

# Teachers' Perceptions of the Negative Impact of Tobephobia on Their Emotions and Job Satisfaction

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**Abstract**—The aim of this study was to investigate the extent of teachers' experiences of tobephobia (TBP) in their heterogeneous classrooms and what impact this had on their emotions and job satisfaction. The expansive and continuously changing demands for quality and equal education for all students in educational organisations that have limited resources connotes that the negative effects of TBP cannot be simply ignored as being non-existent in the educational environment. As this quantitative study reveals, teachers disliking their job with low expectations, lack of motivation in their workplace and pessimism, result in their low self-esteem. When there is pessimism in the workplace, then the employees' self-esteem will inevitably be low, as pointed out by 97.1% of the respondents in this study. Self-esteem is a reliable indicator of whether employees are happy or not in their jobs and the majority of the respondents in this study agreed that their experiences of TBP negatively impacted on their self-esteem. Hence, this exploratory study strongly indicates that productivity in the workplace is directly linked to the employees' expectations, self-confidence and their self-esteem. It is therefore inconceivable for teachers to be productive in their regular classrooms if their genuine professional concerns, anxieties, and curriculum challenges are not adequately addressed. This empirical study contributes to our knowledge on TBP because it clearly outlines some of the teaching problems that we are grappling with and constantly experience in our schools in this century. Therefore, it is imperative that the tobephobic experiences of teachers are not merely documented, but appropriately addressed with relevant action by every stakeholder associated with education so that our teachers' emotions and job satisfaction needs are fully taken care of.

**Keywords**—Demotivated teachers' pessimism, low expectations of teachers' job satisfaction, Self-esteem, Tobephobia.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE challenges of fear, stress, tension, and anxiety amongst teachers as employees arise, because to some extent, everyone experiences a fear of making a mistake, as all change efforts in any organisation can induce fear if employees are not fully prepared for it. Fear can have a dampening effect on these employees' job satisfaction, as it could negatively impact on their expectations and, consequently, their self-esteem [1]. Deep change processes that call into question long-held beliefs and attitudes, and habitual ways of acting (such as deferring to the leaders, or leaders not having to reveal their reasoning), can be especially threatening to employees. Fear of failure in the organisation can culminate in questions being raised by employees regarding their ability and training to perform at optimum levels and can be the cause of emotional dissonance in the

workplace [2]. This fear can result in them suffering from TBP which is associated with them not being adequately educated and professionally equipped to do their work [3]. Creating and being unaccountable for a *tobephobic* climate in the working environment is a major management blunder that can impact negatively on the schools' vision and mission [4].

There is a distinct link between organizational commitment, in other words the strength of the teachers' identification with their schools, and job satisfaction. This link indicates that there is strong support for and an acceptance of the organization's goals and values, and as a result, employees are willing to offer high levels of commitment, service, and loyalty to the organization because they are satisfied at work. Leaders need to understand, therefore, that there should be a direct link between organizational commitment, the level of efficiency that is required for all teachers, and a presence of job satisfaction, in order for a school attain its objectives [5]. For this to materialise, it is imperative for leaders to demonstrate acceptable levels of emotions in their organisations. Admittedly, organizational commitment has its focus on a more global, long-term attachment to the organization as a whole, as well as an emphasis on congruence between the goals of the individual and those of the organization. The more positive the leaders' strategies, the more helpful, cooperative, and positive are those in the team and the ability of leaders to manage their interpersonal and intrapersonal emotions as predictors of job satisfaction and organizational commitment [6]. Inevitably, a leader who deals with and understands emotions in the workplace will assist in the creation of job satisfaction because teachers will feel that they are being recognized as individuals and that their emotions are being deservedly acknowledged. Reference [7] aptly elucidates the difficulties that teachers experience in their schools, when she states that:

*"I can't envision a time when teaching has been easy – at least not real teaching. Nonetheless, it's difficult to envision a period when teaching in the United States has been more difficult, more riddled with pressure, more laden with tension than it is now. The reasons are many – societal, political, economic, structural, personal. It is surely a time that merits our full consideration of how to care for teachers in ways that make their work fulfilling rather than depleting."* [7, p. 92].

