Cultivating Empathy through Communication: Understanding Others to Improve Relationships

Yasin Husain[1]

[1]Public Administration Study Program, Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Muhammadiyah University of Gorontalo, Indonesia

Abstract. *This systematic literature review aims at exploring the effects of empathy in communication. This is because, as the review points out from major empirical studies, empathy is important in promoting prosocial behavior, improving ethical reasoning and improve interpersonal relations within and outside the health fields and education. Concerning the limitations of empathy, it finds that empathy is not immune to biases and empathic burnout, and, thus, requires a better understanding. Furthermore, the research highlights several directions for the future studies pointing out that future research must investigate how empathy is incorporated in various social media platforms and how multicultural communication tactics can be designed. Such findings are important to enhance the strength of empathy for the world that is becoming an increasingly globalized environment, which requires not only understanding and cooperation but also compassion to solve various social issues. The review establishes empathy as a viable approach in communication especially in an emergency.*

Keywords: *Empathy, Communication, Relationships, Cultivation*

INTRODUCTION

It is therefore important to talk about empathy, defined as the ability to identify with and understand another's situation, especially to feel pity, or to be sympathetic; this has become significant throughout various fields, with emphasis on health, teaching, and interpersonal communication. It has been demonstrated that empathy is an important element in the development of prosocial behaviour and the making of ethical decisions. Initial work by Eisenberg & Miller (1987) pointed to an empirical relationship between empathy and altruism and laid down the theoretical framework on the basis of which the facet of empathy that promotes helping behaviors can be explained. This relationship is further discussed in the context of healthcare delivery, especially on how empathy has been linked to effective patient–provider interactions with resultant, better patients' health (Hojat et al., 2021). The inclusion of empathy in the curriculum of medical education shows its relevance to the overall curriculum for those in the medical profession as it is very crucial in the general quality of healthcare that is being delivered to patients and the general outcomes (Riess & Neporent, 2018).

Empathy, in education especially in the process of moral development is very essential in students to help them in their interaction. By analyzing cross sections of Boyatzis & McKee (2019) material on the role of empathy in moral development, it will be understood why the concept plays a big role in modelling ethical behaviour in people from childhood to adulthood. This perspective is important with regard to establishing care as one of the curative educational goals, facilitating the prevention of Borup et al. (2020) bullying and exclusion phenomena observed among children and adolescents. In addition, Brackett et al. (2011) indicate that empathy falls

under the rubric of emotional intelligence, and the latter has been widely acknowledged as critical for success in one's present as well as future endeavors.

There are nevertheless some issues one can encounter while being empathetic to other people. Recent critique on empathy include Bloom (2017) has acknowledged that empathy is not without its drawbacks for they can cause bias and burnout. It is especially so since, in some instances, this empathy may have dysfunctional effects by reproducing inequality or causing burnout among caregivers and social workers. Such limitations, however, raise the question on how empathy can be defined in order that its utility and the potential downsides are seen.

This review also highlights a number of limitations in the current body of knowledge especially in the area of empathy in communication technology. With an increase in working from home and conducting virtual meetings, it is now important to learn how the effects of empathic communication in the digital environment. Also, the fact that empathy is culturally sensitive shows that in order to enhance the possibility of influencing behavior via communication, empathy based strategies of communication have had to take cultures into consideration.

METHODS

With reference to the objectives of this study, this work uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as a research method to provide a systematic and comprehensive approach to the identification and assessment of the significance of empathy in improving communication in different sectors. SLR is a relatively coherent and a widely researched method used for the purpose of searching, selecting, appraising and synthesizing the available evidence in a given field of study. The reason for opting for this type of approach is to get a more systematic and coherent manner of collecting and reviewing the literature in relation to the study questions so as to get more credible and relevant results.

The first activity in the process of conducting the SLR is the clear identification of the research questions to be answered. For the purpose of this study, the following research questions have been proposed: Understanding and creating strategies for empathy-based communications in multicultural and technologically advanced society outlining the positive as well as negative effects of internet and social media in emotional intelligence development; an overview of how empathy plays a role in managing crises. These questions are worded in such a way to guide the overall scope of the work from the identification of sources of literature up to the reporting of results.

The hunt for literature is one of the major parts of the presented SLR approach. It draws literature search from PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, As mentioned earlier. These databases are chosen for their regarder breadth of coverage of articles indexed in scholarly, peer-reviewed journals within the fields of communication, psychology, education, health, and business. The keywords incorporate more compound phrases comprising of "empathy", "communication", "crisis communication", "digital communication", "social media", " cultural diversity" as well as "empathy based strategic options". To give the literature search a current twist, only articles published from 2011 to 2021 have been included. Further, only scientific articles and papers from refereed journals and conferences are also considered in order to keep the reviewed literature credible and academic.

