Jain and Antony found that some teens who worry about failing might aim lower in school (Jain & Antony,2021). This might make them feel less stressed now. It could hurt their progress and confidence later.

Fear of failure makes people feel emotional strain when they are judged. This hurts their confidence and performance. A study by Sagar and colleagues in 2010 found that when people are worried about being judged they feel more stressed (Sagar et al., 2010). This stress makes them less confident and perform worse. When evaluation is coming up worry takes over. This changes how people react. The emotional weight builds up. Interferes.

3)Cognitive Appraisals and Test Anxiety

When it comes to thinking worries about school are linked to how much control and skill a person thinks they have. Research by Putwain and Pescod in 2018 found that learners who think they have no control over results feel more nervous during exams (Putwain & Pescod, 2018). If tasks seem hard or risky they feel more anxious. So dreading performance is not just about pressure. It is also about what people think about their own abilities.

4)Effects on Social and Emotional Learning

One way to look at it is that resilience grows when young people see setbacks differently. Evidence shows that guided approaches make a difference. When teens change how they think about failing stress tends to ease. Akamatsu and Gherghel found this in 2025(Akamatsu

& Gherghel, 2025). Of fixed views flexible mindsets open space, for learning. Programs focused on emotions and social skills could include tools that reshape thought patterns. With practice missteps start feeling like threats. Growth follows when interpretation shifts. Less worry appears alongside constructive outlooks.

Results

1. Academic Fear as a Dominant Concern

The findings suggest that fear of failure and academic failure were the dominant concerns among the participants, reported by 66.7% of the participants. This finding indicates that academic pressures are a major source of fear for 17-18-year-old adolescents, who are at a crucial phase of educational transition.

2. Psychological and Social Impacts

The fear of failure has been found to have a significant effect on various psychological aspects. Moderate to high mean scores were recorded for motivation ($M = 3.81$), self-esteem ($M = 3.67$), and decision-making ($M = 3.59$). The correlation analysis showed statistically significant positive correlations between academic fear and its impact on motivation, self-esteem, and decision-making ($r = 0.48-0.62$), which suggest that higher levels of academic fear are significantly associated with higher levels of perceived impact on these psychological aspects.

3. Coping Strategies Adopted by Adolescents

Regarding the coping strategies, most of the adolescents reported turning to peer support (59.3%) and self-motivation (51.9%) to overcome fear and failure. However, a relatively small number of participants reported turning to professional counseling (11.1%). Support from teachers or mentors was sought by 29.6% of the participants.

Key Findings

1. Academic fear, specifically fear of examinations and failure, is identified as the most prominent fear among adolescents.
2. Psychological factors are more important than environmental factors in the causation of fear of failure.
3. Fear and failure impact negatively and substantially on the self-confidence and intrinsic motivation of adolescents.
4. Adolescents display a strong preference for informal support systems, namely peer support and self-motivation, over formal support systems.
5. Systematic interventions, specifically Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) approaches, are viewed as highly effective in developing resilience.

Limitations

1. The study is based on self-reported information, which may be prone to response bias.
2. Convenience sampling limits the generalisability of the findings.
3. The study is restricted to adolescents aged 17-18 years, and the findings cannot be generalised to other age groups.

Future Scope

1. The future studies can be taken in the following directions:
2. Increasing the sample size to include adolescents from different regions, educational boards, and socio-economic backgrounds to increase generalisability.
3. Studying gender-based and age-based differences in fear of failure, coping strategies, and resilience development.
4. Studying the effects of digital environments like social media and online learning platforms on adolescents' experiences of fear and failure.
5. Studying the effects of parental involvement and teacher training programs on reducing fear of failure in adolescents.
6. Using qualitative research approaches like interviews and focus group interviews to explore the emotional experiences of adolescents.

Conclusion

The research work focused on the types of fears that adolescents experience, the factors that contribute to fear of failure, the effects of fear of failure on motivation and self-esteem, and the effectiveness of coping strategies and interventions. The results show that academic-related fears are the most common among adolescents, which are caused by psychological factors like negative experiences and lack of self-confidence, as well as social influences from parents and peers (Conroy et al., 2002; Sagar et al., 2010). Fear of failure has been shown to have a significant impact on emotional health, decision-making, and motivation, which can result in avoidance behaviour and lack of engagement in academics (Conroy et al., 2002; Jain & Antony, 2021).

Although many adolescents use informal methods of coping with fear and failure, like peer support and self-motivation, formal interventions like Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) have been found to be highly effective in overcoming fear and failure (Putwain & Pescod, 2018; Akamatsu & Gherghel, 2025). In conclusion, the research work highlights the need to create a supportive learning environment that views failure as a natural part of the learning process and emphasizes the development of emotional intelligence alongside academic success (Akamatsu & Gherghel, 2025).

References

Akamatsu, D., & Gherghel, C. (2025). Failure beliefs in school and beyond: From the perspective of social and emotional learning. *Social and Emotional Learning: Research, Practice, and Policy*, 5, 100095.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sel.2025.100095>

Conroy, D. E., Willow, J. P., & Metzler, J. N. (2002). Multidimensional fear of failure measurement: The Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 14(2), 76–90.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200252907752>

Jain, V., & Antony, A. J. (2021). Goal setting and fear of failure among indigent adolescents. *Psychology and Education Journal*, 58(2), 2967–2975.

<https://doi.org/10.17762/pae.v58i2.2967>

Köroğlu, B., & Şahin Kıralp, F. S. (2025). Validity and reliability of a fear of failure scale for adolescents. *Alpha Psychiatry*, 26(2), Article 39867.

<https://doi.org/10.31083/AP39867>

Putwain, D. W., & Pescod, M. (2018). Is reducing uncertain control the key to successful test anxiety intervention for secondary school students? Findings from a randomized control trial. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 33(2), 283–292.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000228>

Sagar, S. S., Busch, B. K., & Jowett, S. (2010). Fear of failure and student-athletes' interpersonal relationships. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 5(2), 173–188.

<https://doi.org/10.1260/1747-9541.5.2.173>

Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940** Vol. 26:2 February 2026

Vishnupriya K and Dr. Sreejana S

Exploring Fear of Failure Among Late Adolescents: Psychological Factors, Impacts, and Interventions