One of the objectives of this comprehensive study on TBP was to focus on teachers' perceptions of the negative impact of TBP on their emotions and job satisfaction. Why? Not much is written about the tobephobic experiences of teachers who unselfishly invest all their professional resources in their

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schools to maximize the potential of every learner within their milieu. Yet, can this be unequivocally stated about maximizing every teacher's potential and career goals? Admittedly, teaching is an unnatural profession. The unnaturalness of teaching creates many challenges and concerns to many stakeholders in education. Reference [8] provides a resourceful description of the unnaturalness of the teaching profession (as compared to other professions) in three fundamental ways:

- *Specialized expertise*: Teaching is unnatural in that it demands not only knowledge and skills in specific areas of subject specialization, but also the ability to take this knowledge and skills apart so that pupils can learn in safe and learner-friendly environments. Frequently, teachers are placed under undue stress and tension because they are required to teach subjects for which they have no professional training.
- *The challenge of multiple perspectives*: Teachers must cope with diverse abilities, and because they must ensure that all their pupils succeed, they must see ideas and skills from all their pupils' perspectives. The greater the differences between learners and their teachers - in culture, language, and experience - the less precisely attuned the teaching and learning outcomes would be.
- *Working with many learners*: Teachers must cope with large numbers of learners in regular classrooms in the mainstream of education. They must individualize and differentiate learning in terms of the personal needs of each and every pupil. Attending to the ability differences simultaneously is no simple task in a heterogeneous learning environment. This must be tailored within specific scheduled time frames because the teachers need to fulfil the standard requirements of the core curriculum. Unlike many other professions, where the customers are serviced individually in terms of their specific needs, teachers have to work conscientiously with theirs in batches, as prescribed by the common core curriculum.

When teachers are not appropriately supported by their leaders in their professional day-to-day activities, they will inevitably lack the cognitive and emotional effectiveness to identify with the specific cognitive needs of all their learners. As a result, these overburdened teachers will not be able to relate relevant subject content to their pupils' lives. By being ineffective in their classrooms, the teachers would be exposed to the negative impact of TBP and invariably, experience a lack of job satisfaction. This aspect of the comprehensive study, therefore, investigated teachers' perceptions regarding their motivation, expectations, self-esteem, pessimism, and dislike of their job, and this was directly linked to their emotions and experiences of TBP.

## II. JOB SATISFACTION OF TEACHERS

Happiness is the key that unlocks the door of job satisfaction for employees. Reference [9] aptly assert that:

*"If work comes to be seen solely as a source of income and never as a source of fulfilment, organizations will totally ignore other human needs at work - needs*

*involving such intangibles as learning, self-worth, pride, competence and serving others ... work comes from the inside out; work is an expression of our soul, our inner being. Without employing peoples' hearts, organizations lose precious returns on their investment in people."* [9, p. 41].

Job satisfaction can be defined as an emotional state of either liking or disliking one's job because of a global feeling on the one hand, or a set of related attitudes that are caused by aspects of the job that produce either satisfaction or dissatisfaction on the other. It would be naïve to believe that one can simply divide the world of work into two distinct scenarios, where employees are identified as either unhappy and unproductive, or happy and productive. If this were the case, then one could offer a basic recipe with a list of ingredients for improving job satisfaction. It may also be so that happiness and productivity do not necessarily form an automatic alliance, but rather there are a number of other factors that are said to influence the creation of job satisfaction. There seems to be little doubt that organizations that have sustainable successes are those that manage to motivate their people effectively. These organizations are able to maximize the potential of their human resources, by recruiting the most suitable candidates, enabling them through relevant induction and mentor programmes, and motivating them to work at optimum performance levels [10]. A longitudinal study conducted by labour economists at Ohio State in the USA, revealed that job satisfaction or dissatisfaction continued even when people changed their places of work [11]. This evidence of consistency supports the hypothesis that if one is dissatisfied in one kind of job context, one is likely to be dissatisfied with another, even if the environment is better. If specific beliefs and expectations pertaining to the job are not met, then the result could be that an employee will remain dissatisfied until the misconceptions are resolved.

Empathy is an essential trait for teachers to overtly include in their instructional strategies. Expressing empathy in the organization requires the employee to thoughtfully consider everyone's feelings in the process of making intelligent decisions. Teachers who use instructional empathy will reduce anxiety, tension and the effects of TBP in the learning environment. When learners see their teachers expressing empathy, they feel more comfortable and open to talk about problems they may have in the classroom or even at home. If teachers want learners to succeed in their classes, it is important for teachers to connect with their learners at a professional and personal level. Good listening skills are therefore the key to genuine empathy, because when teachers learn to listen better, they gain the respect of their pupils. Expectedly, empathy would increase trust and closeness within the organization and this would inevitably impact positively on the productivity and job satisfaction of teachers.

