



Empathy Interventions in Schools: Effects of Incorporating Empathy in Teaching Practices

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Abstract

This study was designed as an educational social-work project to examine the impact of empathy training on school teachers from 4 different schools in Karachi, Pakistan. In order to measure the impact of empathy intervention on teachers' empathy levels, data was collected before and after the intervention. The intervention was carried out in the form of a three-day empathy workshop. Eight schoolteachers were assigned to the experimental condition whereas 4 teachers participated in control group. The impact of training was assessed using a triangulation design, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was collected through self-report surveys and qualitative data was gathered through an online questionnaire. Although, quantitative data showed no significant impact of empathy training, however, the qualitative findings signify the usefulness of the workshop in promoting empathetic mindset among teachers. Teachers recognized the importance of listening and understanding their students' and maintaining a healthy teacher-student bond. Quantitative findings portray low level of average empathy scores and a drop-in teachers' empathy level after attending the workshop. Low average scores could be due to increasing psychological challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and time constraints, present in the study.

Keywords: COVID-19; Empathy intervention, Workshop, Teaching practices; Training impacts; School teachers

Introduction

Teachers play a very important role in the lives of students. The impact they have on students is not only limited to academics. Their influence even shapes the way pupil value and respect themselves (Hoge, Smit & Hanson, 1990). Teachers' empathy comprises of affective and cognitive domains and it is the ability to express concern and take the perspective of a student (Tettegah & Anderson 2007). Caring teachers usually have children who perform well academically, socially, morally, and culturally (Gay, 2000). Empathy is recognized as the second most significant feature in contributing to effective pedagogy (Gilly, 1980). A classical notion that connects teachers' empathy with their teaching ability is that in order to provide proper instructions teachers need to know their students well (Gilly, 1980).

Why is Empathy Important?

There has been extensive research on empathy and its effect on creating a healthy and comforting environment. According to Robert and Strayer (1996), people who are empathetic tend to exhibit a more prosocial response towards others. They not only understand and value their own feelings, but these people also respect the feelings of others. Doing so enables them to establish a better connection in social interactions. Having an empathetic outlook can be a useful approach towards improving human relations. In order to understand someone, it is quite important to take their perspective and listen to him/her without attaching any judgment. Doing this successfully can create a conducive environment while failing to do so can lead to violence (Thomas, 2018).

Most of the times our positive interactions are limited to people that belong to our own culture, having a sense of familiarity bridges the gap and helps us to connect at a deeper level with

them. However, empathy can even enable us to enter into the shoes of culturally diverse people. This is supported by a study that enabled students to take an empathic approach towards culturally diverse people through a brief poetry session, aimed at incorporating a sense of empathy towards discriminated immigrants in Malta (Xerri & Agius, 2015). After the session many students discussed the hardships faced by the asylum-seekers, three even stated the word dehumanization in highlighting how migrants were treated (Xerri & Agius, 2015)

Classrooms are platforms that require a high level of empathy. They comprise of students belonging to various cultures and backgrounds. Teachers who are open and flexible, towards diversity in the classroom, effectively adjust to different contexts (Delpit, 1995). They establish positive relationship with students which leads to better learning outcomes in terms of increased motivation and better academic performance of students (Gay, 2000).

Teaching as a profession has gone through immense commercialization. It has made the teaching process more mechanical which means that educational institutions are more inclined towards making profit rather than meeting the demands of students (Borgohain, 2016). Numerous teachers consider the relationship with their students to be more business oriented rather than a personal one.

This type of commercialization and increasing professionalism generates a greater distance among teachers and students. Such distance among the two leads to creation of in-groups and out-groups. Sometimes teachers perceive students to be members of out-groups and fail to consider their perspective and are unable to share students' emotional states. Empathy has served as a positive mediating variable towards reducing prejudice towards the out-group (Anjum, Castano, & Aziz, 2016). This research study signifies that higher contact aids people to take the perspective

of out-group members and empathize with their concerns. It helps them to adopt better inter-groups attitudes and relations. Likewise, empathy can also act as a positive mediator in reducing the gap between teacher-student relationships through promoting greater perspective-taking and sharing emotional states among teachers.

Improving quality of education and classroom environment requires incorporation of empathy on a large scale. Many educational institutions have created a narrow-minded culture and norms regarding learning and academic achievement. Students are made to compete against each other without considering each other's well-being. The environment in schools leads to unequal educational experiences for different social groups (Carter, 2015). The article further illustrates that educational equity in schools requires genuine integration of all racial and ethnic minorities. However, it says that it is not possible to achieve such integration without promoting an empathetic school culture and environment that enables pupils to consider education more than just a competition and take into account the well-being of their fellow students.

