Empathic Approach in Classroom Activities to Support Gender-Responsive Education at the Sixth-Grade Elementary Students

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Pendekatan Empati dalam Aktivitas Kelas untuk Mendukung Pendidikan Responsif Gender pada Siswa Kelas Enam SD

ARTICLE HISTORY	ABSTRACT
Submitted: 10 Oktober 2023 *10th October 2023*	*This paper examines the role of empathy in fostering a gender-sensitive atmosphere in elementary schools, especially among sixth-grade students. It seeks to address the issue of lack of empathy, which has been linked to the prevalence of sexism, misogyny, and sexual abuse in today's society. The research objective is to assess the efficiency of incorporating an empathetic approach in classroom activities to enhance gender awareness among students. The research uses a qualitative experimental design and an empathetic approach by applying Gender Responsive Scorecard (GRS) and Empathy map as the foundation of activities design. The research result indicates and provides evidence of the effectiveness of the empathic approach in improving students' understanding of experiences that differ from their own, especially regarding gender. In addition, the results will guide educators and researchers on how to incorporate an empathetic approach in promoting gender responsiveness in the classroom.* *Keywords: emphatic approach, gender-responsive classroom, empathy map, GRS*
Accepted: 24 November 2023 *24th November 2023* **Published:** 25 Desember 2023 *25th December 2023*	Artikel ini mengkaji peran empati dalam menciptakan atmosfer yang sensitif terhadap gender di sekolah dasar, khususnya di antara siswa kelas enam. Penelitian di artikel ini dilakukan untuk mengatasi masalah kurangnya empati, yang telah dikaitkan dengan prevalensi seksisme, misogini, dan pelecehan seksual dalam masyarakat saat ini. Tujuan penelitian adalah untuk menilai efisiensi penggunaan pendekatan empatik dalam aktivitas kelas untuk meningkatkan kesadaran gender di kalangan siswa. Penelitian menggunakan desain eksperimental kualitatif dan menerapkan pendekatan empatik dalam aktivitasnya dengan menggunakan *Gender Responsive Scorecard* (GRS) dan peta empati sebagai dasar desain aktivitas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan dan memberikan bukti efektivitas pendekatan empatik dalam meningkatkan pemahaman siswa tentang pengalaman yang berbeda dari mereka sendiri, terutama dalam hal gender. Selain itu, hasil ini akan memberikan panduan bagi pendidik dan peneliti tentang cara menggabungkan pendekatan empatik dalam mempromosikan responsivitas gender di kelas. **Kata Kunci:** *pendekatan empati, kelas responsif gender, peta empati, GRS*

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between empathy and various forms of gender-based crimes, such as misogyny, sexism, and sexual violence, has been well documented (Cuff et al., 2016). When empathy is lacking, individuals may not be able to understand the experiences of others, which can result in a lack of acceptance and respect for differences. This lack of empathy creates a culture of exclusion, where people form closed groups and believe in their own superiority. This kind of environment leads to a rejection of diversity, where people are not willing to understand or accept the experiences of others, which can ultimately result in radicalization (Weisz & Cikara, 2021). Empathy, on the other hand, can help to prevent these negative outcomes. By understanding and accepting differences in life experiences, gender, beliefs, and backgrounds, individuals can foster a sense of empathy that encourages mutual respect and understanding. This kind of inclusive culture creates a supportive environment where diversity is embraced, and people are more likely to appreciate and understand the experiences of others. This understanding, in turn, helps to prevent the spread of harmful attitudes and behaviors and promotes a more peaceful and equitable society.

Empathy is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, allowing us to comprehend the experiences and emotions of others. It is the ability to put ourselves in another person's shoes, to understand their perspective, and to acknowledge that if we were in their situation, we might make similar decisions or even worse ones (Riess, 2017). Through the practice of empathy, we develop an understanding and acceptance of the differences that exist among individuals. We recognize that each person is a unique collection of experiences and perspectives, and that these experiences shape the way they see the world. Empathy opens the door to greater understanding and respect for the diversity of life experiences and perspectives, helping to build stronger and more meaningful relationships with those around us.