The teachers' motivation to expend effort would therefore be a function of their expectancies that applying a given effort on their tasks would lead to improved job behaviour and performance. Empathy shown by leaders in schools can

contribute to both the intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction of teachers, and this is usually associated with the opportunities for their personal growth and accomplishment that the job provides. Reference [12] alludes to the fact that “a worker’s overall level of self-esteem and perceived ability to perform necessary tasks are positively related to the magnitude of the person’s expectancy estimates” (p. 371). Hence, the amount of satisfaction teachers get from their occupation is also influenced by their role perceptions because those who perceive large amounts of conflict in the demands placed on them tend to be less satisfied than those who do not. Empathy can be a powerful tool in schools to eliminate such negative role perceptions.

Leaders must understand empathetically what the fears and needs of employees are and where their strengths and weaknesses lie. They need to comprehend that employees display a variety of emotions that should be handled with professional sensitivity. When leadership structures are built around the empowerment of individuals and the active involvement of all employees, the best long-term efficiency is achieved. Most teachers want to feel confident in their jobs and know that by being empowered, they are making meaningful contributions to the effectiveness of their organisations. Empathy and compassion are the nucleus of collaboration and empowerment, because without them, human emotions are ignored and teachers then begin to stray from the school’s core purpose because they are unhappy, as pointed out by [13]:

*“It is from empathy, especially when there is an environment of trust, that connection comes, one person to another. In terms of corporate and career achievements, it can be said that almost everything begins and ends in the emotions of confident relationships, in human connectedness”.* [13, p. 53].

An empathic temperament has been seen as a salient attribute for teachers in a heterogeneous classroom and this disposition is associated with an increase in sensitivity to different cultures. The empathetic disposition often also manifests itself in the teachers’ caring relationship. Learners who have a positive connection with their teachers are often more motivated and have the ability to perform at a greater academic level than students who do not share this bond. Empathy can also contribute to the success of teachers. Employees who are motivated to a greater extent to excel by their leaders would experience more job satisfaction. There can be a strong relationship between the ability to work with, appreciate and respond to workers, and the self-esteem of employees would be higher in a working environment that encourages an empathic relationship amongst workers. An increase in empathetic skills can definitely improve classroom interactions by means of various attributes such as listening, being patient, reflecting constantly and caring for the learners.

Leaders need to demonstrate the necessary emotional leadership skills in order to understand and assist in the creation of job satisfaction and positive attitudes amongst employees in their institutions. In order for schools to be more desirable places in which to work, it is necessary for leaders to

recognise their employees’ emotions and be sensitive to their job satisfaction needs. They need to have knowledge of their own capabilities and limitations and be able to identify the factors and situations that evoke emotion at both interpersonal and intrapersonal levels, and if leaders are able to do this, then understanding of emotions in the workplace could improve vastly. The leader’s ability to understand, identify and empathise with employees’ emotions and then react appropriately are, according to [14], integral factors which could help foster a feeling of job satisfaction amongst employees:

*“Those who are emotionally intelligent can connect with people quite smoothly, be astute in reading their reactions and feelings, lead and organise, and handle disputes that are bound to flare up. They are the natural leaders, the people who can express the unspoken collective sentiment and articulate it so as to guide a group towards its goals. They are emotionally nourishing – they leave people in a good mood.”* [14, p. 119].

If one agrees that the human element in an organization needs to develop along with the pace of change, then people, and not products, would be the most important resource which would necessitate that leaders focus on the intrinsic needs of people in order to discover what makes them satisfied at work. Leaders need to create professional relationships with employees in order to create mentoring roles that develop partnerships and modify behaviours that are necessary to improve the emotions of team members. A leader’s influence should be based on the intrinsic characteristics of consistency, values, inspiration and commitment. If leaders in schools demonstrate consistent values over a long period of time, then teachers would most likely demonstrate these values as well. Reference [15] proposed a model for promoting emotional consonance in the workplace that could impact on the job satisfaction of employees through the creation of intrinsic worth which they divided into a process of four phases:

1. *The securing of organizational support.* This involves the employment of emotionally intelligent leaders, the creation of autonomy in decision-making structures, linking emotions to the needs of the organization and introducing training to improve the emotional intelligence of staff.
2. *Prepare for change.* The importance of self-directed learning is stressed and includes the setting of clear, manageable goals and the creation of positive expectations amongst employees.
3. *Training and development.* The recognition and acknowledgement of emotions is a skill that is learned during this phase. How to deal with extreme emotions associated with TBP is also paramount. The development of a positive relationship between the leader and the employee is important in this phase.
4. *Encouraging, maintaining and evaluating change.* The leader’s role in providing ongoing encouragement and support is vital here. The role of a mentor should be assumed and ongoing evaluation of emotional development should be made [15, p. 66].

