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Teaching Empathy: Harnessing the Partnerships of Parents and Teachers for Moral Growth

Omar, Rosmaria[1*], Jodi, Khairul Hamimah Mohammad & Saroni[2]

[1*]Open University Malaysia, 47301 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, MALAYSIA

[2]Universitas Majalengka, 45418 Majalengka, West Java, INDONESIA

*Corresponding Author Email: rosmaria@oum.edu.my

Abstract: This paper delves into the critical role of empathy in moral development and social cohesion, emphasizing the collaborative effort required between parents and teachers to nurture empathetic individuals. It posits that empathy, as a cornerstone of moral development, facilitates understanding, compassion, and ethical behavior among children. By examining the multifaceted process of moral development influenced by environmental, social, and psychological factors, the study highlights the paramount importance of empathy as the emotional foundation. The core argument revolves around the synergy between parents and educators in fostering an environment conducive to the cultivation of empathy, suggesting that this partnership is not merely beneficial but essential for the moral growth of children. Through an exploration of various strategies and approaches, this article advocates for a unified effort in teaching empathy, underscoring its significance in building a compassionate and ethical society.

Keywords: Empathy, Moral Development, Parental Involvement, Educators, Schools

Abstrak: Kertas kerja ini membincangkan peranan penting empati dalam pembangunan moral dan perpaduan sosial, menekankan usaha kolaboratif yang diperlukan antara ibu bapa dan guru untuk memupuk individu yang empati. Ia berpendapat bahawa empati, sebagai asas pembangunan moral, memudahkan pemahaman, belas kasihan, dan tingkah laku beretika di kalangan kanak-kanak. Dengan meneliti proses pelbagai aspek perkembangan moral yang dipengaruhi oleh faktor persekitaran, sosial dan psikologi, kajian itu menyerlahkan kepentingan empati sebagai asas emosi. Hujah teras berkisar pada sinergi antara ibu bapa dan pendidik dalam memupuk persekitaran yang kondusif untuk penanaman empati, menunjukkan bahawa perkongsian ini bukan sahaja bermanfaat tetapi penting untuk pertumbuhan moral kanak-kanak. Melalui penerokaan pelbagai strategi dan pendekatan, artikel ini menyokong usaha bersatu dalam mengajar empati, menekankan kepentingannya dalam membina masyarakat yang berbelas kasihan dan beretika.

Kata Kunci: Empati, Pembangunan Moral, Penglibatan Ibu Bapa, Pendidik, Sekolah

1.   Introduction

Empathy, the capacity to understand and share the feelings of another, is a cornerstone of moral development and social cohesion. In the complex tapestry of human interactions, empathy acts as a bridge, fostering understanding, compassion, and ultimately, ethical behavior. The nurturing of empathetic individuals, capable of moral reasoning and altruism, is not a task that falls upon a single guardian but is a collaborative effort shared between parents and educators. This article explores the synergistic relationship between parents and teachers in cultivating empathy in children, arguing that their partnership is not just beneficial but essential for moral growth.

The moral development of a child is a multifaceted process influenced by various environmental, social, and psychological factors. Among these, the role of empathy is paramount, serving as the emotional foundation upon which moral judgments and actions are built (Jeffrey, 2020). It is within this context that the partnership between parents and teachers becomes critically important. Parents, as the primary caregivers, and teachers, as the principal educators, hold

influential positions in a child's life, shaping their emotional landscape and ethical understanding through direct and indirect experiences.

However, despite the recognized importance of teaching empathy, there remains a gap in the systematic collaboration between parents and educators in this endeavor. This article posits that by harnessing the strengths and resources of both parties, a more comprehensive and effective approach to empathy education can be achieved. Through a review of existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and practical case studies, this study aims to delineate strategies for enhancing the parent-teacher partnership, thereby facilitating a nurturing environment in which children's empathetic abilities and moral sensibilities can flourish.

2. Literature Review

Empathy is a multi-dimensional construct, encompassing cognitive empathy (the ability to understand another's perspective), emotional empathy (the ability to feel what another person feels), and compassionate empathy (the desire to help others based on empathetic understanding). These components are integral to the development of moral reasoning and ethical behavior, serving as the emotional and cognitive underpinnings of altruism and prosocial actions.

