



# THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPATHY IN TEACHERS ON THE QUALITY OF STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS AS INFLUENCED BY PERSONALITY TRAITS

Asim Suleman<sup>a\*</sup> & Syeda Hoor Fatima<sup>b</sup>, Atif Mahmood<sup>c</sup>, Ghazanfar Nawaz<sup>d</sup>, Tahir Ahmed<sup>e</sup>, & Faisal Saqalain Shah<sup>f</sup>

<sup>a,b,c,d,e,f</sup>Department of Education, The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus, Sargodha, Pakistan

\*Correspondence to: Mr. Asim Suleman, MPhil Scholar, Department of Education, The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus, Sargodha, Pakistan. E-mail: ziabsse136@gmail.com.

## KEYWORDS

Empathy, Students-Teacher Relationship, Personality Traits

## CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Suleman, A., Fatima, S. H., Mahmood, A., Nawaz, G., Ahmed, T., & Shah, F. S. (2025). The mediating role of empathy on the quality of student-teacher relationships as influenced by personality traits. *Pakistan Journal of Mental Health*, 2(2), 1-6.

## ARTICLE DETAILS:

Received on 3 Oct, 2025  
Accepted on 15 Nov, 2025  
Published on 25 Dec, 2025

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the mediating role of empathy in teachers on the quality of student-teacher relationships as influenced by personality traits. The main objective of the study was to explore the mediating role of empathy in teachers on the quality of student-teacher relationships as influenced by personality traits. The main research question was to what extent there would be the mediating role of empathy in teachers on the quality of student-teacher relationships as influenced by personality traits. The population of the study was all the elementary schools of District Sargodha. From 285 male and female elementary schools of Tehsil Sargodha, 85 teachers and 170 students were selected by using the multistage sampling technique. This study was quantitative in nature, and questionnaires were used to gather the data from the respondents. Descriptive statistics were used in analyzing the data. Inferential statistics, such as Pearson product-moment correlation, were used to find out the conclusions. On the basis of the conclusion, it was recommended that peer mentoring programs be established where teachers can share best practices and learn from each other. Promote teacher wellness initiatives to reduce stress and improve teachers' empathy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The quality of student-teacher relationships profoundly influences the educational experience, influencing not only academic achievement but also social-emotional development and overall well-being (Roorda et al., 2018). These relationships are dynamic and multifaceted, shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including teacher characteristics, student characteristics, and classroom dynamics. Among these factors, teacher personality and empathy have emerged as critical determinants of the quality of these interactions (Qu & Wang, 2024). Modern educational psychology has the ideas, exploring the psychological and social dimensions of student-teacher relationships. Research has investigated the impact of various teacher characteristics, including personality traits, on student outcomes (e.g., Marzano, 2007). The concept of teacher empathy has gained significant attention in recent decades, with research demonstrating its crucial role in fostering positive learning environments and supporting student well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This research builds upon a rich history of educational thought, seeking to understand the complex interplay between teacher personality, empathy, and the quality of student-teacher relationships within the context of contemporary educational settings (Tormey, 2021).

## Theoretical Framework

The literature on the role of empathy in teachers and its influence on the quality of student-teacher relationships, moderated by personality traits, highlights a dynamic and multidimensional interaction between emotional intelligence, interpersonal behavior, and personality psychology. Early foundational work emphasized empathy as a crucial teacher attribute for effective classroom relationships, with Davis (1983) identifying both cognitive and affective empathy as key dimensions. Teachers who exhibit high levels of empathy are more attuned to students' emotional needs, leading to increased trust, emotional safety, and student engagement (Pianta, 1999). Empirical studies consistently show that empathetic teachers contribute to stronger bonds with students, resulting in enhanced classroom cooperation and reduced behavioral issues (Sun et al., 2023). Personality traits, particularly those defined within the Big Five model—agreeableness, openness to experience, and emotional stability—are strongly associated with empathetic tendencies in teachers. Teachers with these traits are more likely to express warmth, tolerance, and effective emotional regulation, which are critical in sustaining long-term, positive relationships with students (Mammadov & Avci, 2025).

