Learners' Violent Behaviour and Drug Abuse as Major Causes of Tobephobia in Schools

Prakash Singh

Abstract—Many schools throughout the world are facing constant pressure to cope with the violence and drug abuse of learners who show little or no respect for acceptable and desirable social norms. These delinquent learners tend to harbour feelings of being beyond reproach because they strongly believe that it is well within their rights to engage in violent and destructive behaviour. Knives, guns, and other weapons appear to be more readily used by them on the school premises than before. It is known that learners smoke, drink alcohol, and use drugs during school hours, hence, their ability to concentrate, work, and learn, is affected. They become violent and display disruptive behaviour in their classrooms as well as on the school premises, and this atrocious behaviour makes it possible for drug dealers and gangsters to gain access onto the school premises. The primary purpose of this exploratory quantitative study was therefore to establish how tobephobia (TBP), caused by school violence and drug abuse, affects teaching and learning in schools. The findings of this study affirmed that poor discipline resulted in producing poor quality education. Most of the teachers in this study agreed that educating learners who consumed alcohol and other drugs on the school premises resulted in them suffering from TBP. These learners are frequently abusive and disrespectful, and resort to violence to seek attention. As a result, teachers feel extremely demotivated and suffer from high levels of anxiety and stress. The word TBP will surely be regarded as a blessing by many teachers throughout the world because finally, there is a word that will make people sit up and listen to their problems that cause real fear and anxiety in schools.

Keywords—Aims and objectives of quality education, Debilitating effects of tobephobia, Fear of failure associated with education, learners' violent behaviour and drug abuse

I. INTRODUCTION

THROUGHOUT the world, schools are facing increasing challenges in coping with the violence and drug abuse of their pupils. Hence, the question of the fear of failure to meet the planned aims and objectives of quality education inevitably surfaces. It places increasing and challenging demands on the competencies of educators, and all other relevant stakeholders to address this educational malaise. One must admit that the phenomenon of fear of failure is not something new to education. Decades, and even centuries, of retrospections on some of the pronounced failings of education demonstrate the existence of this phenomenon. The construct *tobephobia* (TBP) is a term that has been in existence for the past two-and-half decades. Research strongly suggests that TBP appropriately captures and mirrors the essence of the fear of failure caused by several factors

Prakash Singh is a professor of education at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth, South Africa (e-mail: Prakash.Singh@nmmu.ac.za)

associated with education [1]-[5]. Evidently, current exploratory studies [6]-[10] on TBP confirm the notion that the fear of failure in education is responsible for the act of failure in teaching and learning. All human beings are susceptible to experiencing failure. No one can deny this. Fear is a reality in our schools. It is just that we do not wish to talk about our fears openly. We prefer to suppress our educational fears in order to avoid humiliation. The occurrences of failure naturally depend on the circumstances of fear that ignite it. Within the school environment, this study would reveal that the violent behaviour of pupils and drug abuse by them are major factors that contribute to the existence of TBP, detrimentally affecting quality teaching and the accomplishment of meaningful learning outcomes. Obviously, the values of safety and professional competence of educators need to be embedded in the culture of our schools to overcome the debilitating effects of TBP.

Nobody is happy to work under fearful and stressful conditions in any organization. Working in a fearful organization creates a high level of stress and anxiety for employees. Expectedly, tobephobic educators would spend most of their time worrying about their fear of violence and the drug abuse by pupils and would be too frightened to carry out their normal duties. They would prefer to stay in familiar surroundings for fear of being attacked by inebriated learners. This study, therefore, contributes to our further understanding of the effects of TBP in our schools caused by violence and drug abuse. The research would also expand the evidence accumulated over the past two decades that TBP is not simply a figment of someone's imagination; it is a gruesome reality affecting the very foundation of our educational system globally to provide quality and equal education to all our learners in a harmonious, collegial school environment [11]. This study is therefore a continuation of the exploratory studies on the manifestation of fear in education.