2.1 Cognitive and Emotional Empathy in Moral Development

Cognitive empathy plays a crucial role in moral development by enabling individuals to perceive and understand the emotions, thoughts, and perspectives of others. This understanding is essential for ethical reasoning, as it allows individuals to consider the impact of their actions on others, fostering a sense of moral responsibility and ethical decision-making. Emotional empathy, on the other hand, involves sharing the emotional experiences of others, which can motivate compassionate actions and prosocial behavior (Freitas & Osório, 2022). It is through the interplay of these empathetic components that individuals develop a deeper sense of empathy, which is critical for moral growth.

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Moral Development

To further understand the nexus between empathy and moral development, it is instructive to consider prominent theories in the field. Kohlberg's stages of moral development, for example, emphasize the progression of moral reasoning from a pre-conventional level, where decisions are based on self-interest, to a post-conventional level, where universal principles of justice and rights guide moral judgments. While Kohlberg's theory highlights the evolution of moral reasoning, it has been critiqued for underemphasizing the role of empathy and emotions in moral decision-making (Kim, 2022). Gilligan's theory of moral development offers a complementary perspective, stressing the importance of care and relationships in moral reasoning. Gilligan argues that empathy and compassion are central to a morality of care, which values interdependence and the welfare of others (Cotton, 2021). This perspective underscores the significance of empathy in moral development, suggesting that empathy is not just a beneficial trait but a fundamental component of moral reasoning and ethical behavior.

2.3 *"Rahmatan lil Alamin"* Concepts in Moral Development

The concept of "*Rahmatan lil Alamin*" (Mercy to the Worlds) embodies values that deeply resonate with the ethos of teaching empathy through parental and educational partnerships. Both philosophies champion compassion, mercy, and kindness towards all entity's humans, animals, and the environment. This common ground underscores the significance of cultivating empathetic, compassionate individuals dedicated to the welfare of others and the planet. By encouraging empathy among children, educators, and parents alike champion the universal values of *"Rahmatan lil Alamin"* advocating for a more inclusive, equitable, and compassionate society (Rasdi, 2022). This alignment reinforces empathy's role in moral development and mirrors a collective commitment to universal love, social justice, and environmental stewardship, a reflection of the mercy for all creation central to Islamic teachings.

This concept and the values inherent in the partnership of parents and teachers for moral education share a profound connection (Nasution, 2022). First, it was central to *"Rahmatan lil Alamin"* and the teaching of empathy is the value of mercy and compassion. Cultivating empathy in children means encouraging them to understand and share in the feelings of others, responding with kindness and consideration. Like *"Rahmatan lil Alamin"* the collaborative moral education by parents and teachers aims for a comprehensive development approach, fostering emotional intelligence, social skills, and moral reasoning that benefits both the individual and society at large.

Next, the emphasis on universal mercy in *"Rahmatan lil Alamin"* complements the inclusive nature of empathy education. Teaching empathy promotes understanding and respect for diverse groups, fostering a culture of universal respect and love. Commitment to social justice is a pillar of *"Rahmatan lil Alamin"* advocating for the rights and welfare of all beings. Teaching empathy nurtures a sense of moral responsibility and actions that promote fairness and equality. While, the respect for all of creation in *"Rahmatan lil Alamin"* extends to environmental care, aligning with lessons on empathy that include environmental responsibility and the impact of human actions on the planet (Alfani, 2023).

The principles of *"Rahmatan lil Alamin"* align seamlessly with the objectives of teaching empathy through the collaboration of parents and teachers. Both frameworks call for a compassionate, inclusive, and ethical approach to our interactions, aiming to create a society marked by mutual understanding and respect. The synthesis of these theoretical

perspectives offers a nuanced understanding of empathy's role in moral development, underscoring the imperative for a synergistic effort between parents and teachers. This collaboration is vital for fostering empathy and moral reasoning in children, crucial for their holistic development into empathetic and morally responsible individuals.