The model provides a useful framework for designing an intervention program to help develop leaders' emotionally intelligent competencies and should assist employees reach a feeling of satisfaction at work that in turn, enhances organizational development [16]. It also supports the belief that team trust, cooperation, motivation and collaboration, result from an effective control of emotions which facilitate a positive working environment [17]. An emphasis on intrinsic motivation will also encourage a move away from measurement according to the objectives and performance ratings, a system of assessment that receives negative responses from many employees [18].

### III. RESEARCH DESIGN

A multi-respondent survey design was used in this empirical study. In such a design, the focus is on relationships between and among variables in a single group [19], [20]. The subjects chosen to participate in the study were selected following a process described as non-probability convenience sampling because the subjects were selected on the basis of their accessibility and availability [21]. There was also an element of stratified sampling used and the final sample was neither random nor probability based. It was a mixture of convenience and stratified sampling and this ensured that the population represented a cross-section of teachers at all post levels. Hence, for the purpose of this study, the participants were teachers studying at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Ethics clearance to proceed with the study was granted by the university (NMMU).

The questionnaires were completed by teachers from Port Elizabeth and Durban (in South Africa). Seeing that the main NMMU campus is based in Port Elizabeth, 78.8% of the respondents were from this site. For ethical reasons, respondents were advised not to disclose their names and the names of their schools on the questionnaire. Confidentiality and anonymity were thus ensured and the participation of the respondents was on a totally voluntary basis. Of the 335 questionnaires distributed, 311 completed questionnaires were returned. This represented a return rate of 92.8%. In this paper, the focus is only on sub-section six of the questionnaire. There are six items (see Table I) in this sub-section. Respondents were required to respond to the items with three options: agree fully (A+), agree partially (A-), or disagree (D).

Cronbach's alpha coefficient values were used to determine the reliability (internal consistency) of the scores. The observed Cronbach's coefficient alpha value of 0.91 for teachers' perceptions of the negative impact of TBP on their emotions and job satisfaction was much higher than 0.70, the minimum value regarded as significant, thus confirming the score's high reliability. Hence, the value of Cronbach's alpha verified that the research was reliable, that the questionnaire was consistent and the scores had insignificant error. Also, in order to ensure the content and construct validity of the questionnaire, as is evident in this paper, a study of relevant literature on TBP and job satisfaction was undertaken, and the

theory clearly supported the empirical findings.

### IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Teaching is a demanding job. Teachers are entrusted to teach with passion and be creative in their classrooms. Teachers are even required to commit themselves completely, to educate all their learners who are put into their pastoral care. Thus, many stakeholders, including parents, employers, and the community, have high expectations that teachers would make every bit of sacrifice to maximize learning opportunities for their pupils. However, recently, the teaching profession has had to cope with increasing challenges, including many teachers who experience fear of failure (TBP). Research, as cited in this paper, reveals that many teachers, globally, are not optimistic about their work. The analysis (see Table I) that follows, affirms these concerns and challenges that impact negatively on the expectations, emotions, and the self-esteem of many teachers.

Only 1.3% of respondents indicated that they disagreed with the statement that teachers are demotivated as a result of TBP. These respondents are the younger, inexperienced teachers who are in the profession for less than five years. They have not yet been exposed to the real causes of TBP in their schools. The biographical details of these respondents place them in the age bracket of 20-29 years. Also, their demographics indicate that they are at well-resourced schools that have private funding to offset several of the challenges that regular mainstream schools find themselves having to cope with. Hence, their response regarding this item is negligible, as is confirmed by the majority of respondents. The majority of the respondents (98.7%) agreed that this was a true reflection of their emotions and job satisfaction. TBP is inextricably bound to the emotions experienced by people, and the lack of achievement motivation can impact negatively on the employees' emotions. The lack of capacity to usher in curriculum changes at the classroom level has led to untold levels of anxiety, stress and tension within the teaching profession. Teachers are suffering from stagnation which in turn leads to emotional dissonance because of their inability to contribute effectively in their daily classroom teaching and learning processes [22]. This confirms that curriculum changes that are incompatible with teachers' knowledge and experiences are likely to be met with passive resistance by experienced teachers.