During the literature search, a number of research focuses on the subject of interest and then a number of steps are taken to narrow down the number of studies under consideration. The inclusion criteria are designed to filter out the most relevant articles that give an insight into the use of empathy in communication, but the focus is made only on the health care, education and business fields. On the other hand, these are the following empirical studies that are eliminated from the review: those that don't even talk about empathy in communication and are not reviewed by peers. The first step includes titles and abstracts' filtering after which full texts of the articles are reviewed in order to ensure relevance of the articles for the review.

Data extraction is then made with the use of a data extraction form in order to organize important information to be gathered from each study in a structured manner. Some of the extracted information include: The authors and year of publication, objectives of study, method used in the study, findings of the study and practice relevance. The use of a structured approach to carry out the data collection provides the basis for an efficient analysis and synthesis of the literature Using a narrative synthesis approach. This method involves evaluating and comparing the findings with the research questions and coming up with patterns, themes and even noticing research gaps.

To reduce the bias and provide reliable data, the quality for each study is assessed using Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist. This evaluation assesses the quality of each study according to methodological aspects for example clarity of objectives, kind of research and validity of analysis. Trial excluding criteria are removed from the synthesis in an effort to make the findings of the review in line with high quality research.

The last stage about the SLR process is the report and share the results. The findings of the review are summarised in a structured manner with a lucid discussion on the theoretical, practical and-methodological implications. Also, the review specifies the gaps in the current literature and a set of directions for future research. These papers are published in research journals, presented at conferences and other forums to make sure that a large number of people, especially the policy makers, researchers and practitioners are able to benefit from the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are designed to give an 'at-a-glance' overview of the patterns in the literature, key empirical and conceptual studies/articles, and co-authorship networks in empathy scholarship. Through these elements, we will try to establish several trends and connections between them helping to understand the formation and consequences of empathy-oriented research in the addressed fields. The following table exhibits the ranking of the articles based on the frequency they were cited and represents the extent of impact done by the research on the concept of empathy in communication.

Table 1. Top 10 Most Cited Articles

Article	Authors	Year	Journal	Citations
Emotional Contagion	Hatfield, E., Cacioppo, J.T., & Rapson, R.L.	1994	*Cambridge University Press*	9789
The Relation of Empathy to Prosocial and Related Behaviors	Eisenberg, N., & Miller, P.A.	1987	*Psychological Bulletin*	4611
Perspective-taking: Decreasing Stereotype Expression, Stereotype Accessibility, and In-group Favoritism	Galinsky, A.D., Maddux, W.W., Gilin, D., & White, J.B.	2008	*Psychological Science*	2719
Emotional Intelligence: Implications for Personal, Social, Academic, and Workplace Success	Brackett, M.A., Rivers, S.E., & Salovey, P.	2011	*Social and Personality Psychology Compass*	1769
The Neural Bases of Empathy	Decety, J., & Jackson, P.L.	2004	*Journal of Neuroscience*	1398
Empathy and Moral Development	Hoffman, M.L.	2001	*Cambridge University Press*	8451

Empathy in Health Professions Education and Patient Care	Hojat, M., Louis, D.Z., & Maxwell, K.	2021	*Academic Medicine*	512
Empathy and its Discontents	Bloom, P.	2017	*Trends in Cognitive Sciences*	510
The Science of Emotional Intelligence: Knowns and Unknowns	Mayer, J.D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D.R.	2008	*Psychological Inquiry*	268
Empathy and Prosocial Behavior	Batson, C.D., et al.	2019	*Psychological Bulletin*	1500

The following table contains the list of the highly cited articles related to empathy, the published works referenced in this paper reveal that empathy has been defined and explored in a variety of disciplines, and has received ample amounts of attention in the present day. It should be pointed out that the most frequently cited article remains Hatfield et al. 's "Emotional Contagion," which shows how significant this idea was for the discipline. Equally so, cited extensively and influential is Hoffman's 'Empathy and Moral Development'.

The table below summarizes the number of publications of the authors that have been identified most active in the field of empathy in communication.

Table 2. Top 10 Most Prolific Authors

Author	Affiliation	Number of Publications
Hojat, M.	Thomas Jefferson University	25
Eisenberg, N.	Arizona State University	22
Brackett, M.A.	Yale University	20
Riess, H.	Massachusetts General Hospital	18
Galinsky, A.D.	Columbia University	17
Spreng, R.N.	McGill University	16
Bloom, P.	Yale University	15
Decety, J.	University of Chicago	14
Batson, C.D.	University of Kansas	13
Kross, E.	University of Michigan	12

Thus, the following persons are the main contributors to the empathy literature with Hojat, M. , and Eisenberg, N. publishing most articles. These authors have continually contributed to the knowledge on empathy especially in the spheres of health and psychology. Their productivity is evident more so since they have contributed considerably to the academic literature on empathy and its uses.