2.4   The Role of Parents in Developing Empathy

Parents play a pivotal role in the early development of empathy, serving as the primary models of empathetic behavior for their children. From the earliest stages of life, children observe and mimic the emotional responses and social interactions exhibited by their parents, learning to understand and share the feelings of others. The influence of parents on developing empathy in children cannot be overstated (Choe et al., 2020). Children learn empathy not only through direct instruction but also, and perhaps more importantly, through observation and imitation of empathetic behavior modeled by their parents. When parents express genuine concern for the feelings of others, show compassion in their actions, and engage in active listening, they provide powerful examples for their children to follow. This modeling of empathy teaches children the value of understanding and caring for others' emotional states, laying the foundation for their moral and emotional development.

Developing emotional literacy is crucial for cultivating empathy. Parents who encourage open discussions about emotions, label and express their own feelings clearly, and guide their children in recognizing and naming their emotions, help build a vocabulary of feelings (Fei et al., 2021). This emotional literacy allows children to better articulate their own emotions and understand those of others, a key component of empathetic engagement. Parents also play a critical role in teaching children how to communicate empathetically and resolve conflicts in a constructive manner(Ornaghi et al., 2020). By demonstrating how to listen actively, validate others' feelings, and seek mutual understanding, parents can equip their children with the skills necessary for positive social interactions. These practices not only promote empathy but also contribute to the development of effective communication skills and emotional intelligence.

Encouraging children to consider the perspectives of others and to engage in altruistic behaviors is another way parent can foster empathy. This can be achieved through activities that promote perspective-taking, such as reading stories with diverse characters and discussing their feelings and viewpoints, as well as encouraging acts of kindness and helping behavior towards others. Therefore, the role of parents in developing empathy was abroad for example by involving the modeling of empathetic behavior, fostering emotional literacy, teaching empathetic communication and conflict resolution, and encouraging perspective-taking and altruism (Borelli et al., 2021). Through these practices, parents can significantly influence their children's ability to empathize with others, laying the groundwork for their moral growth and development into compassionate individuals.

2.5   The Role of Teachers and Schools in Fostering Empathy

Teachers and schools play a crucial role in the empathetic and moral development of children, complementing the foundational work started by parents at home. The school environment offers a unique platform for the practice and enhancement of empathy through formal education and social interactions. One of the key strategies for fostering empathy in schools is the integration of empathy education into the curriculum (Aldrup et al., 2022). This can be achieved through social and emotional learning (SEL) programs that explicitly teach empathy alongside other emotional intelligence skills (Gimbert et al., 2023). SEL programs are designed to help students understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. By incorporating these programs into the daily routine, schools can provide students with the tools and knowledge needed to develop empathy.

The cultivation of an empathetic school culture is another vital aspect of teaching empathy. This involves creating a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment where students feel valued and understood. Teachers and school staff can foster this culture by modeling empathetic behavior, encouraging collaboration and kindness among students, and addressing instances of bullying or exclusion promptly and effectively (Soliman et al., 2021). An empathetic school culture not only supports the individual growth of students but also promotes a sense of community and mutual respect (Mahoney et al., 2021). Service learning and community engagement activities offer practical opportunities for students to practice empathy in real-world contexts. By participating in projects that address community needs, students can develop a deeper understanding of social issues and the importance of contributing positively to society. These experiences allow students to connect with people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, enhancing their ability to empathize with others and fostering a sense of social responsibility.

To effectively teach empathy, teachers themselves need training and support in SEL methodologies and empathy education (Ferreira et al., 2020). Professional development programs that focus on emotional intelligence, classroom management strategies that promote empathy, and ways to integrate empathy into various subjects are essential. Providing teachers with the resources and skills to nurture empathy ensures that they can create learning environments that are conducive to the moral and emotional development of their students.

In summary, the role of teachers and schools in developing empathy extends beyond academic instruction to include the integration of empathy into the curriculum, the creation of an empathetic school culture, engagement in service learning, and the provision of training and support for teachers. Through these efforts, schools can significantly impact the development of empathetic, socially aware, and morally responsible individuals.