II. VIOLENCE AND DRUG ABUSE

Crime, drug abuse, and violence in schools threaten the well-being of both the learners, as well as their teachers. There can be serious long-standing physical, emotional and psychological implications for both teachers and learners, including distress, reduced self-esteem, risk of depression and suicide, reduced school attendance, impaired concentration, fear and a diminished ability to learn. Schools are required to play a major role in the socialization of children and it is crucial that they offer a safe environment in which learning and growth can take place simultaneously. However, despite efforts to make schools safe and to restore a culture of learning

World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Educational and Pedagogical Sciences
Vol:10, No:10, 2016

and teaching, incidents of theft, vandalism, burglary, assault, rape and murder have been reported on school grounds. Reference [12] notes that one out of three girls and one out of five boys under the age of 16 have been sexually abused in school.

Violence refers to the use of intense physical force or intimidation which at times is unlawfully exercised, causing outrage or injury [13]. By behaving in a violent manner, an individual disrespects and violates the rights of victims. Many pupils at schools tend to have little respect for social norms and, because they harbour feelings of invincibility, they believe that it is within their right to engage in violent behaviour. As noted in the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) Report [14], school-based violence is multidimensional and assumes various forms. Its manifestation often depends on the context in which it arises, such as whether the violence is perpetrated by learners against fellow learners, by educators against learners, by learners against educators or by external persons against both learners and educators. In its report on school-based violence, the SAHRC chairperson pointed out that a major concern was whether we are able to create environments within our schools that are conducive to teaching and learning. He stated:

The violence that is playing itself out in our schools is not simply violence in the form of bullying; it has escalated into serious levels resulting in fatalities. Providing and receiving quality education in a state of fear will never be possible [14, p. iv].

The SAHRC reported that bullying, gender-based violence, accidental violence, discrimination and violence, sexual assault or harassment, physical violence, and psychological violence were the most prevalent forms of violence identified during the public hearings. Knives, guns, and other weapons appeared to be more readily used on the school premises than before.

It has been reported in the media that almost two million South African school children have been victims of violent crime at school, including incidents of theft, assault, robbery and sexual assault. Children exposed to violence and victimisation are likely to become perpetrators of anti-social behaviour. The number of cases in which children have resorted to violence and killed other children have increased over the past few years [15].

Teachers admit, as this study affirms, that they fear for their safety at school. Working in a fearful situation places a high rate of stress and anxiety on them. This inevitably affects their teaching outputs, as they find themselves being frequently absent from school in order to escape the violence and drug abuse by pupils. They also state that they do the bare minimum and do not confront learners in class for fear of upsetting them. Teachers have to constantly watch their backs and instead of teaching learners to maintain discipline, the educators have to regularly take a step back to ensure their own professional safety. As pointed out by them, their attitude towards their work tends to filter down to their learners; thus if educators have a negative attitude towards school, then the learners will end up adopting this attitude. Therefore, if

educators do not put much effort into their work as required, and create an exciting learning environment, learners will consequently lack motivation to excel at a commendable achievement level.

The ideal safe school would be one where the safety of teachers and learners are not threatened by drugs, violence, dangerous weapons and gangs, where school buildings and property remains safe and secure, where the school is not easily accessible to criminals, where the professional, democratic, organisational and personal values of teachers and learners are in place and functioning in accordance with the shared vision of the school, and where respect for the individual, whether an illiterate parent or a poor child, is the norm. Educators must find ways to promote tolerance and respect in the classroom. A positive classroom will contribute to the self-esteem of both teachers and learners, consequently motivating them to scale greater heights in curtailing the cancerous effects of school violence and drug abuse.

III. EMPIRICAL STUDY

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 [16], [17]. 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 [18]. 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 five of the questionnaire. In this sub-section, 12 items of school violence and drug abuse were highlighted. 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 0.95 for school violence and drug abuse as major causes of TBP were much higher than 0.70, the minimum value regarded as significant, thus confirming the score's high reliability.

