Online Education and The Role of Teacher Empathy in Student Motivation

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Abstract

Empathy has been recognized as one of the crucial elements in social and behavioral sciences. As a multidimensional phenomenon, empathy helps individuals share emotions and understand others' emotional reactions. Online learning platforms, as one of the popular learning environments, should also be led with a proper pedagogy, regulating teachers to practice certain pedagogical practices to address students' emotions and express emphatical responses. Nevertheless, it has often been reported that online learning due to social distancing and lack of certain psychological factors induces unfavorable results. Using a mixed-method research design, present study sought to take a serious look at the focal role of teacher empathy in pedagogical contexts and its effect on student motivation in online learning environments. To this aim, the Toronto empathy questionnaire was administered to ten university assistant professors at two universities. Simultaneously, a number of students of teacher participants (n=60) filled out the academic motivation scale. Student participants were also interviewed to reflect on the empathetical aspects of their teachers' performance in online classes. Findings from the quantitative (correlation and regression) analyses of the data as well as the qualitative analyses of the interviews, demonstrated that the explicit demonstration of empathy in classrooms elevates students' motivation for learning. The study highlights the importance of prioritizing the demonstration of empathy in educational ecology.

Keywords: Online Education, Student Motivation, Teacher Empathy

INTRODUCTION

Digital education has been consistently advancing during the last years due to rapid evolvements in software, accelerated shifts in educational pedagogy, and learners' preferences (Bond et al., 2020; Schwartstein & Roberts, 2017; Emanuel, 2020). Since the outbreak of the novel corona virus in 2019, online learning platforms gained a well-established foundation, putting teachers and learners at the forefront of facing novel aspects of educational technology (Hodges et al., 2020; Schwartzman, 2020). Pandemic
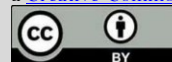
pedagogy as Schwartzman ([2020](#)) suggested, brought new levels of educational necessity into view. Given that online education was associated with social isolation and limited interpersonal interactions considerable long-term health implications, new teaching practices were required (Kumar & Nayar, [2020](#)). By building a network of social bonds, individuals get the opportunity to reaffirm their relationships, share ideas and thoughts, or cope with possible personal issues. Receiving empathetic responses from concerned people around us helps us to better curb the growing rates of frustration and irritation (Macfarlane, [2020](#); Santini et al., [2015](#)). Elevated levels of social support gained from reciprocal social ties between participants of greater communities will diminish anxiety-triggering sources, which would significantly contribute to a healthy state of cognition, emotion, and mind. Well-integrated individuals would be less susceptible to morbidity, early mortality, and hazardous deeds (Durkheim, [1951](#)).

The importance of demonstrating empathy, emotions, and mutual understanding between teachers and students was highlighted during the pandemic. As in online education, face-to-face interactions decrease significantly, and chances for a casual conversation are reduced; students' engagement, academic achievements, and sense of belonging are altered (Naciri et al., [2021](#)). Scholars such as Dewey emphasize that the approach teachers take in their classrooms to teach content is more important than merely teaching the content. In other words, Dewey's pedagogical philosophy effectively backs students learning and gives room to the demonstration of empathy and mutual understanding (Aronson, [2000](#); Foster, [2021](#)). Likewise, Dewey argues that classroom environments should be filled with respectful interactions between teachers and students. Such reciprocal communicative exchanges can foster an ecosystem where empathy is expressed effectively. Both sides can exercise social and communicative behaviors; thus, learners can shape a stable and stimulating learning environment (Waks, [2021](#); Hougaard et al., [2020](#)).

Considering that online learning platforms have pros that have admirably facilitated learning qualities and equalities, they also have cons that should be addressed (Oruh et al., [2021](#)). "The teaching space," as Zaky ([2024](#)) maintains, has always posed thorny challenges to teachers. According to the researcher, psychological and communicational distances are aggravated in online education; therefore, teachers should devote rapt attention to affective proximity in the educational landscape. Likewise, the researcher strongly suggests that educational ecologies should be blended with care and empathetic practices to maintain affective proximity. Maintaining affective responses can also be helpful to international students and international educational settings; as such, students can define their individuality and feel their sense of belonging to the environment (Zaky, [2024](#)).

