



## THE BURDEN OF LAST RESORT: DEFEATISM IN PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS WHO ENTER TEACHING UNWILLINGLY

Dr. Talmeez Fatma Naqvi <sup>1</sup>  & Mr. Shah Alam Khan <sup>2</sup>

### RESEARCH ARTICLE



**Author Details:** <sup>1</sup> Associate Professor,  
College of Teacher Education  
(Bhopal), Maulana Azad National  
Urdu University, Hyderabad, India;  
<sup>2</sup> Uchch Madhyamik Vidyalaya  
Rajanpura, Siwan, Bihar, India

**Corresponding Author:**  
Shah Alam Khan

**DOI:**  
<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.250303026>

### Abstract

The present study explores the psychological construct of defeatism among prospective teachers, particularly in relation to their preference for entering the teaching profession. In India, teaching is often regarded as a fallback career due to low social status, low remuneration, and limited career growth — as such, many teacher trainees enter the profession not out of passion, but due to a lack of alternatives. This research investigates whether such reluctance correlates with defeatist attitudes — marked by low motivation, pessimism, and diminished self-efficacy.

A descriptive survey design was employed, involving 100 B.Ed. students from three teacher training colleges in Bhopal. Data was collected through a self-constructed defeatism scale and preference ranking questions. Results revealed that one-tenth of participants reported teaching as their least preferred profession, nearly half of the prospective teachers moderately preferred it, and just two-fifth (42%) marked it as their most desired career. Regarding defeatism, 72% demonstrated average levels, 19% low, and 9% high, with a significant chi-square value indicating non-random distribution. Correlation and regression analyses showed a statistically significant, though modest, negative relationship between preference for teaching and defeatism ( $R = -0.310, p < .01$ ), suggesting that lower professional preference is associated with higher levels of defeatist beliefs. However, post hoc comparisons showed only the average vs. low defeatism groups differed significantly in teaching preference.

The findings of the study highlight a troubling trend. Many future educators approach the profession with moderate defeatism and limited enthusiasm, which may have profound implications for teacher efficacy, student outcomes, and the future of education. Interventions aimed at enhancing motivation, self-efficacy, and positive professional identity among prospective teachers are urgently needed.

**Keywords:** *Defeatism, Teaching Profession, Career Preference, Prospective Teachers, Defeatist Performance Beliefs, Quality of Teaching*

### Introduction

There is a popular saying: ‘Those who can, do; and those who cannot, teach’, meaning that people who do possess the skills in their chosen industry, can go on to get a job in that particular industry – while those who don’t, go on to become teachers in those very fields.

This sounds rather ironic – after all, typically, one would assume that it would be the cream of the crop in any field that would become suitable teachers, such that they could teach the next generations how to be better at their work and life. However, this is not the case in India. Low social status, poor working conditions, contemptible societal attitude, generally unattractive salaries, and meagre chances of upward mobility are only a few of the problems making the teaching industry the last career choice for many meritorious students.

This issue has not gone unnoticed by the government, which had cited this as the reason behind the change in the B.Ed. structure from a two-year course to a four-year course. Former Human Resource Development Minister, Prakash Javadekar, said, in a post on X (formerly Twitter), “Teaching should become a profession of choice but not a profession of left-over that is why we are introducing 4-year integrated B.Ed. course in the coming academic year.”

This is a matter of great concern — that most of the teachers working in this field only opted for their profession after being rejected or removed from their job of first (or even second) choice. It serves to give rise to a question: what would be the state of mind, the personality of these teachers, who were not led to their jobs because of passion, but for lack of other choices?

Logically, or at least, generally, most would assume that when one chooses to teach because of genuine preference rather than as a last resort, their personality would reflect traits that align closely with the values and demands of the teaching profession. On the contrary, teachers who opt for the profession as a last resort, might have contrary traits.

To avoid any overgeneralization, the present researcher sought to the state of defeatism or defeatist performance beliefs in the prospective teachers with the predictor variable preference to enter in teaching profession. Before going further, we must first understand what defeatism is.

Defeatism is a state of mind in which a person accepts defeat without any struggle. It is a way of thinking characterized by an acceptance of loss, rejection, and failure. It is a belief that going any further in a situation is futile, and that nothing matters because things can only ever end negatively.

Defeatism is a common trait in individuals with depression, who feel that trying is irrelevant, because the situation will end badly no matter what happens. Defeatism is also seen in warlike situations, where soldiers will refuse to participate due to feeling that their actions are futile and nothing will change the inevitability of their loss. The feeling of hopelessness and perceived certainty of negative outcomes exacerbates this feeling of pointlessness.

Their feelings thus align with defeatist performance beliefs — which are negative thoughts and expectations about one's ability to successfully perform tasks or achieve goals. These beliefs often lead to a reluctance to try, a lack of motivation, and reduction in goal-directed behavior. In essence, they are a pessimistic outlook on one's capabilities, potentially hindering social and professional engagement.

