



Section 2. General pedagogy

DOI:10.29013/EJEAP-26-1-44-47



ENHANCING EMPATHY IN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS THROUGH POWERFUL TED TALKS

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Cite: Makhkamova G., Zemlyankina Y., Gulyamova Z. (2026). *Enhancing Empathy in Learning Environments Through Powerful Ted Talks*. *European Journal of Education and Applied Psychology 2026, No 1*. <https://doi.org/10.29013/EJEAP-26-1-44-47>

Abstract

The general concern of the article is that empathy is a crucial component of intercultural competence and an exemplary quality to cultivate in learners and educators in foreign language education. The specific problem addressed in the study was lack of attention to, and the limited research on, the incorporation of empathy into the academic curriculum of Uzbekistan State University of World Languages and the Tashkent State Pedagogical University for the training of English language specialists. The research analyzes approaches to and defines the nature of the phenomenon empathy together with the importance of its cultivation as presented in foreign pedagogic literature. The purpose of the investigation is to disclose the deficit of empathy and the reasons for this in Uzbek language educational programs.

Keywords: *education, empathy, empathic competence, emotional intelligence, ability, attitude, TED Talks, intercultural*

Introduction

In a world which is becoming more complex and diverse than ever, where cross-cultural hostility and intolerance is an overriding social problem destroying humanity globally, *empathy* has become a paramount need in society and a primary concern in education. Empathic competence should be given particular attention while training foreign language specialist (teachers, translators and editors) as they must be able to recognize and accept cultural diversity, to promote tolerant and empathic social environment within and outside the classroom.

So, the main focus of the study is *empathy* as an essential but neglected aspect of intercultural elements in English language education in Uzbekistan and the failure to address adequately complex multilingual and multicultural environments (Makhkamova, 2017). The study discusses the beliefs, experiences and meanings associated with significance of empathic skills of teachers and students. It attempts to analyze the factors impeding the development of empathic ability and offers some advice on how to incorporate empathic strategies into the classroom, to create a more empathic envi-

ronment, and to encourage both teachers' and students' long-term empathy growth.

Empathy and the importance of its cultivation.

The concept of 'empathy' has various definitions. Empathy is commonly defined as imaginative intellectual and emotional participation in other peoples' experience (Bennett 1998, p. 207), or the act of perceiving, understanding, experiencing, and responding to the emotional state and ideas of another person (Eriksson & Englander, 2017). Imaginative intellectual activity can be obtained through informed presuppositions, in other words admitting others' national specificities of the world picture. As mentioned by Brown (1994), both learners and teachers of a second language need to understand cultural differences, to **openly acknowledge** that everyone in the world is not "just like me", that people are not all the same beneath the skin (p. 167). That is why empathy contains two distinct components: 1) from the cognitive view it is the ability to understand how other people may be affected by a situation, as well as understanding that there may be other perspectives on a situation, and 2) from emotional or affective position it is feeling compassion for another and having the motivation to understand that person in a new way (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000). Moreover, from pragmatic point of view an empathy is considered as a way of semantic organization of the interaction through verbal and nonverbal means. The empathic action itself performs emotional and sensual function, exactly, when someone wants to express concern, compassion, tolerance, or equality and balance with partner. That is why, it is dealt with as illocutionary and perlocutionary acts to have communicative effect for performing intention and achieving result of communication through certain verbal and behavioural patterns.

TED talks as an effective tool for cultivating empathic competence of future EL teachers

There is a course of "Teaching Intercultural Communication" in the curricula of Uzbekistan State University of World Languages and Tashkent State Pedagogical University which aims at the development of intercultural competence of the 2-year students, where

the teachers focus on development of empathic competence in the attitudinal component. However, analysis of the reviewed data generated our keenness as English language teachers to explore possible practical strategies to integrate empathy into the module of "Integrated skills" (the practical course for language proficiency development at the C1 level). Setting in the 'Integrated skills' classroom itself has great potential to create conditions for personal and cultural development of students through the implementation of the well-known idea of 'dialogue of cultures. In the present study, we conducted empirical research to reveal the effectiveness and reliability of the renowned TED public talks related to empathy and compassion as technology for raising university students' empathic competence at English lessons as "Integrated skills".

Methodology of experimental research: implications and discussion

The study was carried out over two academic semesters (September-June 2022–2023). A total of 100 students, boys and girls of different nationalities (Uzbek, Russian, Tatar, Korean, Kazakh), took part in the study. All participants were the sophomores of the Uzbek State University of World languages, English philology faculty, within the age range of 19 to 23 years. They were informed that neither participation nor non-participation in the research would influence their grades; an informed consent being taken from each participant. The volunteers were also made aware that they could drop out as research participants at any stage of the study, without the need to explain.