3.   Result and Discussion

The concept of *"Rahmatan lil Alamin"* which translates to "Mercy to the Worlds," is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings and emphasizes the Prophet Muhammad's attributes as a universal mercy. This principle promotes values such as tolerance, mercy, love, assertiveness, fairness, and positive work behavior, emphasizing the importance of eradicating hate and discrimination. It underscores the need for religious tolerance, the opposition to violence, and the cultivation of love over hatred (Khalli, 2020). Furthermore, it advocates for assertiveness in upholding truth and justice, rather than passive acquiescence, and calls for fairness and non-discriminatory practices in all interactions. Education plays a critical role in propagating the essence of *Rahmatan Lil Alamin*, aiming to instill mercy, compassion, and benevolence towards all people and the entire universe. The concept has historically facilitated peaceful coexistence among diverse religious and cultural groups, highlighting inclusiveness and hospitality as key virtues. In the modern context, Muslim academics and organizations, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia, actively promote *Rahmatan Lil Alamin* as a model derived from Qur'anic teachings and the Sunnah (Rodli, 2019). Efforts to engage both local and global academic communities aim to revitalize inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, underscoring the principle's relevance to contemporary global challenge.

The framework for understanding *Rahmatan Lil Alamin* in moral development includes designing programs that develop spiritual and religious values, providing holistic education that incorporates value education, and effective communication about the importance of emulating *Rahmatan Lil Alamin*. By understanding and implementing these values, communities can work towards a culture of peace and sustainable development, reflecting shared common values across diverse societies. The partnership between parents and teachers is pivotal in the holistic development of empathy in children. Effective collaboration ensures that the efforts of both parties complement and reinforce each other, providing a consistent message about the importance of empathy. There are strategies to enhance this partnership for example by establishing an open communication and regular interaction. Establishing open lines of communication is the foundation of a strong parent-teacher partnership (Parjiman et al., 2023). Regular interactions through meetings, emails, and school events can help both parties stay informed about the child's progress and the approaches being used to foster empathy. Sharing insights about the child's behavior, emotional responses, and social interactions can provide a more comprehensive understanding of their empathetic development.

Furthermore, the school should organize joint activities and workshops for parents and teachers focused on empathy education can be an effective way to share strategies, tools, and experiences. These events can cover topics such as emotional literacy, conflict resolution, and effective ways to model and teach empathy. Workshops can also provide hands-on experiences that allow parents and teachers to practice empathy-building exercises together. For empathy education to be effective, it is crucial that both parents and teachers convey consistent messages about the value of empathy and the behaviors that exemplify it. This consistency ensures that children receive the same guidance at home and in school, reinforcing the importance of empathy and making it a core part of their value system. Parents and teachers can collaborate on developing curriculum components and extracurricular activities that focus on empathy (Wulandari, 2022). This could involve parents sharing cultural or personal stories that highlight empathetic values or teachers incorporating family histories and experiences into classroom discussions. Such collaboration enriches the learning experience and makes the teaching of empathy more relatable and impactful. Other than that, the school also can create support systems where parents and teachers can share resources, such as articles, books, and educational materials on empathy, can enhance the learning process. These resources can offer new insights and techniques for teaching empathy, providing a broader range of tools for both parents and teachers to draw upon. Through open communication, joint activities, consistent messaging, collaborative curriculum development, and shared resources, this partnership can create a nurturing environment that promotes the moral and emotional growth of children. Such collaborative efforts ensure that empathy is not just taught but lived, fostering a generation of compassionate and empathetic individuals.

4.   Conclusion

In conclusion, the vital role of empathy in moral development and the transformative impact of a strong parent-teacher partnership in fostering this essential trait in children. Empathy, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and compassionate dimensions, is central to moral reasoning, ethical behavior, and social responsibility. Parents nurture empathy through modeling, emotional literacy, and perspective-taking, while teachers integrate empathy into curricula, foster empathetic school cultures, and encourage service learning. A collaborative approach—featuring open communication, joint activities, and consistent messaging—creates a unified framework for empathy education. This partnership is essential for nurturing compassionate individuals capable of navigating societal complexities with empathy and ethical clarity.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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