Leading an online classroom requires teachers to be emotionally, interculturally, and mentally effective and employ empathetic leadership to infuse better academic activities. Researchers defined empathy as a concept enabling individuals to express their emotions and understand others' emotional status (Zaky, [2024](#)). According to data provided on the influence of empathy on education, it is mentioned that empathetic teachers can arouse

learners' appreciation for their teaching practices and encourage students to focus their attention on common grounds between students and the teacher instead of attending to differences (Jones, 1990; Vogus et al., 2020; Zaky, 2022). Institutional practices and online learning pedagogy should be betteraligned with new educational policies that embrace emotional, academic, and social aspects of students' lives. Through forming influential interpersonal perceptions it is hoped that mutual values and empathy practices will be fostered. Developing empathetical understandings in communities can fulfill visions of collaborative partnership efforts, promote teamwork throughout the organizations, and boost well-being (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019; Singer & Klimecki, 2014; Barello et al., 2020). The current study aims at primarily contributing to further elaboration of possible influences teachers' empathetical responses and their identities may have on the quality of learning in online framework, given that diverse bodies of literature have been provided on the topic.

Empathy

During the years of research, empathy has been defined abundantly in various ways in which new aspects of the field have been taken into consideration; it has been found pretty hard to ensnare the soul of the concept in a definition (Heyes, 2018; Hogan, 1975). Empathy is an internalized cognitive ability that enables human beings to better understand one another's emotional status in tough conditions. Riess (2018) considers three modalities for empathy as affective, cognitive, and empathetic concerns. Through affective empathy, we can share emotions with others; through cognitive empathy, we are able to understand others; and through empathetic concerns, we are able to infuse compassion in communicational settings. Empathy feeds social ties and helps societal networks of various natures (individuals, communities, or cultural groups) flourish over time. In other words, empathy provides community members with broader hindsight in intercultural units, allowing people to further attachments and recognition (Jakovljevic, 2018). Empathy would be nurtured across the life span in social interactions (empathy is a social phenomenon, and it is not developed in isolation); also, the overall form of this humane social activity would vary based on the participants of the conversation and the context (Cooper, 2004).

Santamaría-García et al. (2017) perceive empathy as an intricate cognitive-affective procedure wired throughout human nature to support individuals with a sense of coherence and a higher level of interpersonal comprehension through which empathic humanistic concerns would be articulated. Also, empathy promotes positive waves of transformations in relation to mental health in online frameworks or any other educational environment (Beard et al., 2009; Miller, 2011). In fact, empathy assists people in granting a better understanding of the internal mental status of their conversational participant, translates communicative stimuli, and facilitates the mutual comprehension process. Undeniably this cognitive competency saliently fosters social skills development and masters emotional knowledge management as it proceeds and is being processed through interpersonal communications (Miller & Wallis, 2011; Decety & Lamm,

2007). Establishing social relationships and maintaining contextual proximity through friendlier communications have far and away long-term fundamental positive influences on mental health (Güroğlu et al., 2008).

Empathy and educational setting

Empathy sources are considered to be important elements in social interactions in which other subtle factors, such as culture and individual differences, are involved. Teaching as intercultural professional career employs empathy on several occasions; in fact, teachers need to be aware of their students' emotional status, understand their feelings, and help them in case. Actually, as some scholars approve, teaching students would not be possible if the teacher does not have a good understanding of their emotional status (Gilly, 1980, as cited by Arghode et al., 2013). However, it is understandable that due to some undesirable conditions, the empathetic concerns of teachers are suffocated; therefore, their overall reactions to their pupils would take a dramatic shift (Cooper, 2004). Empathy is crucially important to establishing a two-sided rapport between the teacher and the student; mutual understanding happens when the teacher-student relationship in an educational context is solidified. Hence, students would participate in class activities more than before, and bonds of trust would be formed between pupils and the teacher (Arghode et al., 2013). As the notion of teaching with empathy grew into a hotly debated topic, new approaches such as Social Emotional Learning (SEL) was introduced. SEL necessitates schools and educators to sufficiently address students' emotional and social competencies in classroom setting. Eventually, through effective employment of SEL, students learn to regulate their emotional reactions and deal with social challenges of their lives. SEL is associated with multiple beneficial aspects. On social level, it can bring reduced anxiety, negative social conversations, aggression and depression. On the educational level though, it can foster collaboration, and empathy (Joseph et al., 2007). Researchers pinpoint that developing empathy can help students excel in conflict resolution, emotion regulation,and decision making (Taylor et al., 2020; Zaky, 2023).