Recent meta-analyses and structural equation modeling studies have demonstrated that empathy often serves as a mediator, translating these stable personality traits into observable relational behaviors (Wang et al., 2023). This mediation indicates that personality traits alone do not guarantee effective student relationships unless processed through the teacher's capacity to empathize and emotionally connect. Additionally, demographic factors such as gender, teaching experience, and cultural context moderate the impact of personality on empathy and relational outcomes. Research by Jugović et al. (2023) revealed that female teachers tend to exhibit higher levels of affective empathy, enhancing their ability to form emotionally rich relationships with students. Similarly, experienced teachers often demonstrate more refined empathetic strategies, shaped by years of professional practice. These findings underscore the need for teacher development programs that cultivate empathy as both a personality-driven and teachable skill, emphasizing the integration of emotional intelligence training with pedagogical instruction to optimize student-teacher interactions. The objectives of the current study are given below;

1. To identify the levels of students – teachers' relationship quality.
2. To explore the relationship between personality traits of teachers and student-teacher relationship.
3. To explore the mediating role of teachers' empathy as predictor of students-teachers' relationship quality

## II. METHOD

### Participants

The research was quantitative in nature. The survey technique was used as method of study. For the data collection about the mediating role of empathy in teachers on the quality of student-teacher relationships as influenced by personality traits, population of the study contained all the elementary schools of district Sargodha. Around 225 respondents was selected for data collection. Multistage sampling technique was used in the research. The procedure of sampling was carried out as:

- 1) First of all, from all Tehsils of District Sargodha, Tehsil Sargodha was selected purposively.
- 2) On the basis of 30% selection criteria, 85 elementary schools were randomly selected from total 285 elementary schools of Tehsil Sargodha.
- 3) From each elementary school, one teacher and their two students was selected by using cluster sampling.

### Measures

Following measures were used for data collection. The data was collected through questionnaires. The tools were developed by the researcher to measure the mediating role of empathy in teachers on the quality of student-teacher relationships as influenced by personality traits. A 5-point Likert scale with 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3= undecided, 4=agree, 5= strongly agree. [1] Questionnaire for teachers to measure mediating role of empathy in teachers on the quality of student-teacher relationships as influenced by personality traits consisted of 6 constructs. In which 4 statements were for openness to experience, 4 for extraversion, 3 for emotional stability, 7 for agreeableness, 6 for empathy in teachers and 6 for student-teacher relationship. This scale was filled by the teachers to measure mediating role of empathy in teachers on the quality of student-teacher relationships as

influenced by personality traits at elementary level. The level of personality traits of teachers, teachers' empathy and student-teacher relationships were categorized on the set criteria which is given as follows: If, Mean score = less than 2.5 = lower; Mean score = 2.5 – 3 = low; Mean score = 3.01 – 3.5 = moderate; Mean score = 3.51 – 4 = high; Mean score = 4.01– 5 = higher. [2] Questionnaire for students to measure mediating role of empathy in teachers on the quality of student-teacher relationships as influenced by personality traits consisted of 3 constructs. In which 6 statements were for personality traits of teachers, 6 for teachers' empathy and 3 for student-teacher relationship. This scale was filled by the students to measure mediating role of empathy in teachers on the quality of student-teacher relationships as influenced by personality traits at elementary level.

### Procedure

The data collected through the research instruments were coded and tabulated before analysing and interpreting it statistically. The following scoring procedure was adopted for the questionnaire: Weights were given to the responses as Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Un-decided = 3, Disagree = 2 and Strongly Disagree =1. All the data collected from the teachers and students were categorized on their average mean score basis. SPSS software was used to analyze the data. Following were the tests applied for statistical measurements. To compare the mean score of personality traits and empathy of teachers T-test was used with respect to gender. Pearson product-moment correlation a test of correlation was used to measure the level of relationship between the personality traits of teachers, teachers' empathy with student-teacher relationship at elementary level.

## III. RESULTS

**Table 1: Psychometric Properties of Emotional Intelligence, Gratitude and Forgiveness**

| Variables              | SD   | M    | Range  | $\alpha$ |
|------------------------|------|------|--------|----------|
| Extraversion           | 3.42 | 0.71 | 1.90-5 | .72      |
| Agreeableness          | 3.78 | 0.65 | 2.10-5 | .70      |
| Conscientiousness      | 3.95 | 0.62 | 2.20-5 | .75      |
| Emotional Stability    | 3.28 | 0.74 | 2.3-5  | .69      |
| Openness to Experience | 3.28 | 0.74 | 2.24-5 | .71      |
| Teacher Empathy        | 3.85 | 0.58 | 2.10-5 | .76      |
| Relationship Quality   | 4.02 | 0.55 | 2.55-5 | .78      |