Cultivating empathy is essential for creating a more understanding and respectful society. One of the most effective ways to do this is by starting early in life. Around the age of seven, children enter a crucial developmental stage known as the age of reason (Frosch et al., 2021). During this stage, children become more capable of rational thought, develop a sense of conscience, and gain greater control over their impulses. This makes elementary school-aged children the perfect audience for receiving education that focuses on honing rational thinking and fostering empathy. By teaching children to view the experiences of others with openness and understanding, we can lay the foundation for a more compassionate and inclusive society. By instilling these values early in life, children are more likely to carry these qualities with them into adulthood, where they can make a positive impact on their communities and the world.

To foster a gender-responsive environment in grade 6 elementary school students, one effective method is to cultivate empathy by regularly exposing them to stories of others' life experiences without pre-conceived biases. This creates a safe and non-judgmental space where students can better understand and relate to the experiences of others. To further explore the impact of this approach, a research group sought to examine the effectiveness of classroom activities that are based on an empathic approach. By incorporating empathy-building exercises into the curriculum, the aim was to determine whether this could help to instill an empathetic spirit and ultimately foster a more gender-responsive environment in elementary schools.

The research group aims to determine the effectiveness of empathic approach in classroom activities in fostering a gender-responsive environment in grade 6 elementary school students. They expose students to stories of others' life experiences without initial judgment to create a safe space and

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instill empathy. The study's purpose is to investigate the impact of this approach and provide guidance for educators and researchers based on the findings.

THEORETICAL
Empathy in Education Research

Within the educational landscape, researchers have systematically explored the application of empathetic approaches, as exemplified by studies like "Empathic Approaches in Engineering Capstone Design Projects" (Guanes et al., 2022) and "Empathic Approach to Reducing Negative Attitudes of Nursing Undergraduate Students towards Cancer" (Arda Sürücü et al., 2021). These investigations not only shed light on the overarching significance of empathy but also delve into specific variables within educational settings. For instance, the engineering study reveals a disconnect between belief and practice, emphasizing the variable of implementation challenges. Furthermore, ongoing research endeavors are extending empathetic methodologies to elementary school education, concentrating on variables related to creating a gender-responsive environment.

In contrast, the second study focuses on the application of the empathic method to cancer patients for nursing students. The research design used a cross-sectional method and found that the empathic approach improved nursing students' attitudes towards cancer patients, making them more empathetic and positive. This current research is different in terms of its subject, method, and focus, but it uses a similar approach as the previous studies. The researcher's team aims to create activities based on an empathetic approach for elementary school students and examine if it increases effectiveness in fostering a gender-responsive environment.

Understanding and Nurturing Empathic Thinking in Education

The development of empathic thinking involves two contrasting designs of thinking, beliefs and attitudes (Arda Sürücü et al., 2021). Despite the widespread recognition of empathy's importance in daily life and education, many actions and attitudes often go against the true meaning of empathy. According to some experts, there are two types of empathy: cognitive empathy and affective empathy. Cognitive empathy refers to the ability to understand others' feelings and is linked to the theory of mind (Blair, 2005). Meanwhile, affective empathy involves experiencing emotions triggered by emotional stimuli.

Empathy is an essential aspect of human behavior that plays a crucial role in the development of social-emotional skills, empathy, and interpersonal relationships. In the field of education, empathy-based approaches have been widely used to foster a positive and supportive learning environment in the classroom. One of the most widely cited theories of empathy is the theory of mind (ToM) (Blair, 2005). According to this theory, empathy is the ability to understand and share the emotions and thoughts of others. This theory suggests that individuals who are more empathetic have a greater understanding of the perspectives and feelings of others and are more likely to be able to respond appropriately to these emotions. Another theory related to empathy is affective empathy (AE), which refers to the experience of emotions caused by emotional stimuli (Decety & Jackson, 2004). This theory posits that empathy arises from a combination of cognitive and emotional processes. Individuals with higher levels of AE are more likely to experience empathy for others and to respond appropriately to others' emotions.

In recent years, researchers have increasingly focused on the role of empathy in promoting positive and supportive classroom environments. For example, Guanes et al. (2022) conducted a study to investigate the importance of an empathic approach in engineering capstone design projects. The

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study found that empathy is crucial in understanding the needs and wants of stakeholders, and in making decisions that are responsive to those needs. Arda Sürücü et al. (2021) also investigated the role of empathy in reducing negative attitudes towards cancer patients among nursing students. This study used an empathic approach to improve students' perceptions of cancer patients and found that students' attitudes improved significantly as a result of this approach.