The experiment consisted of 3 stages:

1. Empathetic awareness

At the preliminary stage, participants were asked to complete the following survey:

1. What is empathy?
2. Why is empathy important in society?
3. Why is empathy important in education?
4. What are the characteristics of empathic teachers?
5. Why is empathy particularly important in language education?
6. Is there an empathy deficit in language education? If yes, what might be the reasons for it?

7. Do you consider yourself an empathic person? Why?
8. Would you like to increase your empathy level?

Summarizing the obtained data, we traced a noticeable similarity in the responses for the first five items. This fact is probably due to homogeneity of respondents in terms of age, occupation and relatively similar cultural background. Only 35% of participants appeared to have awareness of empathy and considered it to be an important aspect in both society and education and particularly in language education, pointing out that communicative competence is a central goal in language classrooms while ‘rapport’ ‘meaningful high-quality relationships’, ‘emotional security’, ‘psychological comfort’, ‘respect, trust and responsiveness’ are vital for successful learning and personal development. The rest (65%) revealed little understanding of the notion of empathy as well as its role in society.

2. Methods of experimental teaching

At the first week of the experiment the students were introduced to a brief module on ‘*Empathic competence*’ including the definition of the concept, and components of empathic competence. Further, throughout the semester the learners were exposed to a variety of tasks and activities developed by educators (Everhart et.al. 2016; Gray 2018) and those based on the watched 21 TedTalks intended to raise empathy awareness and develop empathic skills.

1) ‘Emotional Vocabulary’. The first and foremost component of developing emotional intelligence in English lessons is working with emotion-related vocabulary. Students need to learn different words and expressions that will help them to accurately describe their feelings and understand the emotional state of others. Within three minutes students are asked to write down words, expressions, that allow them to precisely express their feelings in two columns: positive – negative. Once finished the instructor interprets their results. Students who wrote:

– more than 30 words are more likely to convey their feelings to others as well as to be understood by others;

– about 20–25 words – they can express their feelings in a variety of ways, but need practice;

– less than 10 words – they need to develop their ability in expressing their emotions.

Which column chosen, positive or negative, also characterizes an individual’s personality, mindset and attitude to life. And finally, any volunteer students are tasked to imagine themselves being the narrator and express the emotions and describe COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIOR they had while going through the experience they shared, i.e., to project the speaker’s feeling into themselves.

2) Another activity that develops out sight is having students analyze and share with the class the speaker’s performance on the following dimensions in terms of how these all contributed to creating a particular emotional and communicative behavior impact on the listeners:

1. Outfit
2. Mood
3. Eye contact and interaction with the audience
4. Tone of the speaker (passion)
5. Pace of speech.
6. Posture
7. Language

3) Besides this, students, in groups of ten, were tasked to make project works named “Empathy is our Superpower!” and present them at the conference ‘Innovative and integrative problems of developing foreign languages in a multilingual environment’ as well as submit their articles devoted to the topic.

3. Empathy assessment test

At the end of the semester, students took a test measuring a person’s empathy across four domains: physical, cognitive, emotional, and intuitive. The IDRlabs What Kind of Empath Are You? (IDR-WKEY) is based on the work of Dr. Darrick Jolliffe and Dr. David P. Farrington, the designers of the Basic Empathy Scale – BES (<https://www.idrlabs.com/4-empathies/test.php>). They were also asked to reflect on paper on whether, how, and why their perspective on empathy and empathic skills had changed over the semester. The effectiveness of the experimental work was proved by means of comparative analysis of the data obtained at the initial and fi-

nal stages. The test scores, as expected, were significantly higher than those of the primary survey, particularly in cognitive and emotional domains. The results showed a positive growth of students' interest in the development of empathic competence, since at the beginning of the semester the level of awareness was in the range of 35%, while at the end of the course it reached 95%. In the self-reflective essays the students admitted that in the process of this work, they developed a set of such skills as 'creativity, co-operation, communication, mindfulness and information processing'.

Conclusion

The current research carried out in the context of Uzbekistan language university, many of the issues that the teachers and students faced in this instance are relevant to other types of the educational establish-

ments. Overall, the proposed TED Talks as a way of developing empathic competence of future FL specialists in this study proved to be tangibly effective. At the same time, the presented techniques for increasing empathy and assessing empathic competence of university students are not exhaustive, but rather, hopefully, provide a useful resource and manual for ourselves and others involved in related fields of study. We suggest that modules or courses related to empathy cultivating should become a standard part of curriculum of FL specialists training to improve FL education. The achieved results in evaluating and cultivating empathic competence have only strengthened our view of the need to broaden discussion and specification of structural elements of empathic competence, as well as to involve large scale groups from other language universities into empirical study.

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submitted 06.02.2026;

accepted for publication 20.02.2026;

published 31.03.2026

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