The usefulness of empathy extends to a greater engagement with the classroom material as well. Various disciplines such as history require students to actively engage with the text. Historical empathy is one of the forms of empathy that refers to the skill of observing the world as it was seen by the people of the past, without attaching today's values on the historical times (Yilmaz, 2007). There is an essential need for teachers to adopt such practices in the class to promote rigorous historical inquiry and deep understanding of historical events among students (Davis, 2001).

Recent research in the educational institutions of Pakistan has also shown that students and teachers are experiencing higher levels of emotional burden in context of COVID-19 crisis. Anjum

(2020) conducted a study to explore the emotional wellbeing of academics, students, administration and support staff at various academic institutions in Pakistan. The findings suggested that the stress, emotional burden, and anxiety of unknown had a significant impact on the emotional wellbeing and emotional capital of all samples. The study indicated that the emotional impacts of the pandemic can last for much longer than financial and somatic losses. Therefore, conducting the current study will also be able to tap into this more nuanced understanding to what extent empathy trainings of teachers in such a context of heightened anxiety would be fruitful.

Theoretical Framework

DasGupta and Charon (2004) explain how medical students are mainly trained to distance their personal feelings and experiences, in order to become more professional. This not only harms the relationship with their patients but with their own selves as well. Arthur Kleinman (1988) proposes an empathetic witnessing model of clinical care, which signifies the importance of establishing a meaningful bond with clients. It suggests that understanding patients' illness story is a key towards establishing empathetic communication with the client. The study also states that empathy leads to more self-awareness, which aids clinicians to be more aware of their own biases and feelings. Similarly, empathetic witnessing models can also assist teachers to have effective interactions with their students and can help them to go beyond the professional bounds and understand the underlying problems of their pupils. This leads to an endorsement of greater understanding and better student-teacher relationships.

Intervention

Gretchen McAllister (2000), in his study, introduced an intervention in the form of CULTURES program among 34 practicing teachers. The goal of the program was to assist these teachers to work efficiently with culturally diverse students and to enhance the quality of teaching in schools. The results showed that all 34 teachers believed empathy to be an important determinant towards working efficiently with diverse students. Furthermore, the teachers mentioned several attributes that dictated empathetic behavior, such as patience, tolerance, respect, sensitivity, acceptance understanding, openness, flexibility and humility. The program enabled the teachers to make more positive interactions with students, have a supportive classroom environment and indulge in student-centered practices. In the study, fifty-six percent of the teachers showed concern about their classroom environments and frequently reflected on the way culturally diverse students might feel in their classrooms. Sixty-two percent of the teachers signified in their post-CULTURES data how they altered their curriculum to emphasize on students' interests. Correspondingly, it should be taken into account that although empathy has been identified as an important element, nonetheless it is not the only element to enhance teaching practices (Gretchen McAllister, 2000).

Another study was conducted which was an online intervention that was based on encouraging empathic discipline. It was introduced to test whether empathic mindset can change teachers' practices. It also measured whether such a mindset can enable students to have a better approach towards maintaining discipline and whether it could reduce the suspension rates among 1682 students in five diverse middle schools. As anticipated in the study, teachers portrayed different disciplinary responses based on empathic and non-empathic mindset. Compared to teachers in punitive-mindset condition, teachers in empathic-mindset condition were more

empathic and less punitive. These teachers were also less likely to label the student as a troublemaker. The empathic mindset of teachers also yielded more respectful responses from adolescents. Students also reported that, belonging to middle-school, they would respect the teacher who has an empathetic attitude far more, in comparison to the other teacher who displays a punitive-discipline attitude. The intervention also divided year-long suspension rates among the students. The aim of the said study was to highlight the link between teachers' empathic mindset and treatment. Moreover, it also signified students' reduced suspension and perceptions of respect (Okonofua, Paunesku, & Walton, 2015).

The results of the previous study are supported by the findings of Richardson et al, (1994). The research shows different responses to conflict based on how participants scored on empathic concern. Individuals who scored low on empathic concern used aggressive ways of dealing with conflicts. While participants who had high scores on empathic concern portrayed non-aggressive and constructive responses to conflict. Similarly, teachers who adopt an empathic approach are more likely to inhibit aggressive responses and provide constructive feedback to their students. The cognitive aspect of empathy i.e. perspective-taking, enables teachers to adopt a third-person viewpoint that helps them to understand students' behaviors in a better way in the classroom.