Empathy-based approaches have been shown to be effective in fostering positive and supportive classroom environments. By incorporating these approaches into educational practices, teachers and researchers can help students to develop the social-emotional skills and empathy that are necessary for success in life. This research primarily focuses on affective empathy, with the goal of inducing empathy in elementary school students through emotional experiences. This is achieved by creating a safe space for students to share their experiences through dialogue. Cognitive empathy, while important, may be less effective in creating empathy as it requires the ability to understand the perspective of others without actual interaction in a safe environment.

METHOD

This study aims to explore the effectiveness of an empathic approach in fostering a gender-responsive environment in elementary schools through a qualitative method. To gather and interpret data, a descriptive coding approach will be used. Data will be collected through student responses to various scenarios through questionnaires, both before and after the implementation of empathic activities. Additionally, a survey using a questionnaire sheet based on the UN's gender responsive scorecard will also be administered to the participants. The participants of this study will be selected through accidental sampling from SDN 168 Pekanbaru, Riau. The choice of this research methodology is aimed at providing a deeper understanding of how students perceive empathy and its impact on creating a gender-responsive atmosphere in schools. The data collected will be in the form of student answers to various cases through a list of questions designed by experts, empathy map (Kolko, 2010), and a survey using a questionnaire based on the gender responsive scorecard produced by the United Nations (Agbevanu et al., 2021; United Nations Development Programme, 2014).

The initial phase of the study involves administering a pre-test questionnaire to a group of 10 male students and 10 female students who will participate in empathy-based activities. The questionnaire, designed by an expert using the Gender Responsive Scorecard (GRS), aims to assess their initial understanding of gender-related issues. Subsequently, the participants will engage in various empathy-based activities, including group discussions on the definition of gender equality, personal storytelling from the perspectives of both men and women, and filling out an empathy map based on daily experiences by assuming the opposite gender. Following these activities, a post-test questionnaire will be administered to evaluate the participants' final understanding.

These activities are carefully designed to foster an understanding of empathy among the students and how they perceive gender dynamics within their school environment. The empathy-based approach emphasizes non-reactive communicative dialogue, creating a safe space for students to openly share their experiences. This approach is rooted in the understanding that affective empathy, which involves emotional experiences and the ability to comprehend others' feelings, plays a crucial role. The anticipated results of this study will offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of the empathetic approach in cultivating a gender-responsive atmosphere within elementary schools. Furthermore, the findings will provide guidance for educators and researchers seeking to promote empathy and address gender-related issues in educational settings.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of the research, which aimed to explore the impact of empathy-based activities on fostering a gender-sensitive atmosphere in elementary schools. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the findings, highlighting the effectiveness of the empathetic approach in enhancing students' gender awareness and sensitivity. Furthermore, the implications of these findings for educators and researchers seeking to promote empathy and address gender-related issues in educational settings will be discussed.

Results

The empathy map activities as shown below served as a pivotal component in fostering students' understanding of the feelings and experiences of others, leading to a notable shift in their perceptions of gender dynamics. Through the activities, participants were challenged to go beyond contemplating their own words and actions and consider how they would feel and think if they were subjected to gender-stereotyped statements. For instance, male students were presented with the statement, "*women do not need to have higher education, just come here and help me do domestic chores,*" while female students were confronted with the statement, "*men should not be a crybaby, don't cry and come here to help me work.*" The purpose of these statements was to expose students to gender biases and stereotypes prevalent in society. The findings revealed that, following the empathy map activities, 20 participants demonstrated a heightened comprehension of the emotional impact of such statements, allowing them to empathize with those who are subjected to gender-based expectations.
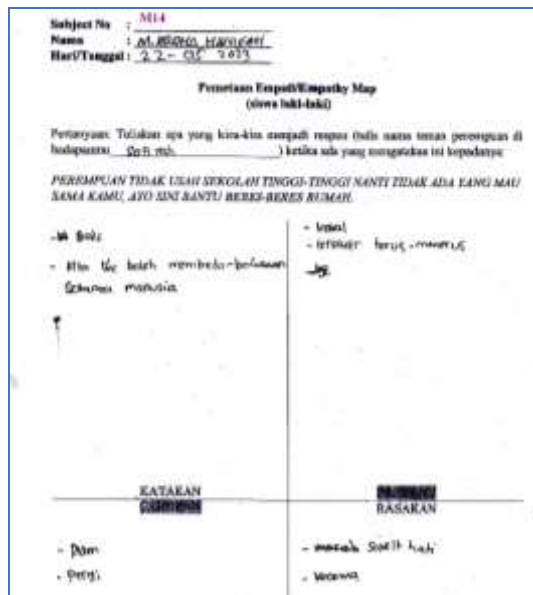