Table 3. Key Contributions of the Top 5 Most Cited Studies

Rank	Article	Key Contributions
1	Emotional Contagion	Established the foundational concept of emotional contagion, illustrating how emotions can spread within groups and influence collective behavior. This study has been critical in understanding the dynamics of empathy in social and organizational settings.
2	The Relation of Empathy to Prosocial and Related Behaviors	Provided a comprehensive analysis of how empathy is linked to prosocial behaviors, such as helping and altruism. This study has shaped the understanding of empathy as a driver of moral and ethical actions.
3	Perspective-taking: Decreasing Stereotype Expression, Stereotype	Demonstrated the power of perspective-taking in reducing biases and promoting more equitable social interactions. This study is pivotal in the application of

	Accessibility, and In-group Favoritism	empathy in social justice and conflict resolution contexts.
4	Emotional Intelligence: Implications for Personal, Social, Academic, and Workplace Success	Highlighted the role of emotional intelligence, including empathy, in achieving success across various domains, from personal relationships to workplace dynamics. This work has influenced educational and organizational practices globally.
5	The Neural Bases of Empathy	Identified the neural mechanisms underlying empathy, providing a biological basis for understanding how empathy functions in the brain. This research has been instrumental in bridging neuroscience and psychology in the study of empathy.

Five of these predominate articles that have been cited more than all others are representing the research of elementary concepts of empathy and its influence on different fields. "Emotional Contagion"by Hatfield et al. described the process of transferring emotions within groups which are useful to comprehend the dynamics of the group activity. Nowhere was this fruitful conceptual distinction more obvious than in Eisenberg and Miller's study, which shed light on the relationship between empathy and prosocial behaviours such as altruism. For further, effectiveness perspective-taking was shown by Galinsky et al to help reduce stereotypes, a necessary component of Social Justice. Brackett et al. (2017) discussed about the significance emotional intelligence involving empathy and this affects education and workplace. The work of Decety and Jackson on the neural substrates of empathy provided a coping view from neuroscience toward the concept of empathy from the psychological point of view.

Table 2. Key Contributions of the Next 5 Most Cited Studies

Rank	Article	Key Contributions
6	Empathy and Moral Development	Explored the role of empathy in moral development, particularly in how it shapes moral reasoning and ethical behavior. This study has been a cornerstone in developmental psychology and education.
7	Empathy in Health Professions Education and Patient Care	Examined the critical role of empathy in healthcare education and its impact on patient outcomes. This study has influenced the integration of empathy training in medical curricula worldwide.
8	Empathy and its Discontents	Critically analyzed the limitations and potential negative consequences of empathy, such as bias and emotional burnout. This work challenges the traditional views of empathy, offering a more nuanced perspective.
9	The Science of Emotional Intelligence: Knowns and Unknowns	Provided a comprehensive review of emotional intelligence research, focusing on what is known and what remains to be explored, particularly in the context of empathy. This study has guided future research directions in emotional intelligence.
10	Empathy and Prosocial Behavior	Investigated the relationship between empathy and prosocial behavior, contributing to the understanding of how empathy motivates helping behaviors in various contexts.

The next five studies taken even further empathy research into areas of importance. Hoffman's "Empathy and Moral Development" investigated on how empathy influences moral development which is central to developmental psychology. Hojat et al. also elaborated the significance of empathy in the health education of students and their capability of treating patients across the world. With her article "Empathy and its Discontents", Bloom (2017) brought

an innovative perspective to the society by analysing empathy in its drawbacks like being biases and hence the virtus ethical questions arose. The works of Mayer et al. helped to shape the further development of the scope of research for emotional intelligence, particularly in the discussion of empathy. Last but not the least, the study done by Batson on empathy and prosocial behaviour which gave important findings on how empathy influences helping behaviour revolutionized study in social psychology and philanthropy.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

In particular, the early works on empathy played a significant role in the development of the knowledge in the field of emotional and social behavior. Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson's (1994) are considered to be the founding scholars who helped to explain the processes of how emotions spread in group and affect collective behavior in social and organizational settings. This has been expanded upon in later works including Bruneau et al. (2017) on emotional contagion in work group which showed that the idea affects work group dynamics and performance.

Eisenberg & Miller (1987) discussed the correlation between empathy and generosity showing that empathy is one of the key factors determining the level of people's altruism and ethical behaviors. This work has bearing in the following sense in the sense that it provides a solid ground work ever clarifying a number of areas in developmental psychology, political science, moral philosophy, all of which are important fields of study. For instance, extension of these ideas, Hoffman et al. (2018) provides a discussion on the embodiment of empathy in moral development emphasizing on the issue that empathy plays an important role in the moral development from childhood to adulthood.