Moreover, empathic instructors have a greater ability to comprehend the classroom environment and resolve their students' issues. They also assist the students in interpersonal issues and do not disregard problems, such as troublesome (Barr, 2011). However, there are some limitations to perspective taking. It is not always possible to take perspective of others. If a person is put under a tough situation, he/ she might not be able to represent empathic tendencies. The results of the study discovered that empathy only controlled aggressive reactions under conditions

of moderate threat; it did not play a significant role when the threat was very high or very low (Richardson et al, 1994).

Empathy

The affective domain of empathy is measured by Personal distress (PD) and empathic concern (EC) scales. Whereas the Perspective taking (PT) scale assesses the cognitive component. The Fantasy scale (FS) scale is mostly included in the affective components but it is difficult to characterize it along the affective cognitive domain (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004).

Interpersonal Reactivity Index is one of the most regularly used scales to measure the differences in empathic tendencies in individuals (Pulos, Elison, & Lennon, 2004). It is widely known due to its many desired features. First is its easy use, it is quite short and thus easy to administer. Secondly, it conceptualizes and measures empathy in multiple dimensions. Lastly, IRI is one of those self-reported measures that is very extensive (De Corte et al, 2007).

A search of relevant databases shows that the effects of intervention have never been primarily studied in relation to effects on teachers' empathy. Along with the increasing demand of education in South Asian countries, not many schools understand the issues and importance of empathy in teaching practices. Hence, the objective of this study is to identify the significance of incorporating empathy in teaching practices in South Asian context, especially in Pakistan. Furthermore, since mental health awareness is being circulated around the world, it is also crucial to study how empathy influences mental health concerns and helps in mitigating violence that is prevailing in the society. The study also aims to promote the use of empathy programs such as workshops to train teachers to be more empathetic towards students rather than using punishment or violence.

Previous studies have mainly focused on recruiting participants that are either early adolescents or university students. However, this study is different as it measures the impact of empathy on teenage students, aged from thirteen to sixteen. This age group is crucial in terms of developmental stage. It is a critical period in a human's life, which includes many psychological, physical and social changes (Frisen, 2007). This research provides evidence on how these pupils respond to empathic teachers and thus finds out whether empathy is one of the factors in enhancing teacher-student relationships in this age group.

Method

There are two key variables in the current study- teachers' empathy as a baseline and change in teacher's empathy after the intervention. Teacher empathy refers to affective and cognitive domains of empathy; it is the ability to express concern and take the perspective of a student (Tettegah & Anderson, 2007). The impact of the intervention, empathy workshop (independent variable) will be measured on teachers' empathy (dependent variable). Therefore, there was one key question posed by this research:

Would an empathy workshop will have a positive impact on teachers' empathy levels?

Sample

The targeted population for this study is five to eighth grade teachers (N=12). All the teachers in the current study were female participants. They are from four diverse schools in Karachi; Haque Academy, PECHS girls' school, BVS boys school and Froebel Education Center. These schools offer a diverse sample in terms of socio-economic class and gender. In order to reduce gender biasness two co-ed and two same-sex schools are chosen. There is also variation in

socio-economic class; Haque Academy and Froebel Education center mainly represent the upper class while BVS Boys schools and PECHS girls' school represent the middle class.

Research Design and Scales

The study follows triangulation in research in the form of observations (qualitative) and surveys (quantitative). In order to ensure that proper ethics were being followed an informed consent form was sent to the head of each school. After the confirmation, two rounds of data collection were performed, one before the workshop and one after the workshop. There was a one-month gap between pre and post data collection. The teachers were divided into a control and experimental group. The former had eight teachers, three each from BVS boys and PECHS girls' school and one each from Haque Academy and Froebel education center. The control group contained four teachers, two each from both the co-ed schools.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index

The level of empathy of these teachers was measured on Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980). It is a 28-items index which is answered on a 5-point likert scale that ranges from "Does not describe me well" to "Describes me very well". There are four subscales of this measure, each made up of 7 different items. These subscales are directly taken from Davis (1983). The first subscale is perspective taking – the tendency to spontaneously accept the psychological viewpoint of others. Fantasy subscale measures participants' tendencies to transpose themselves imaginatively into the actions and feelings of fictitious characters in movies, books and plays. Empathic concern evaluates the tendency to share others' unfortunate feelings. The last subscale is personal distress, which measures "self-oriented" feelings of personal anxiety and unease in tense interpersonal settings.