Figure 1. One of the empathy maps drawn by subject

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Participant	Gender	Pretest Response	Post-test Response
P1	Male	Mother	Professor
P2	Male	Mother	Nurse
P3	Male	Wife	Doctor
P4	Male	Teacher	Lecturer
P5	Male	Wife	Professor
P6	Male	Mother	Doctor
P7	Male	Mother	Nurse
P8	Male	Doctor	Doctor
P9	Male	Mother	Teacher
P10	Male	Wife	Businesswoman
P11	Female	Athlete	Athlete
P12	Female	Teacher	Teacher
P13	Female	Doctor	Doctor
P14	Female	Doctor	Doctor
P15	Female	Athlete	Athlete
P16	Female	Athlete	Athlete
P17	Female	Doctor	Doctor
P18	Female	Doctor	Doctor
P19	Female	Teacher	Teacher
P20	Female	Lecturer	Lecturer

Figure 2. visual representation of the changes in perceptions and career expectations observed in the pretest and post-test data.

The pretest results above revealed stark gender-based expectations held by the male students regarding the future career paths of their female friends. Out of the 10 male participants, 8 individuals expressed the belief that their female friends would likely become mothers or wives in 10 years' time. Only 2 participants acknowledged the possibility of their female friends pursuing professions such as teaching or medicine. Conversely, all 10 female participants displayed a more diverse and inclusive perspective, suggesting that their male friends could potentially become athletes, teachers, engineers, or doctors. These pretest findings underscore the presence of gender stereotypes and highlight the need for interventions that foster enhanced gender awareness and challenge traditional expectations.

The non-reactive communicative dialogue and empathy map activity served as transformative interventions that facilitated a shift in participants' perspectives regarding gender-based career expectations. Through these activities, the participants engaged in open and honest discussions about their personal experiences as men and women, fostering empathy and promoting a deeper understanding of gender dynamics. The empathy map activity, in particular, prompted participants to consider the emotions and experiences of individuals with different gender identities. Following these interventions, the participants' post-test responses exhibited significant changes in their perceptions of their female friends' future careers. The post-test results reflected a remarkable transformation in the participants' understanding of gender roles and career aspirations. All 10 male participants revised their views on the future careers of their female friends, recognizing their aspirations beyond traditional gender-based expectations. The revised responses included professions such as professors, nurses, doctors, and businesswomen. This shift signifies a heightened awareness and empathy-driven understanding of their female friends' dreams and aspirations. These findings highlight the power of empathy-based activities in fostering gender awareness and challenging gender stereotypes among students.

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GRS Q	Question	Pretest Response	Posttest Response
1	On a scale of 1-5, how well do you understand different emotions that people experience (1 being not well at all, 5 being very well)?	18 (3)	20 (5)
2	How often do you try to see things from other people's point of view? (Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never)	15 (Sometimes)	19 (Always)
3	How often do you try to comfort someone when they are feeling upset? (Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never)	16 Often	19 (Often)
4	In a group setting, how likely are you to speak up if someone is being treated unfairly? (Very likely, Likely, Neutral, Unlikely, Very unlikely)	10 (Very likely)	15 (Very likely)
5	When someone is upset, how do you typically react? (Try to comfort them, Ignore it, Get upset yourself, Other)	14 (Try to comfort them)	20 (Try to comfort them)
6	How well do you think you can recognize other people's emotions by looking at their facial expressions or body language? (Very well, Well, Somewhat, Not very well, Not at all)	13 (Well)	19 (Well)
7	How often do you feel empathy for others when they are going through a difficult situation? (Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never)	20 (Sometimes)	20 (Sometimes)
8	Have you ever helped someone in need, even if it meant going out of your way? (Yes, No)	18 (Yes)	20 (Yes)
9	How willing are you to help someone in need, even if you don't know them very well? (Very willing, Willing, Neutral, Unwilling, Very unwilling)	10 (Willing	15 (Willing)
10	How important do you think it is to show empathy towards others in everyday life? (Very important, Important, Somewhat important, Not very important, Not at all important)	10 (Very Important)	19 (Very important)

Figure 3. Table summarizing the data from the pretest and posttest questionnaires.