Abu-Halawa (2015) stated that defeatist behavior is a psychological state with cognitive and emotional implications, characterized by feelings of inadequacy, helplessness, and a lack of effectiveness. This behavior often emerges when an individual faces traumatic and stressful life events, especially if they have a weak psychological foundation and poor social upbringing. Defeatism impacts the individual, affecting their relationships with others, making them untrustworthy, incapable of forming healthy social connections, and overly dependent. This behavior fosters feelings of worthlessness, causing the individual to react in unclear ways that do not correspond to the stimuli they encounter.

Defeatist behavior is considered one of the most harmful emotions among students, as these associated negative emotions and feelings of weakness can lead to various mental and social disorders, hindering their personal well-being. This state may lead individuals to blame themselves, fostering a sense of inferiority and avoidance of failure. They may marginalize their strengths and abilities, lose hope and ambition, and become accustomed to pain. Over time, this negatively affects their personality and diminishes their psychological resilience and ability to cope.

Empirical research on defeatist performance beliefs — a form of negative self-appraisal that undermines motivation and goal-directed behavior — has expanded significantly in recent years. These beliefs have been studied across clinical and non-clinical populations, particularly in relation to mental health conditions such as schizophrenia, depression, and psychosis risk.

Luther et al. (2018) tested the cognitive model of negative symptoms in a non-clinical sample. They found that defeatist performance beliefs were more strongly related to negative symptoms than self-efficacy beliefs, suggesting that these beliefs may be a uniquely promising treatment target. Campellone et al. (2019) examined defeatist performance beliefs in college students without psychiatric diagnoses. They found that higher levels of these beliefs were associated with increased risk for depression, mania, and psychosis, as well as reduced effort, pleasure, and progress in daily goal-directed tasks. Clay et al. (2021) investigated defeatist performance beliefs in individuals at clinical high risk for psychosis and outpatients with chronic schizophrenia. They found that both groups exhibited elevated levels of these beliefs compared to healthy controls, and that higher levels were associated with greater negative symptoms and poorer social functioning. Luther et al. (2024) utilized ecological momentary assessment to examine the role of defeatist performance beliefs in daily life among individuals with schizophrenia. They found that higher levels of these beliefs were associated with greater negative symptoms such as anhedonia and avolition, both concurrently and at subsequent time points.

Defeatism in teachers denotes to a sense of resignation, hopelessness, or lack of efficacy that educators may experience in their professional roles. This phenomenon can negatively impact teaching quality, student outcomes, and overall school climate. Research on teacher defeatism often intersects with studies on teacher burnout, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and workplace stress. Defeatism in prospective teachers refers to a negative mindset or attitude where individuals preparing to enter the teaching profession, anticipate failure, feel overwhelmed by challenges, or believe they lack the ability to make a positive impact.

Perusal of the aforementioned literature suggests the existence of a research gap with reference to any investigation of the effect of degree of preference or priority of prospective teachers towards teaching profession, nor did the researcher find a single study where the variables of defeatism of prospective teachers towards teaching profession has been included.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To find out the degree of preference towards teaching profession in prospective teachers.
2. To find out the levels of defeatism of prospective teachers.
3. To find out correlations among the degree of preference in teaching profession and defeatism prospective teachers.

- To find the influences of levels of defeatism on the preference in teaching profession of prospective teachers.

### Hypotheses of the Study

- Prospective teachers will show a high degree of preference toward the teaching profession.
- Prospective teachers will exhibit a low levels of defeatism.
- There will be no significant correlation between the degree of preference toward the teaching profession and defeatism in prospective teachers.
- Levels of defeatism will not significantly influence the preference toward the teaching profession in prospective teachers.

### Methodology

The research design for the present study is descriptive research of the survey type. It aimed to identify the prospective teachers on the basis of degree of preference in teaching profession and their level of defeatist belief of performance. The study also aimed to find out the relationship of preference in profession and defeatism and defeatist belief of performance. The population of this study comprises of all the prospective teachers of Bhopal.

### Sample

The study was conducted in three colleges of teacher education of Bhopal. 100 prospective teachers studying in the selected three colleges were selected through random sampling technique.

### Tools of the Study

To measure the preference in teaching profession the participants were asked to respond in writing to the questions regarding the preferences of their profession and where teaching falls in the list of priority. To measure the defeatism a self-constructed scale was used consisted 23 items.

### Data Collection

For seeking approval and procuring required participation the researcher informed the college authorities about the purpose and the procedure of the study prior to data collection.