In order to support the quantitative findings of these surveys, qualitative data was obtained through classroom observations and an online questionnaire. The observations were made prior to the workshop and an online questionnaire was given to the teachers. The observations focused on the classroom environment, specifically the interaction between teachers and students. Each teacher was observed separately during her class period, each period was around 30 to 60 minutes long, depending on the school's timetable. The online questionnaire contained five open ended questions about teachers' experiences regarding the workshop.

Procedure

The schools were selected through stratified sampling. Due to time constraints only one visit was made to each school. The teachers were briefed about the study by their heads before the visit. They were asked to carry out their routine teaching practices in the beginning of the period, during which they were observed. While the last few minutes were reserved for filling out the surveys.

Due to unforeseen circumstances, caused by the global pandemic COVID-19, schools were closed. It was not possible to carry out the same method of data collection, used in the pre-intervention period. Considering the situation, an online survey and questionnaire were sent to teachers. An online form was made available to each school and the teachers were asked to fill out the form from their homes, by their heads. The survey remained the same while open ended questions were asked about teachers' experiences regarding the workshop.

Results

The results of this study were derived from analysis of triangulated data therefore, both quantitative and qualitative components were analyzed. For Quantitative data analysis Stata Software was used

for analysis and for the qualitative analysis experience based phenomenological quotes were selected to represent the lived experiences of our participants. Table 1 shows the demographic details of our sample schools and participants.

In total 12 female teachers participated in the study. 3 teachers from each school were randomly selected by their respective school authorities. 8 of these teachers were placed under experimental group while the rest of them were under control condition. From these 12 teachers, 4 taught 6th class, 4 taught 7th class, 3 taught 8th graders and only one was responsible for teaching 5th grade students. The average age of the teachers was 36.58, with a range of 28 to 58. The youngest teacher was 28 years old while the oldest was of 58 years. Most of the teachers were 30 to 45 years old. While 2 of them were younger than 29 and only one was older than 45. Table 1 represents the demographic details of our sample schools and the teachers who participated in empathy training.

Table 2 Illustrates the results of mean, standard deviation, alpha reliability and range for Interpersonal reactivity Index, its sub scales (perspective taking and fantasy scale), before and after the intervention. Alpha reliabilities of Coefficients values indicated that highest reliability was found between pre and post intervention empathy scores i.e., .89. It was followed by Reliability Coefficients of Fantasy sub scale i.e., .804 than comes the reliability of Perspective taking sub-scale i.e., .628. Both were measured against post empathy scores.

Table 1*Descriptive statistics for teachers' demographics*

Gender	
Female	12 (100%)
Male	-
Age	
18-29	2 (16.67%)
30-45	9 (75%)
45-60	1 (8.33%)
School	
BVS Parsi School	3 (25%)
Froebel Education Center	3 (25%)
P.E.C.H.S Girls' School	3 (25%)
Haque Academy	3 (25%)
Grade	
5 th	1 (8.33%)
6 th	4 (33.33%)
7 th	4 (33.33%)
8 th	3 (25%)

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Interpersonal Reactivity Index and its subscales, Perspective taking and Fantasy scale (N=12)

Scale/Subscales of items	No.	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>	Range
TPOSTE	28	66.08	8.33	..89	52-78
TPREE	28	72.25	8.78	.89	59-88
PT	7	17.75	3.77	.63	10-23
FS	7	14.67	5.63	.80	5-26

Note. TPOSTE= Total post empathy; TPREE= Total pre empathy; PT= Perspective taking;

FS=Fantasy scale.

Table 3 illustrates the relationship between the Interpersonal Reactivity Index and its subscales perspective taking, fantasy scale, empathic concern and personal distress, studied among teachers. Interpersonal Reactivity Index as a measure of empathy holds a significant positive correlation with subscales perspective taking and fantasy scale. It also holds a positive correlation with other two sub-scales empathic concern and personal distress, but the correlation is weaker. All the three sub-scales are positively correlated to each other except personal distress which hold a negative relation with the rest of three scales.

Table 3

Pearson Correlation between Interpersonal Reactivity Index and its sub-scale Perspective Taking, Fantasy Scale, Empathic Concern and Personal Distress (N=12)

Measures	1	2	3	4	5
1 TPOSTE	1.00				
2 PT	.60	1.00			
3 FS	.72	.36	1.00		
4 EC	.39	.09	.21	1.00	
5 PD	.07	-.21	-.35	-.43	1.00

Note. TPOSTE= Total Post empathy; PT= Perspective taking; FS= Fantasy scale; EC= Empathic Concern; PD= Personal Distress.