IV. Data Analysis

Many teachers pointed out in this study (see Table I) that they have a valid reason for fearing for their safety and that of their learners because schools are far from being safe places any more. They noted that a lack of values and moral grounding resulted in a culture of disrespect. Our modern youth tends to lack the understanding of what is considered right and wrong by society. Because of this lack of values and morals, many learners have no religious, spiritual and political grounding. They do not show respect for rules and have no sense of responsibility. Learners do not care about the larger society. Unfortunately, the learners also do not feel valued and cared for.

TABLE I
SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND DRUG ABUSE AS MAJOR CAUSES OF TBP

	Agree fully %	Agree Partially %	Disagree %	Mean	SD
Not producing quality results because of the poor discipline of learners.	57.2	23.8	19.0	1.62	0.79
Not having the power to discipline children who misbehave.	50.8	28.6	20.6	1.7	0.79
Theft of personal property of teachers.	41.2	33.1	25.7	1.85	0.8
Swearing and taunting of teachers by learners.	43.7	26.7	29.6	1.86	0.85
Learners' parents who are physically violent towards teachers.	46.6	20.9	32.5	1.86	0.88
Teaching learners who use drugs such as alcohol on the school premises.	44.1	24.1	31.8	1.88	0.86
Being verbally abused by unruly learners in the classroom.	38.3	31.8	29.9	1.92	0.82
Being threatened by learners of being attacked after normal school hours.	35.7	20.6	43.7	2.08	0.89
Learners damaging teachers' cars.	31.2	28.9	39.9	2.09	0.84
Sarcastic remarks by learners with sexual undertones.	30.5	25.4	44.1	2.14	0.85
Being harmed by gangsters associated with learners.	33.1	19.9	47.0	2.14	0.89
Being assaulted by unruly learners.	31.5	22.8	45.7	2.14	0.87

The largest proportion of the sample (81%) perceived that poor discipline resulted in not producing quality results. When discipline is poorly implemented in the classroom, effective and meaningful learning will fail to materialise. This finding is further reinforced by the 79.4% of the responses that teachers lack the power to discipline learners who misbehave, and this would inevitably cause TBP in the school environment. More than seventy percent of teachers (70.4%) also feel threatened by pupils who swear and taunt them. Respondents (70.1%) indicated that being verbally abused by unruly learners in the classroom caused them to experience TBP. Bullying is usually regarded as taking place between learners. However, as this research aptly reveals, teachers are also being bullied by their pupils. Educators do not escape the effects of bullying and harassment. Harassment is used by offenders to humiliate, embarrass, intimidate, threaten or belittle another person. The effects of harassment on the victim can be the following:

- Low self-esteem, feelings of sadness and loneliness.
- Feelings of powerlessness and a loss of control over their lives.
- Fear to go to work to avoid further harassment.
- Developing psychosomatic symptoms, depression and even thoughts of suicide.

Teachers are in a very fragile position: their occupation is inherently stressful to cope with the diverse needs of their learners plus they are currently practicing their occupation within a fear manifested environment caused by violence, crime, drug abuse, curriculum innovations without the support structures in place, to mention a few factors. It depicts an erosion of socially acceptable values based on faltering cultural norms. Many respondents agreed (55.9%) that they were subjected to sarcastic remarks by learners with sexual undertones. This highlights the level of erosion of traditionally accepted values that served as hallmarks and benchmarks to transmit socially desirable norms and values of our younger generation. Teaching is an intricate and challenging occupation and research confirms that, in recent years, it has become one of the highest stress professions [19]. Reference [20] defines teachers' stress as the experience by teachers of unpleasant emotions such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger and depression, which can result from their work as teachers. Anxiety focuses the individual's attention on future loss [21].

