



ISSN: 2278 – 0211 (Online)

## Comparison Of Empathy Quotient Of Prospective Teachers Based On Certain Selected Demographic Variables

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### **Abstract:**

*Empathy as a social skill is of great importance for educators as they deal with multifarious problems of students in this challenging world. The present study was an attempt to assess the empathy quotient of student teachers undergoing training at secondary teacher education institutions in Kerala State. An Empathy Quotient Questionnaire prepared and standardized by Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright (2003) was administered to a sample of 150 student teachers from various training colleges. It was revealed that the prospective teachers possess moderate level of empathy quotient and domicile of residence has no influence on the possession of empathy. However, female prospective teachers possess high level of empathy quotient than that of their male counter parts. The findings of the study indicate the need of incorporating empathy building exercises in the curriculum for secondary teacher education.*

**Key words:** Empathy quotient, prospective teachers, and demographic variables

### **1.Introduction**

Today every facet of human life is under transformation because of the technological advancements and knowledge explosion. In the pursuit to become at par with the modern trends, individuals have to face new challenges in their course of life. Therefore one has to attain the necessary skills and competencies to disentangle various problems and to live a worthy life. The formal education is of utmost importance in this regard since it highly influences the personality make up of the learners. The process of socialization of individuals is carried out mostly through educational institutions as they spend majority of their working hours in schools. The role of teachers is highly significant in this formative process. Now teachers are not considered as merely imparters of knowledge but more than that; they have to intervene with various types of problems faced by their students. Teachers have to provide emotional scaffolding to them. Therefore teachers should possess certain qualities to deal effectively with the learners. According to Low (2000) the teachers have to strengthen their skills in assertion, comfort, empathy, decision making, drive strength, time management, commitment, ethics, self-esteem, stress management and deference. To face the challenges of a diverse classroom, these skills need to be developed, strengthened or enhanced. The future teachers should be equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to guide the young generation towards success in life.

### **2.The Concept Of Empathy**

One of the most important qualities needed for a teacher is empathy. The term 'empathy' was coined by Titchener (cited in Hakansson, 2003). Empathy is a direct translation from the German *emfühlung*, a term first used in about 1885, described as the understanding of another person (Basch, 1983). *Ein* translates to 'with,' *fühlung* to feeling, thus the word means 'feeling with.' Empathy means to recognize others' feelings, the causes of these feelings, and to be able to participate in the emotional experience of an individual without becoming part of it (Keen, 2007). Empathy is a multidimensional construct consisting of two main subcomponents, cognitive empathy (the intellectual or imaginative apprehension of another's mental state) and affective empathy (an emotional response to the affective state of another). It is the 'capacity' to share and understand other's 'state of mind' or emotion. Empathy is often characterized as the ability to 'put oneself into another's shoes,' or in some way experience the outlook or emotions of another being within oneself. It is the talent to understand other person's perspective and to see things through other person's frame of reference. Empathy can be expressed in terms of joy, sorrow, excitement, misery, pain and confusion. Empathy allows us to make sense of the behavior of others, predict what they might do next, how they feel and also feel connected to that other person, and respond appropriately to them (Wheelwright & Baron-Cohen, 2011). Empathy is an important capability, which all people must develop in order to progress and continue with their life (Pedersen, 2007).

Empathy, although shares some characteristics with sympathy, is much more sophisticated and complex concept than sympathy. One might feel sorry for other's dilemma and spontaneously express sorrow in a comforting way. Such expressions of sympathy acknowledge a human kinship which may be relaxing to the person in distress. Empathy seeks to understand human behavior, not to judge it. According to Eisenberg and Fabes (1990), sympathy, which frequently may stem from empathy, is defined as a vicarious emotional reaction based on the apprehension of another's emotional state or condition, which involves feelings of sorrow, compassion, or concern for the other. Empathy, then, does not contain sympathy's essential elements of condolence to, or pity for, the other (Greenson, 1960). Halpern (2003) opined that sympathy is an emotional reaction, immediate and uncontrolled, which inundates when one person imagines himself in the position someone else is. That is why it can lead to suspension of care

or alleviate ethical actions. Empathy on the other hand, is a skill earned or an attitude of life, which can be used to try to come into contact with someone, to communicate and understand others' experiences or feelings (cited in Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008).

### 3.Rationale Of The Study

Since teachers take the major role in shaping the character and personality of students, they should be emotionally robust and empathetic in dealing with them. With a high degree of the qualities of empathy, a teacher can facilitate the emotional growth of pupils which in turn pervades all facets of their life. Teachers can help their students to reduce disturbances, make class room time more productive and prevent behavioral and learning problems if they are empathetic. Based on a large body of research on empathy, altruism, and moral development, Eisenberg (2002) opined that pro-social behavior can be learned and is modifiable. Developing empathy, altruism, and other humanitarian behaviors can reduce aggression and destructive tendencies and lead to a focus on cooperation and concern for the larger community of humankind. To guide the new generation and to deal effectively with their problems, the prospective teachers have to be trained in empathy building activities.

### 4.Objectives Of The Study

- To assess the empathy quotient of prospective teachers at secondary level
- To compare the empathy quotient of prospective teachers based on
  - Domicile and
  - Gender.

### 5.Hypothesis Of The Study

- There is significant difference in the empathy quotient of prospective teachers of
  - Different domicile and
  - Different gender.