Table 4 shows a decline in total empathy score. As a result of these reduction in both experimental and control group, total empathy scores also declined. The reduction was approximately by 6.17 points. In order to measure the significance of these results a paired t-test was conducted. The null hypothesis was that there was no difference between pre and post empathy scores. That means our intervention will have no impact on the teachers' empathy levels. The alternate hypothesis was that there will be a positive significant difference in the empathy scores. Results do not support the expected alternate hypothesis. There is a significant difference in the mean empathy scores that means the null hypothesis will be rejected. However, it is rejected in the

favor of alternate hypothesis that there is a negative significant difference in the pre and post empathy scores. Which means the intervention had a negative impact on teachers' empathy levels.

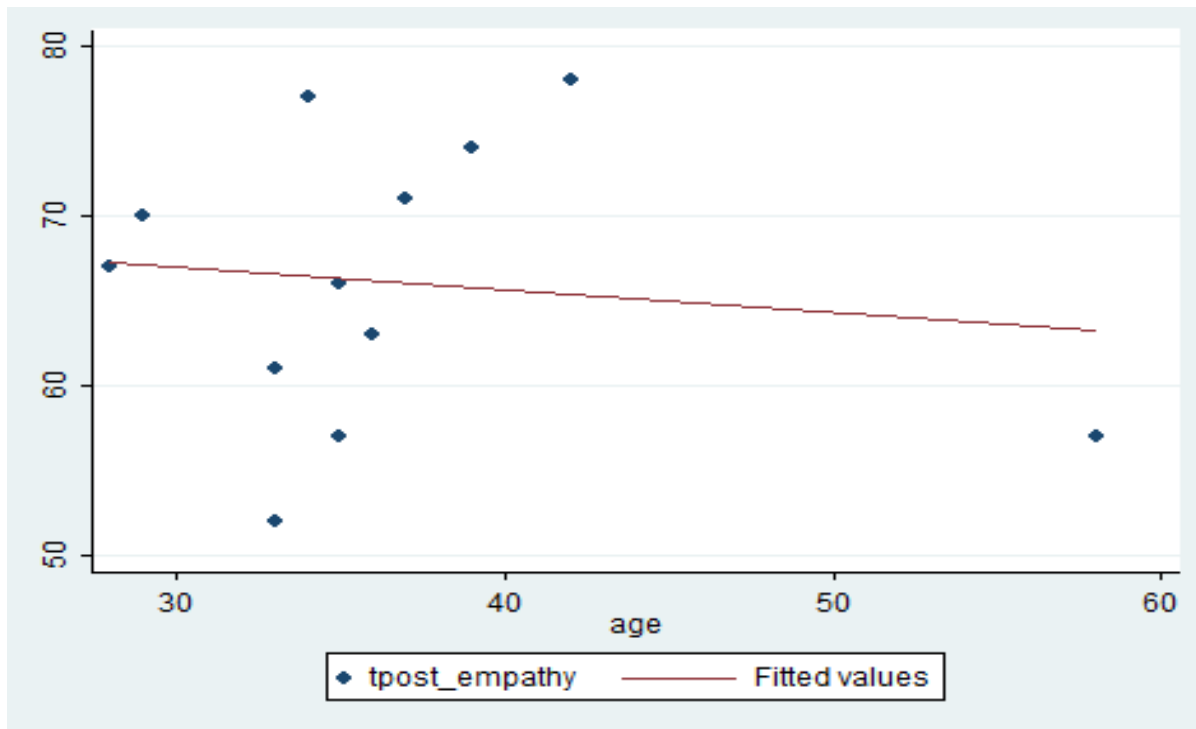
Table 4

Mean, Standard Deviation and independent sample t- test values for pre and post intervention empathy scores (N = 12)

Variables	Pre-intervention (n=12)		Post-intervention (n=12)		<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	95% CI	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
TEMP	72.25	8.78	66.08	8.33	-4.00	.01	-9.56	-2.77
EEMP	72.25	10.55	64.75	9.09	-4.07	.01	-11.77	-3.14
CEMP	72.25	4.79	68.75	6.85	-1.35	.24	-11.77	4.77

Note. TEMP= Total Empathy; EEMP= Experimental Empathy; CEMP= Control Empathy.

The relationship between teachers' empathy scores and their age was investigated using the correlation coefficients and regression analyses. The correlation between their empathy and age was found to be a negative linear one, with moderate strength ($\beta = -.135$) and statistically insignificant ($p=.69$; see Graph 2). This showed that although the sample suggests that empathy levels decline as teachers grow older, but the relationship is not significant, this deduction could not be made.