The pretest and post-test questionnaires based on the Gender Responsive Scorecard (GRS) provided valuable insights into the participants' understanding of different emotions that people experience. In the pretest, 18 participants rated their understanding as 3 on a scale of 1-5, indicating a moderate level of comprehension. However, after engaging in the empathy-based activities, all 20 participants in the post-test reported a significant improvement, with each participant rating their understanding as 5, reflecting a high level of empathy. These findings suggest that the empathetic approach utilized in the classroom activities effectively enhanced the participants' ability to grasp and relate to various emotional experiences, fostering a greater sense of empathy towards others (GRS Question 1).

The exploration of participants' perspective-taking abilities revealed noteworthy changes in their responses between the pretest and post-test questionnaires. In the pretest, 15 participants indicated that they sometimes attempted to see things from other people's point of view. However, after engaging in non-reactive communicative dialogue and empathy map activities, the post-test results showed a significant shift, with 19 participants reporting that they now always tried to understand others' perspectives. This transformation suggests that the empathetic approach facilitated a deeper understanding and appreciation for diverse viewpoints, promoting a more inclusive and empathetic classroom environment (GRS Question 2).

The assessment of participants' willingness to comfort others when they are feeling upset also yielded noteworthy findings. In the post-test questionnaire, 19 participants reported that they often attempted to provide comfort to individuals in distress. This finding indicates that the empathy-based activities fostered a greater sense of compassion and support among the participants. By engaging in discussions and activities that encouraged empathy, the participants developed an increased propensity

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to offer comfort and assistance, thereby creating a more nurturing and caring classroom environment (GRS Question 3).

The exploration of participants' readiness to speak up against unfair treatment in a group setting revealed notable changes in their responses. In the pretest, 10 participants expressed a strong likelihood of speaking up if someone was being treated unfairly. Following the empathy-based activities, the post-test results showed a considerable increase, with 15 participants now reporting a very likely inclination to address injustice. This change suggests that the empathetic approach empowered participants to advocate for fairness and equity, fostering a stronger sense of social responsibility within the classroom (GRS Question 4).

The participants' reactions to individuals in distress were assessed to gain insights into their empathetic responses. In the post-test questionnaire, all 20 participants indicated that they typically try to comfort someone when they are upset. This finding demonstrates that the empathy-based activities instilled a natural inclination among the participants to offer support and solace to others in times of emotional distress. By prioritizing empathy, the participants cultivated a more caring and compassionate classroom environment (GRS Question 5).

The participants' ability to recognize other people's emotions through facial expressions and body language was assessed in the post-test questionnaire. Nineteen participants reported that they possessed a good understanding of others' emotions based on visual cues. This finding suggests that the empathy-based activities enhanced the participants' perceptiveness and sensitivity towards non-verbal cues, enabling them to better comprehend and empathize with others' emotional states (GRS Question 6).

Exploring the participants' frequency of experiencing empathy for others going through difficult situations revealed consistent patterns between the pretest and post-test questionnaires. In both assessments, all participants reported sometimes feeling empathy for others. This finding suggests that the empathy-based activities did not significantly alter the participants' baseline level of empathy but provided reinforcement and validation for their existing empathetic inclinations (GRS Question 7-10).

The participants' willingness to help someone in need, even if they did not know them well, was examined in the post-test questionnaire. Fifteen participants expressed a willingness to offer assistance, indicating a readiness to extend support to unfamiliar individuals. This finding indicates that the empathy-based activities fostered a sense of altruism and a commitment to helping others, irrespective of their level of familiarity (GRS Question 9). These results align with previous research that highlights the positive impact of empathy on prosocial behavior (Eisenberg et al., 2010).

The perceived importance of showing empathy towards others in everyday life was assessed in the post-test questionnaire. Nineteen participants rated empathy as very important. This finding underscores the significance of empathy in fostering positive social interactions and promoting a more inclusive and compassionate society (GRS Question 10). It aligns with previous studies that emphasize the importance of empathy in creating supportive environments and reducing prejudice and discrimination (Batson et al., 2017; Davis, 1983).