Consequently, there was a strong response from the teachers on whether they liked or disliked their jobs, as 97.7% of the respondents indicated that TBP resulted in their disliking their jobs. Teachers suffer from a lot of job-related tension, stress, and anxiety, and therefore, it is not surprising that only a very small proportion of the sample, that is 2.3%, indicated TBP was not directly related to their job satisfaction. The latter could be attributed to the younger teachers who fall within the age group of 20-29 years. Because of their lack of experience, these younger, beginner teachers do not readily relate TBP with their very limited job-related stresses and anxieties. Research, as cited in this paper, strongly suggests that teachers are exposed daily to the effects of TBP, and this



finding strongly confirms the link between TBP and the low level of job satisfaction amongst the more experienced teachers. Most teachers indicated strongly (97.1%) that they develop a negative attitude towards their job because of TBP,

as opposed to only 2.9 % who disagreed. This finding is a further affirmation of teachers' experiences of the fear of failure and the dire need for leaders to address the symptoms of TBP.

TABLE I  
TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF TBP ON THEIR EMOTIONS AND JOB SATISFACTION

|   | Agree fully % | Agree Partially % | Disagree % | Mean | SD   |
|---|---------------|-------------------|------------|------|------|
| Teachers develop a negative attitude towards their job because of TBP | 74.6          | 22.5              | 2.9        | 1.28 | 0.51 |
| TBP has a negative impact on the self-esteem of teachers              | 76.5          | 20.6              | 2.9        | 1.26 | 0.50 |
| Teachers are demotivated as a result of TBP                           | 75.6          | 23.2              | 1.3        | 1.26 | 0.47 |
| Teachers have low expectations as a result of TBP                     | 67.8          | 29.3              | 2.9        | 1.35 | 0.54 |
| TBP results in teachers disliking their job                           | 72.0          | 25.7              | 2.3        | 1.30 | 0.51 |
| TBP leads to pessimism experienced by teachers                        | 70.1          | 27.0              | 2.9        | 1.33 | 0.53 |

Self-esteem is a reliable indicator of whether employees are apparently happy or not in their jobs. The majority of the respondents (97.1%) agreed that TBP had a negative impact on their self-esteem. When teachers have a low self-esteem in their schools, they would not give their best in their classrooms and this could hamper the effectiveness of education in their classrooms. Only 2.9% of respondents disagreed that there was a link between their self-esteem and TBP. These are the younger teachers who have less experience in the profession, and hence, would not readily identify the link between self-esteem and TBP in the educational milieu. Pessimism in the working environment results in employees having a low self-esteem. This was confirmed by 97.1% of the respondents. Optimism and TBP are incompatible traits of emotional intelligence. Hence, it is not surprising that 67.8% agreed fully and 29.3% agreed partially that teachers have low expectations as a result of TBP. Belief in others' abilities is essential to making extraordinary things happen in any organization because exemplary leaders would not doubt the abilities of their employees and would therefore elicit high performance from them, as pointed out by [23]:

*When you expect people to fail, they probably will. If you expect them to succeed, they probably will* [23, p. 277].

Hence, it is imperative that all stakeholders address the causes of TBP that impact negatively on the teachers' emotions and job satisfaction. It is absolutely essential to create a workplace where the employees are demonstrating optimism and self-confidence. Teachers need continuous support from their leaders to develop their professional competencies to cope with the diverse challenges in their schools which can range from major curriculum changes to learners' violent behavior. Productivity is linked directly to one's expectations and self-esteem and it is unthinkable for teachers to function effectively and productively if their professional concerns and challenges are not timely addressed. There can be no question that such factors impede the progress of quality education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An optimistic approach is essential for enhancing resilience, and the teachers' capacity to cope with the effects of TBP must be developed in order to bounce back from the fear of failure, and even failure [24].

## V. CONCLUSION

The process of human endeavour in schools should always be recognized as being as equally important as the task at hand and the curriculum product to be developed, or the quality of the teaching service to be rendered. Therefore, traditional preconceptions held by leaders in education regarding the expected behaviour and role definitions of their teachers need to be altered. This would facilitate the processes of shared decision-making, shared leadership and transformational thinking in educational institutions. Leaders are expected to develop their empathic capacity so that their employees' needs and job satisfaction concerns are understood. Empathy serves as a gateway to understanding and compassion, and therefore, emotionally intelligent leaders would not plow through and impose their agenda, leaving their employees demotivated and pessimistic with low expectations in the workplace. A 21<sup>st</sup> century organization, including schools, should be characterized by collegial teamwork practices, because it should have shifted its emphasis from the management of tasks, to the leadership of people. This view is supported when one accepts that leadership involves the creation of multi-partnerships, the success of which is embedded in the quality of relationships that function as inclusive, motivated units. In order for the collegial units being functional, teachers need to be led with confidence and school leaders need to have a clear understanding of the needs and the emotional strengths and weaknesses of those who are to be led. Undoubtedly, we must support our teachers to be passionate about their jobs if we are to succeed in meeting the challenges of this century.

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