Graph 1

Qualitative Analysis

The post intervention data collection contained a questionnaire comprising five open ended questions which were asked from teachers, who attended the workshop. All of them responded through an online form. The responses are indicated in the following paragraphs.

All the eight teachers responded that the workshop will improve their relationship with students. Almost every participant mentioned that it helped them to be a better listener. They also highlighted that it will have a positive effect on their relationship with their students. The common responses were that it will make the relationship stronger, effective, open and more trustful.

“Yes. It will create an empathetic healthy environment for students to feel at home and easy to be themselves instead of feeling scared or judged.”

“I learned to be more understanding and how to build a rapport with students.”

Every participant except one mentioned that on the whole the workshop influenced their teaching practices. One of them responded that it was an average experience and it did not have any major influence on her. Another participant had previously attended another workshop but mentioned that this one made a few things clearer.

Two of the respondents signified that it created a positive vibe and promoted an optimistic outlook among them.

“Overall it created a positive and optimistic approach among us.”

“On the whole it gave me a very positive vibe.”

Two of the teachers highlighted that the workshop helped them to be more understanding in terms of listening to their students and developing a better bond with them. The rest of the two highlighted that it helped them to figure out favorable and adverse things in their teaching practices. One was motivated by it as it served as a sense of achievement and relief. The other responded that it helped her to realize that she was not a good listener. It helped her to understand the importance of providing space to the students in terms of listening to their problems without giving any suggestions.

“I also learnt that it is not necessary that we always look for a solution, but sometimes we only need to hear out children so that they can feel relieved”

Half of the teachers gave general responses regarding what they learned from the workshop. Their responses were on the line of being more understanding, dealing with different situations, not being angry and judgmental. The rest of the 4 teachers referred to specific theories, activities and strategies that they learned in the workshop. The activities included free writing, visualization, doodling and observing nature. While the strategies they mentioned were recognize, respond and refer, it also included SOLAR strategy to be a good listener. One of the teachers highlighted clang theory as an important takeaway from the workshop.

As a response to how they will implement these strategies in their teaching practices most of the teachers resorted to establishing better communication with their students and incorporating activities used in the workshop in their classrooms. One of the teachers signified that she had developed a lesson plan based on the learning from the workshop. She had already started applying the teachings with her own children and was looking forward to implementing them in the classroom as well.

Some of the teachers' responses were closely related to how the workshop will not only impact them as teachers but how it will have a positive influence on the students and the learning environment. A teacher reported that the intervention had helped her to understand the significance of her students' mental health. She also highlighted that she realized how important her role was in influencing her students' mental well-being and how students' mental health was closely related to enhancing their learning.

"I strongly feel it will. This workshop made us realize how important the student-teacher bond is. If a teacher is more involved with the students in class. They will learn quickly, and students will be less hesitant to share the queries".

Another participant mentioned that by listening to students, without passing any judgments or giving any suggestions, teachers could help the pupils to be more independent. It can make the students feel empowered and take control of tough situations. It can eventually help them to respond effectively to difficult conditions.

“I feel students will feel empowered and they would not depend on anyone or me emotionally, but they will learn to sort out things and control their reactions towards a certain situation, gradually.”

Discussion

Our quantitative analysis reflects how Teachers exhibited low levels of empathy throughout pre and post data collection. The percentage of empathy before the workshop was 64.5 percent whereas after the workshop it was 59 percent. Both of these percentages signify that not much attention has been offered to the empathetic aspect of teaching. It shows the prominence of commercialization in education. Teaching process has been made more mechanical, teachers are focusing more on meeting their lesson plans and course timeline rather than trying to deeply engage with the students and develop an effective bond. This could be due to the larger structure forces which are at play. Education is hardly considered as something that yields wisdom and learning. It is attained and provided more for the monetary terms. The educational institutions do not try to meet the demand of their pupils rather they mainly focus on profit making (Borgohain, 2016).

Low levels of empathy could also be due to the training provided to professionals such as medical students and teachers. Many institutions do not consider emotions such as empathy to be

a part of professionalism. They try to reduce its influence by training their employees to distance personal feelings and experiences when indulging with the clients (DasGupta & Charon, 2004). This could create a barrier between the two parties, which is although considered to be useful in achieving the institutional motives, but it could also hinder the creation of a trustful bond that might be necessary to take the process a step forward. Teachers may be influenced by the same factors. They may have internalized that professionalism requires them to maintain a certain level of distance in order to look professional in their teaching careers.