The findings of this study highlight the transformative impact of empathy-based activities on gender sensitivity. By engaging in non-reactive communicative dialogue, personal storytelling, and empathy mapping, the participants demonstrated a remarkable shift in their understanding of gender dynamics. They moved away from stereotypical career expectations and embraced more diverse and empowering visions for both genders. This shift was evident in the revised responses between the pretest and post-test questionnaires, where male participants expanded their perception of female career possibilities,

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reflecting dreams of becoming professors, nurses, doctors, and businesswomen. These findings provide compelling evidence of the efficacy of empathy-based activities in challenging gender stereotypes and fostering gender awareness (GRS Questions 1-10).

Discussion
Gender Dynamics: Insights from Empathy-Based Activities

The process of actively engaging in the empathy map activities encouraged students to reflect on the societal pressures and inequalities surrounding gender roles. By swapping roles and imagining themselves in the positions of those typically marginalized or subject to stereotypes, participants gained a deeper insight into the challenges faced by individuals with different gender identities. This exercise prompted 20 students to recognize the emotional implications of gender-related statements, fostering empathy and compassion towards those affected by gender biases. Through these activities, participants began to grasp the significance of creating an inclusive and gender-sensitive environment, realizing that true understanding requires acknowledging not only what is said or done but also the emotional toll such expectations and stereotypes can have on individuals.

The findings from the empathy map activities underscore the importance of addressing gender dynamics and challenging traditional gender norms in educational settings. The results reveal that 20 participants experienced a significant shift in their perception of gender-related statements after engaging in the empathy-based activities. This change signifies a deepened understanding of the emotional impact of gender stereotypes and biases. By immersing themselves in the experiences of others, students developed a heightened awareness of the need to challenge societal expectations and promote equality. These insights highlight the potential of empathy-based approaches as effective tools for cultivating a gender-responsive atmosphere in elementary schools. Educators and researchers can draw valuable lessons from these findings, emphasizing the significance of empathy in fostering inclusivity, promoting gender equality, and addressing the prevailing gender dynamics within educational environments.

A striking observation from the empathy map activities was the emergence of a prevalent sentiment among the participants. Out of the 20 students, a substantial majority of 16 students expressed a shared perspective in the "say" column, stating that "men and women are both human beings with feelings." This finding reflects a fundamental shift in their understanding of gender dynamics and highlights the development of a more empathetic and inclusive mindset. The recognition that emotions are not exclusive to a particular gender challenges traditional stereotypes and reinforces the notion that all individuals, regardless of gender, have the capacity to experience a wide range of emotions.

The consistent response of the participants, with 16 students acknowledging the emotional humanity of both genders, indicates a collective realization of the need to combat gender biases and foster equality. This shared perspective in the empathy map activities demonstrates a growing understanding among the students that gender should not define or restrict one's emotional capabilities. By recognizing the shared humanity and emotional complexity of all individuals, regardless of gender, the students exhibit a progressive mindset that challenges stereotypical notions and promotes empathy-driven interactions.

The findings from the empathy map activities align with the broader objective of the research, which sought to examine the effectiveness of empathy-based approaches in cultivating a gender-sensitive atmosphere in elementary schools. The overwhelming response from the participants, with 16 students acknowledging the emotional experiences of both genders, provides valuable insights into

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the power of empathy to challenge gender stereotypes and foster inclusivity. These findings underline the significance of incorporating empathy-driven practices within educational settings to promote understanding, compassion, and equality among students. Furthermore, they serve as a catalyst for educators and researchers to explore innovative strategies and interventions that prioritize empathy and contribute to the creation of gender-responsive environments that celebrate the shared emotional humanity of all individuals.

The findings from the empathy-based activities shed light on the transformative potential of fostering empathy in elementary school settings to promote gender sensitivity. Through engaging in the empathy map activities and reflecting on gender-stereotyped statements, the 20 participants demonstrated a significant shift in their understanding of gender dynamics. Crucially, 16 of the students expressed the belief that both men and women are human beings with feelings, challenging traditional stereotypes and affirming the shared emotional humanity of all individuals. These findings highlight the power of empathy as a catalyst for change and emphasize the importance of nurturing inclusive mindsets among students.

Enhancing Gender Awareness through Empathy: Key Findings and Implications

The implications of the findings of pre-test and post-test on career expectations are significant for educators, policymakers, and researchers concerned with promoting gender equality and inclusivity. The study underscores the potential of empathy-based interventions to enhance gender awareness and challenge traditional gender norms among students. By providing opportunities for non-reactive communicative dialogue and empathy-building activities, educational institutions can foster a more inclusive environment where students recognize and celebrate the diverse aspirations and capabilities of individuals of all genders.