### Analysis and Discussion

**Table 1:** Percentage Distribution and chi-square of Levels of Preferences of Prospective Teachers in Teaching Profession

<i>Levels of Preferences in Teaching Profession</i>	Percentage	Chi-square
Least Preferred	10	25.040**
Moderately Preferred	48	
Most Preferred	42	

\*\*significant at .001

The above table shows the percentage distribution and chi-square of level of preferences in teaching profession amongst the prospective teachers. As may be ascertained from the data, only 10% of future teachers see teaching as their least preferred career choice, which raises some questions indeed — for them to be teacher trainees, but to have gone for teaching as a last choice.

It was also noticed that 48% of prospective teachers were moderately in favor of choosing teaching, suggesting that, while they don't love it, but they don't dislike it either. They stated that if they will get some other, non-teaching opportunity, they would go for it. Finally, 42% of prospective teachers consider teaching their most preferred profession. Altogether, this suggests that more than half of these prospective teachers did not pick teaching as their first choice. The value of the chi-square is 25.04 which is significant at .001 level of significance it denotes the difference between three level of preference is significant.

**Table 2:** Percentage Distribution of the Levels of Defeatism of Prospective Teachers

<i>Levels of Defeatism in Prospective Teachers</i>	Percentage	Chi-square
Low Defeatism	19	68.78**
Average Defeatism	72	
High Defeatism	09	

\*\*Significant at .001

The above table shows the percentage distribution of the levels of defeatism in prospective teachers. Upon interpretation, it can be observed that 19% of the prospective teachers have minimally defeatist attitudes. This suggests they are likely to demonstrate confidence, resilience, and optimism in their future roles as a teacher.

A large chunk, nearly three-fourth (72%) teachers, show a moderate level of defeatist thinking, suggesting that, while they might be having some doubts or negative expectations, these are not especially severe. Still, this does imply a general trend of uncertainty or lack of strong confidence.

A small proportion (9%) of future teachers exhibit a strong sense of defeatism, possibly doubting their abilities or the value of their efforts. It is worth repeating here that 10% of the prospective teachers stated teaching profession is, for them, their least preferred job. Most of them had tried their hand at competitive examinations for medicine, engineering, or were similarly preparing for civil services and allied fields. The high defeatism in these teachers may lead to low classroom effectiveness and student engagement, risk of burnout and negative impact on professional growth and morale. The chi-square value is 68.78 which is significant at .001 level of significance indicates that while extreme defeatism is not widespread among prospective teachers, a majority exhibit average levels, and this distribution is statistically significant.

**Table 3: Mean Distribution Levels of Defeatism of Prospective Teachers**

Levels	Mean	S.D.
Low Defeatism	15.00	3.76
Average Defeatism	16.82	2.04
High Defeatism	17.00	2.24
Total	16.49	2.54

The above table indicates the mean distribution of level of defeatism in prospective teachers. It shows that the mean defeatism score across all prospective teachers is 16.49, indicating a moderate level of defeatism. The standard deviation (2.54) also suggests a moderate spread of defeatism scores around the mean, implying some variation in attitudes, but nothing especially extreme.

Prospective teachers who were itemized as having low defeatism have a mean score of 15.00, and standard deviation (3.76) is relatively high, indicating greater variability within this group. Prospective teachers who reported average or moderate defeatism have a mean of 16.82, with a lower standard deviation (2.04), meaning that this group appears to be more consistent in their defeatist attitudes. The high level of defeatism mean score of 17.00 indicates that the mean is only slightly higher than the average group (16.82), suggesting a narrow range between average and high defeatism levels, but the standard deviation of 2.24 is also relatively low, suggesting this group is more homogenous in their higher levels of defeatism.

As the table suggests, the differences in mean scores between average and high defeatist group are small (only 0.18 points), which may designate that defeatism is generally moderate to high among the sample. Further, it may be inferred that a number of prospective teachers lean toward average or higher defeatism, which could be a cause for concern for their professional readiness and confidence.

Osunde & Izevbigie (2006) revealed that teachers are not remunerated well, and that they are looked down upon. This situation has resulted in the low self-esteem and status of teachers, and of the teaching profession in society at large. Low salaries can deter talented individuals from pursuing teaching as a career, and can further lead to dissatisfaction and attrition among current teachers.

**Table 4: Regression and Correlations among Level of Preference in Teaching Profession and Defeatism of Prospective Teachers**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	-.310 <sup>a</sup>	.096	.087	4.580

a. Predictors: (Constant) Level of Preference in Teaching

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	219.130	1	219.130	10.445	.002 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	2056.030	98	20.980		
	Total	2275.160	99			

a. Dependent Variable: Defeatism

b. Predictors: (Constant), Preference in Teaching Profession

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	15.138	3.018		5.016	.000
Preference in Teaching Profession	.585	.181	-.310	3.232	.002

a. Dependent Variable: Defeatism

The above tables show the regression, analysis of variance, and correlation between preference in teaching profession and defeatism. It reveals a moderate, but statistically meaningful relationship between independent and dependent variables, i.e., defeatism and preference in teaching. It is also found that about 9.6% of the variance in defeatism can be explained by the level of preference in teaching profession. This is a small effect size, suggesting other factors likely also influence defeatism. Since the regression model is statistically significant, it means that preference in teaching profession significantly predicts defeatism.