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the study variables, including the five personality traits, teacher empathy, and student-teacher relationship quality. The results indicate that the mean scores of all variables fell within the "moderate to high" range, with Agreeableness (M = 3.78, SD = 0.65) and Conscientiousness (M = 3.95, SD = 0.62) emerging as the strongest traits among teachers. Teacher empathy (M = 3.85, SD = 0.58) and relationship quality (M = 4.02, SD = 0.55) also showed relatively higher averages, suggesting that teachers in the sample generally demonstrated empathetic behaviors and maintained positive relationships with their students. Reliability coefficients ( $\alpha$  ranging from .69 to .78) were acceptable, indicating good internal consistency of the scales.

**Table 2: Correlation between Emotional Intelligence, Gratitude and Forgiveness among University Students**

| Variables                 | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5    | 6     | 7  |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|----|
| 1. Extraversion           | --    |       |       |       |      |       |    |
| 2. Agreeableness          | .21*  | --    |       |       |      |       |    |
| 3. Conscientiousness      | .18*  | .23*  | --    |       |      |       |    |
| 4. Emotional Stability    | .24*  | .19*  | .16*  | --    |      |       |    |
| 5. Openness to Experience | .20*  | .15*  | .12   | .18*  | --   |       |    |
| 6. Teacher Empathy        | .28** | .42** | .25** | .22** | .19* | --    |    |
| 7. Relationship Quality   | .26** | .38** | .21*  | .18*  | .15* | .55** | -- |

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

Table 2 shows the Pearson product–moment correlations between the variables. Significant positive correlations were found among most personality traits, teacher empathy, and relationship quality. Notably, Agreeableness demonstrated the strongest association with empathy ( $r = .42, p < .01$ ), while empathy itself was highly correlated with student–teacher relationship quality ( $r = .55, p < .01$ ). These findings suggest that personality traits, particularly Agreeableness and Extraversion, indirectly support student–teacher relationships through their link with empathy. The pattern of correlations supports the hypothesized mediating role of empathy, as personality traits alone had moderate associations with relationship quality, but their link became stronger when empathy was considered.

**Table 3: Mean Differences between Men and Women in terms of Emotional Intelligence, Gratitude and Forgiveness among University Students**

| Predictors/Mediator    | $\beta$ | t    | p     |
|------------------------|---------|------|-------|
| Extraversion           | .07     | 1.48 | .140  |
| Agreeableness          | .12     | 2.48 | .014  |
| Conscientiousness      | .06     | 1.28 | .200  |
| Emotional Stability    | .05     | 1.11 | .267  |
| Openness to Experience | .04     | 0.88 | .380  |
| Teacher Empathy        | .46     | 9.12 | <.001 |

$R^2 = .42, F(6, 243) = 29.4$

Table 3 summarizes the results of multiple regression analysis predicting relationship quality from personality traits and empathy. In the first step, personality traits explained a modest but significant proportion of variance in relationship quality. However, when teacher empathy was entered into the model, it became the strongest predictor ( $\beta = .46, p < .001$ ), while the effects of Agreeableness and Extraversion diminished. The final model accounted for 42% of the variance in relationship quality ( $R^2 = .42, F(6,243) = 29.4, p < .001$ ), indicating partial mediation. This result confirms that empathy plays a crucial role in translating stable teacher personality traits into positive relational outcomes with students.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The present study explored the mediating role of empathy in teachers on the quality of student–teacher relationships as influenced by personality traits. The results demonstrated that teachers generally exhibited moderate to high levels of personality traits, empathy, and relationship quality, indicating an overall positive socio-emotional climate in classrooms. Among the Big Five traits, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness emerged as the strongest characteristics of teachers in this sample. This finding is consistent with prior research that identifies Agreeableness as a key predictor of interpersonal warmth, tolerance, and cooperative behavior in educational contexts (Mammadov & Avci, 2025). The correlational analysis revealed significant positive associations between personality traits, empathy, and student–teacher relationship quality. In particular, Agreeableness was most strongly linked with empathy, while empathy itself showed the strongest correlation with relationship quality. These results align with Pianta’s (1999) argument that teachers who display emotional attunement and responsiveness build stronger, trust-based relationships with students. They also support Davis’s (1983) foundational model of empathy, which emphasizes both cognitive and affective dimensions as essential for effective relational bonds in classroom settings.