The key findings of this research have important implications for educational practices and interventions aimed at enhancing gender awareness. By encouraging students to engage in open and empathetic discussions, educational institutions can play a vital role in dismantling gender stereotypes and promoting inclusive career aspirations. The findings suggest that promoting empathy and understanding can empower students to challenge societal expectations and cultivate a more equitable society. Moving forward, it is crucial for educators and policymakers to integrate empathy-building activities and non-reactive communicative dialogue into curricula, ensuring that students develop a deep understanding of gender dynamics and foster empathy towards their peers.

The significant changes observed in the post-test responses of the participants indicate the potential of empathy-based interventions in reshaping gender expectations and fostering inclusivity. These findings align with previous research that emphasizes the role of empathy in challenging gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality. Studies by Davis and Nixon (2017) and Smith et al. (2019) have demonstrated that empathy-building activities contribute to increased awareness and understanding of gender dynamics among students. The current study further reinforces these findings, highlighting the transformative power of empathy in enhancing gender awareness and promoting more diverse career aspirations.

The revised perceptions of the male participants regarding the future careers of their female friends provide insights into the influence of empathy on shifting gender-based expectations. By engaging in non-reactive communicative dialogue and empathy map activities, the participants were able to step outside their own perspectives and consider the aspirations and dreams of their peers. This process aligns with the concept of perspective-taking, which has been shown to foster empathy and challenge biases (Cameron et al., 2020). Through perspective-taking, individuals develop a more

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nuanced understanding of diverse experiences and are better equipped to challenge societal norms and stereotypes.

The transformation of the participants' perceptions indicates the potential for empathy-based interventions to promote gender equity and inclusivity in educational settings. This finding is supported by the work of Eagly and Karau (2021), who argue that fostering empathy and reducing gender stereotypes are critical for creating more equitable environments. The current study adds to this body of research by demonstrating the effectiveness of specific empathy-building activities, such as non-reactive communicative dialogue and empathy map exercises, in challenging gender biases and fostering inclusive perspectives.

The findings of this study have important implications for educational practitioners and policymakers seeking to address gender disparities and promote inclusivity. Incorporating empathy-building activities into curriculum design can empower students to challenge societal expectations and develop a deeper understanding of gender dynamics. By providing opportunities for open dialogue and perspective-taking, educators can facilitate transformative learning experiences that promote empathy, respect, and acceptance. Furthermore, interventions that foster empathy have the potential to create long-lasting changes in attitudes and behaviors, leading to a more equitable and inclusive society (Hoffman, 2020).

Impact of Empathy on Gender Sensitivity: Results from Classroom Activities

The findings of this study contribute to the existing body of literature on empathy and gender sensitivity in educational settings. By implementing empathy-based activities, such as non-reactive communicative dialogue and empathy mapping, the participants exhibited a significant increase in their understanding of diverse emotions, perspective-taking, and their willingness to comfort others. These outcomes align with research that emphasizes the importance of empathy in fostering positive social relationships and creating inclusive learning environments (Eisenberg et al., 2010; Hoffman, 2020). The results highlight the potential of empathy-based interventions to enhance gender awareness and promote empathy as a crucial skill for students to develop.

The transformative impact of the empathy-based activities is evident in the shift observed in participants' pretest and post-test responses regarding their perception of gender roles and career possibilities. The initial pretest responses demonstrated gendered stereotypes, with male participants predominantly envisioning female friends as future mothers or wives, and female participants perceiving male friends in professions like athletes, teachers, engineers, and doctors. However, the post-test results indicated a significant change in their perspectives, as all participants revised their responses to reflect more diverse and empowering career aspirations for both genders. These findings are in line with studies that highlight the role of empathy in challenging and transcending traditional gender norms (Beasley, 1999; Gündoğdu & Kılınç, 2020). They underscore the potential of empathy-based interventions to reshape students' perceptions of gender and contribute to more inclusive and equitable school environments.

The outcomes of this study have implications for educational practice and curriculum development. By incorporating empathy-based activities into classroom settings, educators can cultivate a gender-sensitive atmosphere that promotes empathy, understanding, and inclusivity. The findings highlight the importance of creating safe spaces for students to share their experiences, engage in perspective-taking, and challenge gender stereotypes. Furthermore, the success of the empathy-based interventions in this study suggests the potential for broader implementation in educational contexts to enhance gender awareness and promote empathy among students. Educators

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and policymakers can use these findings to inform the development of curricula and strategies that foster empathy and promote gender equality in schools.