Teachers fear for their safety after normal school hours, especially in crime ridden areas. Teachers, who confront delinquent learners, fear of becoming their victims because they can be stabbed or gunned down by the very education of their children. Socially desirable norms take root in homes, and other social institutions like schools are expected to build on this foundation. If this link becomes weak, then the existence of TBP would become a reality. The theft of anyone's personal property cannot be condoned, leave alone being overlooked as being trivial. Many teachers (67.5%) in this study indicated that the learners' parents were physically violent towards them. This situation is even further aggravated when the teachers are threatened by learners of being attacked after normal school hours, as 56.3% of the respondents pointed out. Respondents (60.1%) agreed that learners damaged their cars whenever punitive action against them was taken. Being assaulted by unruly learners was confirmed by 56.3% of the respondents. In addition, 53% of the respondents in this research confirmed being harmed by gangsters associated with learners. In many cities, suburbs, communities and schools, the levels of violence are increasing at an alarming rate. Violence has not only increased, but has become more brutal and dangerous. Because of these violent incidents, children are afraid to attend school. The violent behaviour is not only learnt at school from peer influences, but

World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Educational and Pedagogical Sciences
Vol:10, No:10, 2016

also outside of it. The violence inside the school is an extension of what is happening outside of the school. Violence has now become part of our everyday life. It seems as though it has become part of our culture.

It has become increasingly apparent that learners smoke, drink alcohol and use drugs during school hours. Consequently, their ability to concentrate on learning tasks, work conscientiously, and learn the subject matter painstakingly is affected. They even become violent and display disruptive behaviour in class and on the school premises when they fail to meet the requirements of success. Drug dealers and gangs also gain access to the school premises through them. Having taverns in the area surrounding the school meant that parents spent money on alcohol and therefore struggled to pay school fees. These parents have unsavoury characters and are poor role models to their children. Teachers fear failure because parents are not doing their share. In this study, 68.2% of the respondents agreed that teaching learners who used drugs such as alcohol on the school premises, caused them to suffer from TBP. Learners coming from unstable homes create the most discipline problems in school. They are frequently abusive and disrespectful, and resort to violence to seek attention.

Reference [22] asserts that the need for achievement and fear of failure have been shown to be orthogonal to each other. This study also found that the following factors contributed to high levels of fear of failure and insecurity amongst teachers:

- Lack of teacher effectiveness.
- Teachers being subjected to continual criticism with little praise.
- Lack of validated competencies.
- Lack of collegial co-operation.

When widely publicized questions emerge about a failing educational system, then uncertainty and fear are inevitable outcomes [23], [24]. It is also evident from this study that TBP can drain teachers of their motivation and inspiration and it can prevent them from realising their full potential. Inevitably, this will impact negatively on them personally, question their professional competencies, and endanger quality education for all learners.

V. CONCLUSION

Teachers desire for their learners to discover a taste for learning, a feel for justice and care for each other and it is their fervent ambition to prepare learners for adult life as they aim to mould them into creative, thoughtful and concerned citizens [25]. It is essential for teachers to make time to support one another and to share success stories about how to deal constructively with anger, conflict and violence in schools. Furthermore, it is essential that at the start of every school term, a boundary agreement between learners and educators is drawn up and adhered to [26]. This would cement the kind of positive behaviour that everyone is required to demonstrate in the school. Teachers cannot educate our children in schools where there are weapons, gang violence and drugs that threaten their safety. For learners to learn and succeed, the schools must become havens of discipline, commitment and

safety. Parents will need to become serious partners in education to ensure that our learners assimilate desirable norms and values to become useful citizens. There is a dire need to set up a team of educators, learners, parents and community police forum members to develop a plan of action for creating safe and secure schools and to have disciplinary policies firmly in place to contain the violent behaviour of learners. To make a difference in the educational journey of learners, discipline must not only be enforced on learners, but other aspects like good relationships, self-discipline and the mastering of sound principles for living must also be addressed. Working in collegial teams in our schools will ensure that the effects of school violence and drug abuse can be minimised and contained. Surely, the word *tobephobia* is regarded as a blessing by many teachers because finally, there is a word that will make everyone involved in education to sit up and listen attentively to teachers' problems, concerns, and challenges that cause real fear, stress, and anxiety in their schools.