Cooper (2004) regards empathy as a socially humane phenomenon that is nurtured side by side simultaneously with moral status; therefore, comprehensibly empathetic teachers own stronger moral attitudes and pay special attention to their students in any situation. This class of teachers would guide their students through a higher level of understanding, resulting in a higher level of cooperation, self-confidence, and effective learning in the sense of a word. In this manner, students would take a chance to accompany their tutor on the journey of developing a deeper understanding of each other in an educational context. Empathetical reactions in teachers, in effect, enclose the ability to understand students' points of view, understand their current position, and articulate their empathetical views with regard to their case (Tettegah & Anderson, 2007). Regrettably, teachers' empathy is horribly snubbed at higher levels of the educational ladder, as if older adult students do not need to be fed with emotional responses (Arghode et al., 2013).

Empathy and online education

Empathetical actions and reactions would vary according to the context and situations. Online pedagogy had not been identified for a majority of teachers and students, and this, unfortunately, contributed to a wide range of unsavory results in educational settings especially at the time of the coronavirus pandemic. In most regions, distance education for higher levels of education had not become a usual medium; therefore, many were not familiarized with the effective use of such educational gadgets. Some of the researchers found that still methods used in traditional classrooms would be used continually in online platforms (Atwood, 1998). However, perspectives began to fluctuate with the beginning of this new era of communication.

Most students reported that they were no longer willing to enroll in online classes due to technical issues, permanent loss of connection, loss of motivation and interest in the subjects, and at times receiving radically bad teacher behaviors. In truth, engaging students in web-based activities seems harder than traditional platforms. Technically connection issues could be solved in a way, but demanding reformation in the case of behavioral responses from teachers in online frameworks would take a lot of time. Therefore, defining online pedagogy along with fostering empathy would lead to cumulative positive outcomes in case of students, their performance and surely student-teacher relationship as empathy is actually believed to be the facilitator of the learning process (García-Pérez et al., 2016).

However, it must be noted that since the wind started to change with regard to the educational setting, the wholeness of empathy's concept was threatened because transmission of empathetical concerns mostly depends on the context of interactions (mostly face-to-face meetings are desirable in this regard). The language of empathy in every condition would be different according to the situation and requirements. Unfortunately, in online settings, virulently impolite and disparaging comments, and hostile ideas filled with malice and cruelty, fueled with caustic language, may lead to "heated conflicts" (Lewinski & Mohammed, 2016). In these types of controversies, no exchange of reasoning is observed. This unfortunate event shows how empathetical thoughts are filtered in online discussions (Konrath et al., 2011). With the start of the digital age, the concept of digital empathy was defined as an alternative form of course, trying to accommodate the psychological needs of individuals (Terry & Cain, 2016). A wide spectrum of societal and digital troubles pose difficulties to the notion of empathy and transmission of empathetical thoughts across a variety of conditions, especially for the majority of teachers who have not mastered sophisticated digital communication skills.

Teacher empathy is actually one of the vital points in the course of educating students in modern times. Teachers' empathy is not solely regarded as a kind of feeling that teachers find within themselves upon encountering emotional situations, such as in the case of their students. However, it serves as a fiercely critical part of the nature of the teaching world (Meyers et al., 2019). Undeniably, teacher empathy is conducive to effective learning, concentrated attention, mastered control of emotional reactions, and increased student participation in the classroom, all of which

demonstrate a direct link between teacher empathy and students' overall performances. Research shows that by inviting students to share, assess, and regard their emotions, empathy in educational environments blooms, and students' awareness grows (Bloom, 2016; Landers, 2020).

METHOD

The current study, as mentioned before, aims at conjuring a perceivable picture of teachers' empathy in the online platforms of teaching. To reach the end, it has been preferred to employ a design based on mixed methods to delve into emotional aspects of a teacher's career, endeavoring to shed light on the leading role of a teacher's empathy in encouraging students to learn effectively in online learning environments. Quantitative data is collected through a survey using questionnaires for both teacher and learner participants. This will be augmented by data from the qualitative analyses of interviews with student participants.