**Table 5:** Showing Multiple Comparisons among Three Levels of Defeatism (for significant main/ independent effect of Defeatism on Preferences) Scheffe's Post Hoc Test

(I) Levels of Defeatism	(J) Levels of Defeatism	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	P-value (Sig.)	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
High Defeatism	Low Defeatism	2.00	.99	.137	-.4695	4.4695
High Defeatism	Average Defeatism	.18	.87	.979	-1.9771	2.3382
Average Defeatism	Low Defeatism	1.82*	.63	.019	.2454	3.3934

\*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

It is evident from the multiple comparisons provided in table 5, that there are no significant differences at .05 level in the mean scores of preference for teaching of prospective teachers having high and low levels of defeatism (Mean difference = 2.00); high and average levels of defeatism (Mean difference = 0.18).

It may thus be concluded that the scores of preference for teaching of prospective teachers do not differ when compared to high and low levels of defeatism; and, similarly, no significant difference was found in case of high defeatism compared with average levels of defeatism.

However, this difference was found significant in case of average levels of defeatism compared to low levels of defeatism. The mean scores (refer the table 3) of preference towards teaching in prospective teachers having average levels of defeatism was (M=16.82) found to be higher as compared to low levels of defeatism (M=15.00); and this difference (16.82 - 15.00 = 1.82) is significant at 0.05 level.

### Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it may be concluded that a considerable proportion of prospective teachers enter the teaching profession with a moderate preference towards it, and average defeatism, indicating a widespread lack of strong professional identity and confidence. Although only a small percentage show high defeatism or report teaching as their least preferred choice, the statistical significance of these trends suggests systemic concerns that warrant attention. The correlation and regression analyses confirm a low but significant negative relationship between teaching preference and defeatism, indicating that individuals less inclined toward teaching tend to harbor more defeatist beliefs.

This psychological state — marked by pessimism, inadequacy, helplessness, and reduced motivation — can critically impair teaching quality, student engagement, and professional resilience. Post hoc analyses further reveal that the most notable difference lies between those with low and average defeatism, suggesting that even a small increase in defeatist beliefs can meaningfully alter one's professional orientation. However, no significant difference was found between high and low or high and average defeatism groups in terms of teaching preference, possibly due to the small sample size in the extreme categories.

Altogether, these findings highlight the urgent need for teacher education programs to address defeatism proactively. Enhancing the psychological preparedness and intrinsic motivation of teacher trainees is critical to reversing this trend. Without such intervention, the profession risks being filled by individuals whose performance and perseverance may be undermined by their own lack of conviction.

**Acknowledgment:** No

**Author's Contribution:** *Talmeez Fatma Naqvi:* Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing and *Mr. Shah Alam Khan:* Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology

**Funding:** No

**Declaration:** All the authors have given consent for the publication.

**Competing Interest:** No

### References

1. Abu-Halawa, M. (2015). Psychological Defeat, its essence indicators, determinants, consequence and prevention from it. Issues of the Arab psychological Network, *Series of the Electronic Book*, Number 28.
2. Campellone, T. R., Sanchez, A. H., Fulford, D., & Kring, A. M. (2019). Defeatist performance beliefs in college students: Transdiagnostic associations with symptoms and daily goal-directed behavior. *Psychiatry Research*, 272, 290–296. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2018.12.045>
3. Clay, K. B., Raugh, I. M., Bartolomeo, L. A., & Strauss, G. P. (2021). Defeatist performance beliefs in individuals at clinical high-risk for psychosis and outpatients with chronic schizophrenia. *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*, 15(4), 865–873. <https://doi.org/10.1111/eip.13024>
4. Luther, L., Coffin, G. M., Firmin, R. L., Bonfils, K. A., Minor, K. S., & Salyers, M. P. (2018). A test of the cognitive model of negative symptoms: Associations between defeatist performance beliefs, self-efficacy beliefs, and negative symptoms in a non-clinical sample. *Psychiatry Research*, 269, 278–285. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2018.08.016>
5. Luther, L., Raugh, I. M., Grant, P. M., & Strauss, G. P. (2024). The role of defeatist performance beliefs in state fluctuations of negative symptoms in schizophrenia measured in daily life via ecological momentary assessment. *Schizophrenia Bulletin*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/schbul/sbae007>

### Publisher's Note

*The Social Science Review A Multidisciplinary Journal* remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published data, map and institutional affiliations.

### ©The Author(s) 2025. Open Access.

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>