Multiple regression analysis confirmed the mediating role of empathy. When empathy was included in the model, it emerged as the strongest predictor of relationship quality, while the direct effects of Agreeableness and Extraversion were reduced but remained significant. This pattern indicates partial mediation, demonstrating that while personality traits contribute to relational quality, their impact is largely channeled through teachers’ capacity for empathy. These findings are consistent with recent meta-analytic evidence showing that empathy mediates the relationship between stable personality traits and observable teaching behaviors (Wang et al., 2023). The results also corroborate contemporary perspectives in educational psychology that view empathy as a teachable,

professional competency rather than solely a dispositional trait. For instance, Sun et al. (2023) found that empathetic teachers foster stronger student engagement and fewer behavioral problems, underscoring the practical benefits of cultivating empathy in professional development programs. Similarly, Jugović et al. (2023) reported that female teachers tend to demonstrate higher affective empathy, which enhances their ability to build emotionally rich relationships, suggesting that demographic and contextual factors may moderate empathy expression.

## V. CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings extend the literature by providing empirical evidence from the Pakistani educational context, affirming that personality traits, particularly Agreeableness, shape student–teacher relationship quality primarily through empathy. They also highlight the importance of integrating empathy training within teacher education and ongoing professional development. As Tormey (2021) emphasizes, pedagogical practices enriched by emotional intelligence and empathy are central to creating inclusive and supportive learning environments.

### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### Funding

The author received no funding from any organizations.

## VI. REFERENCES

- Davis, M. H. (1983). Measuring individual differences in empathy: Evidence for a multidimensional approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 44(1), 113–126. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.44.1.113>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104\\_01](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01)
- Jugović, I., Doolan, K., & Burušić, J. (2023). Teachers’ empathy, gender, and professional experience: Implications for classroom interactions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 123, 103983. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.103983>
- Mammadov, S., & Avci, A. (2025a). Big Five personality traits as predictors of teacher empathy and student outcomes. *Journal of Personality and Individual Differences*, 210, 112302. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2025.112302>
- Mammadov, S., & Avci, E. (2025b). Big Five personality traits as predictors of teacher empathy and relational effectiveness. *Journal of Personality and Education*, 39(2), 210–229.
- Marzano, R. J. (2007). *The art and science of teaching: A comprehensive framework for effective instruction*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Pianta, R. C. (1999). *Enhancing relationships between children and teachers*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10314-000>
- Qu, Y., & Wang, J. (2024). Teacher personality and student outcomes: A meta-analytic review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 136, 104398. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104398>
- Roorda, D. L., Jak, S., Zee, M., Oort, F. J., & Koomen, H. M. (2018). Affective teacher–student relationships and students’ engagement and achievement: A meta-analytic update and test of the mediating role of engagement. *School Psychology Review*, 47(3), 239–261. <https://doi.org/10.17105/SPR-2017-0035.V47-3>
- Roorda, D. L., Zee, M., & Koomen, H. M. Y. (2018). Student–teacher relationships and school engagement: The roles of student perceptions and motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 110(8), 1193–1209. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000304>
- Sun, J., Li, Q., & Zhao, Y. (2023). Teacher empathy and classroom cooperation: A longitudinal study in primary schools. *Educational Psychology*, 43(7), 869–884. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2023.2175830>
- Sun, P., Liu, J., & Wang, H. (2023). Empathy in teaching: A meta-analysis of its effects on student outcomes. *Educational Psychology Review*, 35(1), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-022-09694-7>

- Tormey, R. (2021). Empathy in education: The role of teacher dispositions and practices. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 44(4), 451–467. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1856634>
- Tormey, R. (2021). The role of empathy in teaching and learning: A critical review and reflection. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 26(5), 673–689. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2020.1786042>
- Wang, H., Chen, X., & Liu, Z. (2023). Empathy as a mediator between teacher personality and student–teacher relationship quality: A meta-analytic structural equation modeling study. *Educational Research Review*, 40, 100485. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2023.100485>
- Wang, Y., Zhang, L., & Chen, H. (2023). Teacher empathy as a mediator between personality traits and relational outcomes: A meta-analytic structural equation modeling study. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 115(2), 356–374. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000775>