It is also possible that a low level of empathy was not an outcome of institutional factors. Although professionalism has been described as a multidimensional quality, some institutions have identified empathy as its central characteristic. They emphasize on incorporating the ability to listen, understand, sympathize and offer support to another person (Brownell & Cote, 2001; Halpern, 2003). Research has shown the correlation between empathy and medical students' clinical competency (Hojat, Gonnella & Mangione, 2002). American Association of Medical colleges has promoted the cultivation of empathy by making it one of the key goals their students should have by the time they graduate (Medical School Objectives Project, 1999).

Empathy scores were even lower in the post data collection period. The intervention was planned and conducted in a way that teachers become aware and understanding of their students' demands and their classroom practices. However, instead of becoming more empathetic teachers' empathy levels reduced after the intervention. This could be an impact of the workshop or some other external factor.

The qualitative results of the study portray that most of the teachers considered the workshop to have a positive influence on the relationship with their students'. None of the teachers

gave a negative response about the workshop. Due to this reason it is possible that the quantitative results are an outcome of an external factor. During the course of this study, the whole world was globally affected by COVID-19 pandemic. It is continuing to cause public health emergencies that are negatively influencing the mental well-being of the whole population and increasing the likelihood of psychological crises (Xiang et al., 2020). Both general public and medical health professionals have reported a higher level of mental distress (Kangetal.,2020; Qiuetal.,2020). There is also an increase in anxiety like behavior such as becoming easily annoyed or irritable (Zhang et al, 2020). Brooketal (2020) and Li et al (2020), have attributed the vulnerability of these mental health problems to many factors that include social support, length of isolation, amount of exposure to the media and experience with COVID-19. The results of this study could also have been affected by the uncertainty and confusion caused by this disease. Teachers like other people are also vulnerable to these factors. This could have affected their lives both socially and financially.

Due to this distress and mental health issues teachers can experience a lower level of empathy. Distress and well-being are relatable concepts to empathy. Symptoms of depression such as burnout can exhibit a negative influence on a persons' empathy level while well-being and a sense of achievement can have positive effects on an individuals' empathy (Thomas et al, 2007). These psychological challenges, caused by the coronavirus pandemic, could have manifested these negative effects on teachers' mental well-being, which as a result reduced their empathy scores.

Apart from internal and external factors affecting teachers', the design of current study could also influence the empathy scores. This was a pilot study which was conducted over a brief time period and empathy scores were measured after a single intervention. Empathy is a skill and

characteristic that develops over a long time period. Longitudinal studies conducted over a longer time frame such as one year, give students and teachers more chance to incorporate the knowledge and practices, given in the intervention. Okonofua, Paunesku & Walton (2015) signify that an online intervention can encourage empathic mindset among teachers and subsequently halve the suspension rates of students. This was a longitudinal study that was carried out over a course of an academic year. Due to time constraints it was not possible to replicate the same time framework in the current study. Teachers might have not received enough time to benefit from the workshop completely. As a result, the workshop ceased to generate a positive impact in the results.

Unlike the quantitative findings the qualitative results indicate favorable outcomes. It shows desirable responses that were expected before the workshop. Most of the responses are in line with what was taught in the workshop. Teachers recognized the importance of understanding the needs of their students by being a good listener. They also highlighted their influence on students' mental well-being. Teachers have a huge impact on shaping the way students' respect and value themselves (Hoge, Smit & Hanson, 1990). This shows the usefulness of workshop in terms of helping the teachers realize the importance of their role in their students' life. The intervention also enabled the teachers to acknowledge the significance of listening to their students without making any judgments or providing any answers. They also realized their role as a facilitator rather than a provider. The workshop helped the teachers to develop an inclination towards making pupils feel empowered about their own learning.

The responses gathered from the teachers varied in terms of being general or specific. Teachers who gave general feedback took a wholesome approach about their experience of the workshop. They referred to overarching themes highlighted in the workshop such as becoming

more understanding and being a good listener. Their description was also centered on a positive vibe they got from the workshop. It showed an understanding of the main elements and goals of the workshop.

Other teachers pointed out the specific details and learnings from the workshop. They mentioned particular theories and strategies. These teachers had an organized way of using these teachings in their classrooms. They had made lesson plans and were very active in implementing these changes in their teaching practices. These teachers had a better recall of the material that was used in the workshop. Their responses reflected enthusiasm and attentiveness towards the specific details mentioned in the intervention.