Participants

To pursue the aims of the study, the Toronto empathy questionnaire (Spreng et al., 2009) was selected and administered; ten university assistant professors in the Medical School of Shiraz and Salman Farsi University of Kazerun welcomed the call and filled out questionnaires. Simultaneously, a group of undergraduate students (n=60, 45 female, 15 male) aged 18-26 filled out the academic motivation scale (AMS) (Vallerand et al., 1992). For the students to be eligible to participate in the study, they were required to have attended online classes. Interviewees had taken between 1-10 online classes during a semester. Students of both universities had experienced traditional classes and online ones before the closure of universities and schools on a large scale.

Instruments

Two questionnaires were used as research instruments for the present study. First, the Toronto questionnaire, which consists of 16 questions designed to recognize how empathetic the candidate is in a measurable, useful way. Second, the academic motivation scale (AMS) (Vallerand et al., 1992) is a 28-item questionnaire that measures an individual's internal versus external motivation. The reliability of both questionnaires was calculated through the KR-21 method and amounted to 0.93 and 0.91, respectively.

In addition, an interview was designed to investigate student participants' conceptualization of the empathy variable. The questions of interviews are listed below:

1. How do you define empathy, and how important do you consider it in the teaching process?
2. Do you think if the teacher shows his\her empathy for his learners, they will be encouraged to learn better?
3. How involved do you consider empathy in learning?
4. How much did your teacher manage to demonstrate empathetical expressions in the classroom? Were these empathetical behaviors

    influential in terms of their teaching quality?

5. How much did your teacher manage to emotionally involve you in the class?

Data Collection Procedure

    Both instruments (TEQ and AMS) were distributed among the participants through online platforms. In the case of student participants, the researchers were also online and provided detailed instructions on how to respond to the items. The researchers also ensured the participants that the survey responses would not have any effect on their evaluation and guaranteed the confidentiality of their responses, which would merely serve research purposes.

    Student participants were also interviewed to reflect on the empathetical aspects of a certain teacher's performance in online classes. The interview was mainly done on the phone due to limitations imposed by social distancing matters. During the interviews, the researchers concentrated on questions with regard to students' views toward the teacher and class, the teacher's emotional support, empathetic concerns and mutual understanding (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986). After gaining a better view with regard to the true empathetical status of teachers, students were enrolled to share their experiences of online classes.

Data analysis

    TEQ consists of 16 questions, which include both positive and negative empathy; therefore, a special method of analysis has been used to compute scores in TEQ. The scores were coded through the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software, computing the empathy scores of every teacher based on the instructions provided by the authors. The frequency and empathy scores have been calculated, and as it is clear, only one of the seven participants has managed to reach the highest empathy score. Four of the assistant professors demonstrated a score of 10, which is regarded as a low score compared to the other two participants, who scored 15 and 20.

    To investigate any significant relationship between EFL teachers' empathy and students' motivation, the parametric Pearson correlation test was applied. Prior to the analysis, though, the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were checked. In addition, to examine the predictability of learners' motivation in terms of EFL teachers' empathy, a multiple regression analysis was performed. The results of teachers' empathetical analysis were gathered accordingly. Subsequently, the interview sections were held, and students' viewpoints regarding the teacher's performances were transcribed in order to have a clearer view of the teacher's empathy in educational settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

    To be able to run correlation analyses on the data from the two questionnaires, the assumptions of normality, linearity, and

homoscedasticity were checked. Table 1 shows the results of the check for normality of distribution for the three variables.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the two sets of scores.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratios
Empathy	10	158.35	20.04016	-.836	.512	-1.63
Learner motivation	50	135.58	25.05559	-.564	.172	-3.27
Valid N (listwise)	60					

As shown in Table 1, the skewness ratio of the learners' motivation (3.27) fell outside the normality range of ±1.96, implying that the motivation scores were not normally distributed. So, the nonparametric Spearman correlation was used to correlate this variable with the others. Table 2 shows the result.

Table 2. Correlations between teacher empathy and motivation of learners.