### 6.Methodology

Survey method was employed for the present study. Through survey and the analysis of information, the investigator made an attempt to assess the empathy quotient of prospective teachers. 150 student teachers from three secondary teacher education institutions in Ernakulam district, Kerala were randomly selected as sample for the study by giving due representation to domicile and gender. In order to collect the data required for the study, an Empathy Quotient Questionnaire prepared and standardized by Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright (2003) was adopted and used. The test-retest reliability of the questionnaire was reported to be .853 (Lawrence, Shaw, Baker, Baron-Cohen, & David, 2004). The Empathy Quotient Questionnaire was evaluated (Allison, Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Stone, & Muncer, 2011) using Rasch analysis, as a test of the potential usefulness of applying this approach to measuring the construct of empathy. Results indicated that the Empathy Quotient Questionnaire measures a single dimension of empathy, and it is therefore acceptable to use a summed total Empathy Quotient score.

The tool was administered to the sample of prospective teachers from selected teacher education institutions. The data gathered through the tools were subjected to appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical procedures to realise the objectives.

### 7.Analysis And Interpretation

The scores were analysed on the basis of the objectives of the study.

#### 7.1.Empathy Quotient Of Prospective Teachers

In order to assess the empathy quotient of prospective teachers, the investigator administered an Empathy Quotient Questionnaire to the selected sample of 150 prospective teachers. The Empathy Quotient Questionnaire consisted of 60 items out of which only 40 are considered for scoring purpose. The maximum score that can be obtained by a respondent for the Empathy Quotient Questionnaire is 80 (40x2), minimum score 0 (40x0), and the middle score is 40. The filled up questionnaires were collected and scored. The empathy quotient scores of the respondents were subjected to descriptive data analysis. The statistical constants for the distribution of empathy quotient scores are given in table 1. It was found that the prospective teachers at secondary level possess a moderate level of empathy quotient.

Sl. No.	Statistic	Value
1	Arithmetic Mean	37.53
2	Median	39.21
3	Mode	41.80
4	Standard Deviation	8.78
5	Skewness	-0.574
6	Kurtosis	.324

Table1: Statistical Constants For The Distribution Of Empathy Quotient Scores Of The Total Sample Of Prospective Teachers (N= 150)

#### 7.2.Comparison Of Empathy Quotient Of Prospective Teachers

##### 7.2.1.Comparison of Empathy Quotient of Prospective Teachers Based on Domicile

- Null Hypothesis

“There is no significant difference between the empathy quotients of rural prospective teachers and that of urban prospective teachers.”

To find out whether there exist significant difference between the mean empathy quotient score of rural prospective teachers and that of urban prospective teachers the mean scores were subjected to the test of significance of difference (critical ratio). The details are presented in table 2.

Domicile	N	Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Critical Ratio
Rural	70	Empathy quotient	38.14	8.24	0.80
Urban	80	Empathy quotient	37.00	9.19	

*Table 2: Data And Result Of The Test Of Significance Of The Difference Between Empathy Quotient Scores Of Rural And Urban Prospective Teachers*

When the difference between the mean empathy quotient scores of rural and that of urban respondents was subjected to the test of significance, the critical ratio obtained is 0.80 and it is less than 1.96, the table value needed to reject the null hypothesis at .05 level. Hence the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. Therefore it can be interpreted that there exists no significant difference between the empathy quotient of rural prospective teachers and that of urban prospective teachers. Domicile of residence has no influence on the possession of empathy.

#### 7.2.2. Comparison of Empathy Quotient of Prospective Teachers Based on Gender

- Null Hypothesis

“There is no significant difference between the mean empathy quotient score of male prospective teachers and that of female prospective teachers.”

To find out whether there exist significant difference between the mean empathy quotient score of male prospective teachers and that of female prospective teachers the mean scores were subjected to the test of significance of difference. The details are presented in table 3.

Gender	N	Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Critical Ratio
Male	36	Empathy quotient	34.66	8.42	2.33*
Female	114	Empathy quotient	38.44	8.70	

*Table 3: Data And Result Of The Test Of Significance Of The Difference Between Mean Empathy Quotient Scores Of Male And Female Prospective Teachers*

\*  $P < .05$

When the difference between the mean empathy quotient scores of male respondents and that of female respondents was subjected to the test of significance, the critical ratio obtained is 2.33, and it exceeds 1.96, the table value needed to reject the null hypothesis at .05 level of significance. Hence the null hypothesis can be rejected. The hypotheses formulated regarding the empathy quotient of prospective teachers in the present study proposed that there will be significant difference in the empathy quotient of prospective teachers of different gender. The result of the statistical comparison indicates that there exists significant difference in the empathy quotient of prospective teachers of different gender. Since the mean score of female respondents is greater than that of male respondents, and the difference is statistically significant, it can be reasonably assumed that female prospective teachers possess high level of empathy quotient than that of male prospective teachers. This finding is consistent with that reported in Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright (2003). Similar findings were reported in Raithatha (2009). These studies affirmed that women tend to be more emotionally expressive than men, that they understand emotions better that they have a greater ability with regard to certain interpersonal skills. Women for instance recognize other people's emotions better and possess more empathy compared to men (cited in Nunez, Berrocal, Montanes, & Latorre, 2008). The study of Allen (2009) also confirmed the superiority of females over males with regard to empathy.

#### **8. Conclusion**

Today, teacher education programmes aim at the generation of quality teachers and utmost importance is given to the incorporation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the curriculum. Even though a teacher is knowledgeable he/she cannot inspire and motivate pupils without soft skills like empathy. A high level of empathy is one of the requisites for a teacher to succeed in his/her profession. Through the present study it could be found that the prospective teachers possess only moderate level of empathy. This indicates the need of incorporating various empathy facilitating programmes. Programmes such as community living camps, community extension programmes, social service programmes, etc. are suggested to be included in the secondary teacher education curriculum.

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