REFERENCES

[1] Singh, P. & Manser, P.G. (2000). Effects of a shared vision on the attitudes of teachers towards outcomes-based education. *South African Journal of Education,* 20(2):108-114.
[2] Mofokeng, S.D. (2004). The implementation of the outcomes-based curriculum 2005 in primary schools in the Reitz district. Unpublished MEd dissertation. Vanderbijlpark: North-West University.
[3] Lunn, C. (2009). *Tobephobia.* Port Elizabeth: Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.
[4] Singh, P. (2011). Tobephobia experienced by teachers in secondary schools: An exploratory study focusing on curriculum reform in the Nelson Mandela Metropole. *Africa Education Review,* 8(2): 372-388.
[5] Wildemann, V.A.R. (2009). *The potential impact of Tobephobia on South African educators.* Port Elizabeth: Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.
[6] Singh, P. (2008). The effects of tobephobia on learning outcomes in the educational milieu. *International Journal of Learning*, 15(3):10-15.
[7] Singh, P. & Morar, T. (2009). Tobephobia: Fear of failure experienced by educators. *The International Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Change Management,* 9(4): 93-105.
[8] Ramkhelawon, J.A. (2010). *Tobephobia: A case study.* Port Elizabeth: Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.
[9] Singh, P. (2010). *Innovative strategies to develop better schools.* Sydney, Australia: Common Ground.
[10] Singh, P., Manser, P. & Dali, C. (2013). *Principal leadership: Interconnectedness between emotional intelligence, work-integrated-learning competencies and collegial leaders.* Saarbrucken, Germany: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing.
[11] Singh, P. (2015). Tobephobia: Fear of Failure in Education Caused by School Violence and Drug Abuse. *International Scholarly and Scientific Research & Innovation,* 1396-1407.
[12] Eliasov, N. & Frank, C. (2000). *Crime and violence in schools in transition: A survey of crime and violence in twenty schools in the Cape Metropole and beyond.* Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
[13] Bezuidenhout, F.J. (2004). *A reader on selected social issues.* Pretoria: Van Schaik.
[14] South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC). (2006). Report of the public hearing on school-based violence. Pretoria. Retrieved from http://www.sahrc.org.za/sahrc_cms/publish/cat_index_41.shtml
[15] Pather, S. & Nair, N. (2008). 'What now, Sir,' says killer. *The Times,* August 19, 2008:3.
[16] Gravetter, F.J & Wallnau, L.B. (2008). *Essentials of statistics for the behavioural sciences.* Belmont, CA: Thomson.
[17] Tuckman, B.W. (1999). *Conducting educational research.* New York: Harcourt Brace.
[18] McMillan, J.H. & Schumacher, S. (2001). *Research in education: A conceptual introduction.* New York: Harper.

World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Educational and Pedagogical Sciences
Vol:10, No:10, 2016

[19] Engelbrecht, P., Oswald, M., Swart, E. & Eloff, I. (2003). Including learners with intellectual disabilities: Stressful for teachers? *International Journal of Disability*, *Development and Education*, 50(3): 293-308.

[20] Kyriacou, C. (1998). Teacher stress: Past and present. In J. Dunham & V. Varma (Eds.), *Stress in teachers.* London: Whurr.

[21] Gardner, J. & Bell, A.H. (2005). *Phobias and how to overcome them: understanding and beating your fears.* New Jersey: New Page Books.

[22] Spitzer, D.R. (1977). Achievement motivation and fear of failure in teachers. Paper presented at the Association for Educational Communications and Technology Annual Convention. State University of Albany, New York.

[23] Ginsberg, R. & Cooper, B.S. (2008). Introduction. What's fear got to do with it? *Educational Policy,* 22(1):5-9.

[24] Grant, N. (2009). Schools of little thought: Why change management hasn't worked. *Improving Schools*, 12(1):19-32.

[25] Wrigley, T. (2003). *Schools of hope – a new agenda for school improvement.* Oakhill: Trentham Books.

[26] Mohlala, T. (2006). Helping learners cope with conflict. *The Teacher*, 11(5): 6.