			Learners' motivation	Teacher empathy
Spearman's rho	Learners' motivation	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.485*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.03
		N	50	10
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				

As shown in Table 2, the correlation between teachers' empathy and their learners' motivation turned out to be statistically significant (r=.485, p=.030<.05). To see if we can predict student motivation based on teacher empathy scores, a multiple regression analysis was done. The multicollinearity condition was already met as there was some relationship between each independent variable and the dependent variable (the correlations were more than 0.3). Also, as shown above, the correlation between the independent variable (empathy) was less than 0.7. Table 3 was used to check the outliers' condition for multiple regression analysis.

Table 3. Residuals statistics.

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	116.5391	164.1848	135.5800	13.91817	5
Std. Predicted Value	-1.368	2.055	.000	1.000	5
Standard Error of Predicted Value	6.080	12.922	8.374	1.668	5
Adjusted Predicted Value	106.4909	160.9942	133.3769	14.45971	5
Residual	-20.9055	44.46087	13.57000	18.45796	5
Std. Residual	-.949	2.019	.616	.838	5

Stud. Residual	-1.066	2.235	.664	.904	5
Deleted Residual	-26.3829	54.50908	15.77314	21.51738	5
Stud. Deleted Residual	-1.071	2.580	.700	.959	5
Mahal. Distance	.498	5.590	1.900	1.216	5
Cook's Distance	.001	.376	.067	.088	5
Centered Leverage Value	.026	.294	.100	.064	5
a. Dependent Variable: Learners' motivation					

As Table 3 shows, the Mahal distance values do not exceed 13.82, which is the critical value when there are two independent variables and the Std. Residual values are less than 3.3. Therefore, it was concluded that there was no major outlier. Tables 4, 5, and 6 are the results of multiple regression analyses.

Table 4. Model summary[b].

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.555[a]	.309	.227	22.02575
a. Predictors: (Constant), Teachers' empathy				
b. Dependent Variable: Learners' motivation				

As shown in Table 4, the R square turned out to be .309, which indicates that 30 percent of the variation in the dependent variable (motivation) can be explained by the model (teachers' empathy). Table 6 shows if this amount was statistically significant.

Table 5. ANOVA[a]

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	3680.592	2	1840.296	3.793	.043[b]
1	Residual	8247.275	17	485.134		
	Total	11927.868	19			

As depicted in the Table 5, the model was significant (.043<.05). The Table 6 demonstrates the contribution of the independent variable (empathy) in predicting the dependent variable (motivation).

Table 6. Coefficients[a].

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	261.644	46.07		5.679	.00	164.44	358.843					
Teachers' emotional contagion	-.465	.267	-.372	-1.74	.099	-1.028	.098	-.473	-.389	-.35	.893	1.119

As Table 6 displays, teachers' empathy alone could not significantly predict the learners' motivation (B=.372, p=.099>.05). Thus, there is a need to investigate other variables that could help clarify the situation.

The next step was to analyze the student interview transcripts. Results demonstrated that students mostly believed empathy was chiefly involved in an effective learning experience, though some teachers were not prone to show their empathy in classrooms. Moreover, they were questioned whether the nature of the subject was affecting their emotional understanding, yet they all disagreed. Some students had passed two semesters with the same professor; the courses were different, but the instructors were just the same. The teacher had applied the same pedagogical procedures with the same behavioral patterns in the classroom. It seems that the nature of the course does not significantly influence empathy. Despite their empathetic nature, some of the teachers did not demonstrate empathy in online classrooms. This shows that to incite better quality of learning, teachers should explicitly exhibit their empathy for their students, not add pressure on students.

Surprisingly, the strict teachers who were known to be having strict rules in classrooms had aroused considerable untrustworthiness not only among students but also between the teacher and the students. When we interviewed students attending teachers' classes with strict views, they resolutely refused to answer any of the questions. They said in response, "Do you want me to put myself at an enormous disadvantage by answering your questions about this oversensitive teacher??" on occasions, we even received responses like "You've taken me for a fool if you have thought I will answer you!". We assured the students that their feedback would be used for a scientific study, and the present study was conducted with the professors' consent. Unfortunately, they did not approve of participating in any form, which shows how much being ignorant of the affective issues of students can break the common threads of trust and honesty between them.