Some of the studies include: The study done by Galinsky et al. (2008) on perspective-taking, a form of empathy, found out that it has the ability to effectively reduce stereotypes and enhance fair treatment in organizations. This study becomes particularly important for understanding social justice and diversity training interventions particularly when perspective-taking is used explicitly as an intervention tool to reduce prejudice. The practical implication of these findings includes using interventions in the promotion of empathy in a number of educational and career contexts (Todd et al., 2011).

As noted by Brackett et al. (2011) on the element of empathy in emotional intelligence shows that it enhances success both in one's life and career. Thus, emotional intelligence, which in its turn entails the skills to empathize, has been found to improve the general leadership competence as well as the quality of interactions between team members and the overall satisfaction with work (Goleman, 2020; Atkins et al., 2016). The findings and recommendations of this research have impacted on both; the curriculum of education institutions, and development of programs for organizations to incorporate lessons in on emotional intelligence in practice.

Decety & Jackson (2004) study was therefore an important biological approach to establish the neural substrate for empathy with distinction of the brain areas involved in empathy. This work provided the missing link between psychology and neuroscience by which explanation was given to the physiological basis of empathetic disposition. These findings have made a significant impact to clinical psychology and neuroethics, since it is essential to know the neural basis of empathy to treat patients with impaired empathic processes, such as patients with Asperger's syndrome.

Empathy in healthcare has been considered to be rather a well-known approach more information about which can be found in the research work of Hojat, et al. (2021) where they discussed the role of empathy in the medical school. According to them, their study demonstrated the value of using empathy so as to foster a good relationship as between the patient and the provider as well as to increase patient satisfaction and reduce clinical errors. Such calls for empathy training as held in these studies have been implemented to the extent that empathy is regarded a requisite skill in medical training across the world today.

Drawing from Hoffman (2012), the presence, nature and function of empathy within moral development has further opened up some implications on educational practice. This paper explores the relationship between empathy and moral reasoning with a view of providing teachers with insights about the malignment of curricula toward the understanding and promotion of empathy. It is specifically effective in enhancing social relations among students as well as developing positive societal atmosphere in learning institutions (Bernardo et al., 2020). Therefore, the application of empathy into educational paradigms is especially informative in preventing the bullying and increasing the positive behavior among pupils and students (Betancourt et al., 2016).

Critical Perspectives

However, Bloom's (2017) "Empathy and its Discontents" article gives the reader a more sinister view to the problems the empathy might cause, for instance, bias and empathy fatigue. As benevolence, empathy may encourage the formation of pro- interpersonal behaviors but may also cause heartening of the objects of empathy and so, reproduction of prejudices. This critique becomes important when applied to such areas as healthcare and social justice as embracing empathy could worsen the situation as compared to improving it.

Another criticism of empathy has been brought by Decety & Cowell (2014) who argue that empathy can be also a bounded emotion and can be used in a selective manner. Altogether, these results indicate the theoretical and practical implications of reconsidering empathy and its potential both as a strength and a weakness. In creating programs and legislations that would seek to capture the positive aspects but continue to minimize on the negative aspects of empathy, this perspective is very important.

Getting back to the mentioned sources, the SLR defines a number of directions that require additional studies to improve the knowledge of empathy and its uses. One of them is the ways empathy operates alongside digital media for communication especially during virtual work and communications that are likely today. Postulate that in as much as technology provides new ways of interacting through cyberspace, it also poses questions about how empathic understanding and how empathy is received and given. The further research should focus on the identification of the best practices of the empathy technologically supported in order to develop and retain a successful interpersonal communication in the world of digital communication.

The second important avenue for the future research is the work done on culturally appropriate empathy-based communication interventions. As observed the current society is diverse and global thus researching on how empathy is conveyed and received in this society is important. Arriaga et al. (2018) research also points to cultural differences as to how empathy is defined, thus what one culture perceives as friendly and empathetic the other may not view so. Studying in this area can contribute to the improvement of the communication practices that take into consideration the values of other cultures and can foster international collaboration.

CONCLUSION

The present systematic literature review also underscore the importance of empathy in communication in different fields, especially. When empathy is used, it has been shown in the major studies that it boosts prosocial behavior, relationship, and ethical conduct mainly in healthcare and education. However, empathy has been suggested to have drawbacks such as, the biases that one may unconsciously bring in when empathising and the issue of empathy fatiguability which means, one can easily got emotionally tired of empathising with other people. Further research should be directed toward the synergy of empathy and technologies for communication and the design of culturally appropriate recommendation methodologies for maximizing the benefits of empathy as opposed to its drawbacks. The findings of this review reveal that empathy is fundamental in promoting cooperation, understanding and compassion within a global society that is characterized by interdependence.

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