The discrepancy between the qualitative and quantitative results could be due to the time constraints present in this study. Favorable responses from the teachers indicate the usefulness of the workshop in the form of signifying important elements of empathetic teaching. Teachers also got a chance to evaluate their teaching practices from an empathetic lens. They gained an insight into improving the bond with their students. The workshop provided a chance to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching style. These favorable outcomes represent the existence of the basis of an empathetic mindset. However, developing an empathetic mindset could be easy and can take less time but internalizing these values and thus having a higher empathy level requires more time and effort. It is possible that these teachers' scores did not portray a positive influence as they may require more time to incorporate the strategies and practices they learned in the workshop. They will also need time to make the required changes in their teaching practices. Most of the teachers have been involved in this profession for a very long time. The existing

relationship they have with their students and their teaching style is less likely to change over a course of a few months and a single intervention.

Limitations

There were certain limitations associated with classrooms observations and conducting quantitative surveys/ analysis, in the said research. Despite having four diverse schools to reduce biases, there was still a gender imbalance in recruiting the teachers, as they were all female. Moreover, for online questionnaires and observations, only twelve teachers were recruited which was not enough to generalize the results and interpretations of the study. In addition to this, the experimental group had more respondents as compared to the control group, which is a bias itself.

One of the major limitations was the occurrence of global pandemic; COVID-19. The pandemic has caused certain unforeseen circumstances to develop due to which all educational institutions are closed, and teachers are facing high levels of emotional burden and anxiety (Anjum, 2020). These circumstances might have leading to unclear and inconclusive results. Hence, with such hindrance it was impossible to continue the research with the method of data collection used in the pre-intervention period. Even though the survey remained the same but the open-ended questions that were supposed to be asked face-to-face, were also incorporated with the evaluation. In such situations chances of discrepancies were expected such as having altered responses to open-ended questions and feedbacks of workshops that lack originality. Even informing the teachers prior to the observations in the pre-intervention period might have led to the possibility of them portraying teaching strategies that they may have not utilized in normal settings i.e. in the absence of observations. Moreover, having just one visit and workshop may not have caused the empathy level to remain stable and led to the revelation of certain important

aspects or answers that may have been encountered had there been sufficient visits to schools or adequate observations.

Lastly, there is a possibility of my bias as a researcher since I have a firm belief that it is important to incorporate empathy in teaching practices. Hence, I may have unconsciously analyzed responses as per my belief or had biased interpretations to the teachers' responses or the results revealed.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

After reviewing the literature, it seemed apparent that incorporating empathy in teaching practices can lead to positive changes in numerous aspects such as increased motivation and self-awareness and better academic performance. However, this may be due to the unforeseen circumstances that are still prevailing. This study can be conducted again once the country comes out of the adverse situation to gain accurate results.

Hence, through the examination of literature and evaluation of the teachers' responses, it is evident that the presence of empathy can still have some positive outcomes. Hence, the current study could also lay the groundwork for future research, which could be beneficial in engaging teaching practitioners to focus on other needs of their students rather than just the academic ones.

Moreover, the study indicates that institutions that are focused on preparing students for medical professions such as doctors and nurses, do not encourage empathy to be a part of professionalism. Hence, one of the recommendations for further research could be to have a thorough study on whether other professions such as the ones belonging to the corporate world also promote the same thing, and if so then what is the reason behind it.

Lastly, since research indicates that educational institutions do not initiate ways to meet the demands of people but rather mainly focus on profit making (Borgohain, 2016). Hence, another suggestion of future research could be to observe whether incorporating empathy in not just teaching methods but in the system of institution could hinder the aim of profit making.

Conclusion

The quantitative result of this study illustrate low levels of empathy among teachers, in pre-data collection it was 64.5 percent while in post-data collection it declined to 59 percent. This could be a result of internal and external factors.

Some educational institutions promote professionalism in terms of prioritizing course fulfillment over engagement with students. The organizational structure encourages teachers to maintain some level of distance from their students' in order to look professional. However, there are other institutions that emphasize on the importance of empathy by considering it as their central goal (Medical School Objectives Project, 1999). The decline could have been an outcome of the design of this study. Due to time constraints teachers may not have received enough time to align their teaching practices along with practices mentioned in the workshop. Also it was not possible to carry out multiple workshops, which may have increased the retention and usefulness of the details stated in the workshop.

Apart from internal factors the global pandemic COVID-19 created psychological challenges which may have influenced the results of this study. It is negatively affecting the mental well-being of the whole population and increasing the likelihood of psychological crises (Xiang et al., 2020). Similarly teachers could have reported lower level of empathy due to social and financial issues experienced during COVID-19.

Qualitative results signify positive responses in the form of increased consideration of students' needs, among all the teachers. Generally, teachers portrayed an understanding of main elements of the workshop such as being a good listener and being responsive to students. The results also signify the fascination towards specific details of the workshop such as theories and strategies.

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