However, this was mainly observed among medical school students, who contend for higher scores and gain teachers' trust. These students neither trusted each other nor trusted the teacher exercising serious attitudes in the classroom. Other classmates who showed us the green light for an interview candidly maintained, "Do not look for answers between these students... they will never trust you or us either. Some of them are so afraid that their true ideas with regard to the teacher's performance circulate among students, therefore facing the teacher's wrath. The other groups are diligently working to obtain the teacher's favor. "You may not know, but fierce competition is going on down here." Explicating the reflection of this interviewee, we understood that Iran's social framework is obsessively overwhelmed with the development of extreme attention for medical students and the related sub-branches of the field.

Annually, millions of volunteers sit the exam to be accepted into medical schools. However, a very limited number of students have the chance to study medicine. Understandably, the competition continues even after the entrance exam. The inclusive atmosphere caused by such social attitudes toward the medical field lays the ground for very limited participation from students or teachers. Furthermore, it is speculated that the research subjects explored in medical fields aside from cognitive neuroscience devote less attention to humanitarian, affective, and cognitive matters for research projects.

On the contrary, humanitarian sciences offer greater scope for research that can shape students' views. The study's findings suggest that female teachers with lower empathy scores tend to incite higher levels of tension within students. When we asked students to respond to the question with regard to one of the female teachers with an empathy score of 8, they sounded extremely defensive. They denied answering any of the questions saying, "I know it will have terrible consequences."

We compared the interviews of medical students with the reflections of students studying TEFL at the Salman Farsi University of Kazerun. TEFL is a subbranch of humanitarian sciences; therefore, students trained to be English teachers will be exposed to different courses in which the preconditions of being a teacher would be taught. TEFL students pass educational psychology and sociology of education courses, which can considerably shape the identities of both students and teachers. After all, the teacher is supposed to practice what he preaches! TEFL students considered the question more from a teacher's perspective and managed to be more reflective. Interviewing these students, it was realized that they were far more welcoming than medicine students. They even wanted to help with the interviews by adding extra details to their output.

The majority of students, consistent with the previous opinions, said that "empathy is better to be shown in classrooms through teacher's patience, caring, and his awareness of the effects of social isolation on students. I expected my teachers to understand my circumstances during the pandemic; I experienced a great deal of lack of motivation. The teacher you are asking me managed to achieve his pedagogical goals and helped students keep up with the class. I was encouraged to learn in his classes. Although I must reiterate that I am a hardworking student myself, I do not expect teachers to show unnecessary empathy for irresponsible students." Surprisingly, the TEFL assistant professor of medical sciences university obtained a score of 17 based on TEQ. Likewise, medical students affirmed that the teacher was empathetic and that her class had been great. It was also recognized that a female teacher with a band score of 12 could not have managed to emotionally involve her students in the classroom. However, a male teacher with a score of 9 effectively accommodated the emotional needs of his students. It was also understood that another male teacher with a score of 9 had somehow managed to empathize more with students. We furthered our study and asked more about the features of the two male teachers, and it was revealed that the first teacher showed more empathetic understanding in classrooms through his concern for students, his manner of speaking, etc. On the other hand, the second teacher did not have that much one-to-one relationship with students; therefore, despite the equal scores of empathy, the first teacher had an edge over the second one.Students mostly regarded empathy as being shown in these eleven manners in online classrooms.

Table 7. Students' perception of empathy in classrooms.

1. Understand the effects of social isolation and the lack of motivation to be responsive
2. Do not bombard learners with too many tasks in times of online

    learning
3. Explicitly exhibit their empathy
4. Consider the mental status of students in times of widespread lockdown
5. Diligently analyze student's performance
6. Alleviate the pressure by sharing common beliefs
7. Connect one to one with learners
8. Do not supplant student's participation with extreme pressure for teaching
9. Welcome criticism
10. Consider the whole person while teaching
11. Do not forget to take student's personal traits into consideration

The majority of all students argued that empathy is a leading element in teaching courses, believing that empathy facilitates learning and establishes rapport between the teacher and the students. A small proportion of the participants said that empathy is not required much in classes; showing unnecessary empathy could be detrimental to the normal procedure of the class and the teacher's dignity. Only one person believed that empathy was not necessary because it represents a weak teacher to the students. It is quite important for a teacher to preserve prestige. Other students did not affirm the last extreme view. The existence of discrepancy between the teacher's empathy score and their real performance in classrooms could have different reasons, including the nature of the course, the teaching method, and the teacher's view toward a particular class.

Generally speaking, sometimes females are thought to show a higher level of empathy than male participants (McDevitt et al., 1991). However, in this study, some female teachers were particularly less empathetic than their male counterparts. Students were really satisfied with the work of male professors. However, we did not consider gender as a variable in the paper to be studied more; therefore, gender is not in the scope of this work. Many internal and external factors would respectively alter a teacher's identity; the teacher's priorities for performing a good class and his pedagogical beliefs are included in the way his identity would be shaped. Finally, it could be noted that the educational environments of the two universities significantly differed, which influenced the students' level of participation in the interviews.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The present study explored the effects of teachers' empathy on students' learning when online learning was and still is at large. A group of assistant professors was invited to answer TEQ through online forums. Identity as another definition for the concept of self in both students and teachers was remolded significantly; students grew tired of attending online classes without a good reason, the level of learning dramatically plummeted to lower degrees, and lack of motivation became a significant mental issue to families and teachers (Pidbutska et al., 2021). The results of the study suggest that teachers' empathetic concerns for students led to the rise of interest in learning. Students were encouraged to attend the classes and be

responsive to the teacher. It was also realized that empathy, social isolation, and this long duration of online learning had affected not only students but also the teacher's identity and have been altered in some ways.

The online educational platforms, however, assisted academicians with catering to the needs of students and obviating the chief obstacles toward sustaining virtual learning. Thereafter virtual learning became an indispensable part of students' lives for nearly four years. Teachers inevitably were part of an online learning equation; they, too, experienced a shift in emotional identity. Teachers, in times of personal crisis, such as social isolation, are expected to help students rewire their minds and recharge their batteries so that they do not fall behind the normal classroom procedures. In fact, caring for students is naturally part of the teaching career, and it is highly valued by some professionals (O'Conner, 2008). Empathy is the key to the abridgment of emotional distances and co-experience of the students' emotions (Bloom, 2016).

Teachers can especially demonstrate a great change because of the engagement of a great deal of emotional understanding (Van Veen & Sleegers, 2006; Miller & Koesten, 2008). Emotions majorly enter the line of discussion with regard to the concept of self and identity. Identities are quite flexible and could be molded in various spheres when individuals encounter professional matters regarding their career or other relevant factors in relation to their profession (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Teachers' empathetical expressions would likewise alter the dimensions of learning in students and carve out specific consequences (Titsworth et al., 2010; Mazer, 2013; Ellis, 2004). Actually, in the sense of the word, when certain emotions are in effect, opportunities for rendering a better teaching performance could be respectively expanded or circumscribed (Zembylas, 2003, cited by Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). This constant flow of fluctuations within identities would also affect students' learning. Integrating empathy and emotional understanding in classroom settings can develop a mutual sense of understanding between students and the teacher, and encourage students to be active, creative, and engage in activities (Bloom, 2016).

A teacher's identity could be molded when it comes to professional matters, educational context, teacher's own pedagogical beliefs, and expectations. Teachers become more seasoned in their ideas with regard to teaching and pedagogical context change as well, meaning that teachers' identities can take different shifts over time. Teachers' pedagogical commitments seem to have a crucial role in indicating the emotional identity of teachers; this feature was found to be some kind of positive feature in some students' views. However, the findings also draw attention to the point that some of the teachers, despite their seemingly high empathy scores, could not show their empathy effectively in classrooms for various reasons; therefore, students were not that satisfied with the performance of empathy in certain teachers.

In contrast, there were teachers with lower scores of empathy that had been welcomed more enthusiastically by students. In this regard, the current study encourages teachers to reciprocally understand the emotional status of students and, more importantly, try to have an adequate empathetical

understanding of students' situations. Certainly, such perspectives will yield better pedagogical understandings of online learning environments.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST/COMPETING INTERESTS
The authors have no conflicts of interest/Competing interests.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS
All authors have equally contributed to conducting the study and reporting the results.

INFORMED CONSENT
As part of the instruction to fill in the research questionnaires, all participants in the study were informed about the objective of the study and they were ensured that the results will be used and published for research purposes only. Participants are all adults above eighteen years old and the study consent form is completed individually by each participant.

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