While this study provides valuable insights into the impact of empathy-based activities on gender sensitivity, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The sample size was limited to 20 participants, and the study focused on a specific grade level. Future research could include a larger and more diverse sample to strengthen the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, employing a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative data from interviews or observations with quantitative measures, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and the effectiveness of the empathy-based interventions. Despite these limitations, the present study offers valuable contributions to the field, highlighting the potential of empathy-based activities in fostering gender sensitivity and creating more inclusive educational environments.

The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of the impact of empathy-based activities on students' social and emotional development. The significant increase in participants' self-reported ability to recognize emotions, engage in perspective-taking, and comfort others suggests that these activities promote the development of key empathic skills. This aligns with previous research that highlights the positive effects of empathy on interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution, and emotional well-being (Eisenberg et al., 2010; Decety & Cowell, 2014). The results underscore the potential of empathy-based interventions to nurture empathy skills among students and cultivate a more empathetic and compassionate school environment.

The change in participants' responses regarding their willingness to speak up if someone is being treated unfairly reflects a notable shift in their sense of agency and advocacy for social justice. The increase in participants' likelihood to assertively address unfair treatment indicates that empathy-based activities have the potential to empower students to challenge and confront instances of gender inequality (GRS Question 4). These findings are consistent with research that emphasizes the role of empathy in promoting social activism and advocating for equity and justice (Kahn et al., 2017; Macaulay & Griffin, 2016). They highlight the transformative power of empathy-based interventions in fostering students' sense of social responsibility and their commitment to creating a more just and inclusive society.

The improvement observed in participants' ability to see things from other people's point of view suggests a notable enhancement in their perspective-taking skills. The post-test responses, with the majority of participants indicating that they now try to see things from others' perspectives always or often, indicate a significant growth in their empathic understanding (GRS Question 2). This finding aligns with research that emphasizes the role of empathy in facilitating perspective-taking, promoting empathy-driven decision-making, and reducing stereotyping and prejudice (Duan et al., 2015; Galinsky et al., 2008). It underscores the effectiveness of empathy-based activities in fostering a more empathic and inclusive mindset among students.

The results of this study indicate that empathy-based activities have a positive impact on students' recognition and understanding of emotions. Participants' increased confidence in their ability to recognize others' emotions through facial expressions and body language suggests the development of empathic sensitivity (GRS Question 6). This finding aligns with previous research that emphasizes the role of empathy in improving emotional intelligence, social competence, and interpersonal relationships (Gross & Thompson, 2007; Mayer et al., 2008). It underscores the potential of empathy-based interventions to enhance students' emotional awareness and their capacity to connect with and understand others' emotional experiences.

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The findings of this study highlight the importance of empathy in promoting prosocial behavior among students. The participants' willingness to help others in need, even if it meant going out of their way, increased significantly after engaging in empathy-based activities (GRS Question 8). This finding aligns with research that emphasizes the positive association between empathy and prosocial behavior, such as helping, sharing, and cooperating (Eisenberg et al., 2006; Padilla-Walker et al., 2016). It underscores the role of empathy-based interventions in fostering a sense of compassion and encouraging students to engage in acts of kindness and support.

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence of the positive impact of empathy-based activities on gender awareness and sensitivity among students. The significant changes observed in participants' perspectives, attitudes, and empathic skills highlight the potential of such interventions to challenge gender stereotypes, promote inclusivity, and cultivate empathy in educational settings. These findings have important implications for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers in designing and implementing interventions that foster empathy and address gender-related issues. By prioritizing empathy-based approaches in the classroom, schools can contribute to the creation of a more equitable and empathetic society.

CONCLUSIONS

This research has shed light on the significant impact of empathy-based activities in enhancing gender awareness among elementary school students. The findings demonstrate that engaging students in non-reactive communicative dialogue, personal storytelling, and empathy mapping can contribute to a positive shift in their understanding of gender dynamics. Through these activities, the students exhibited an increased recognition of the emotions and experiences of others, as well as a greater willingness to challenge unfair treatment and support individuals in need.

One of the strengths of this research lies in its use of a pretest and posttest design, which allowed for the assessment of changes in students' attitudes and perceptions. The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of the empathy-based activities, particularly in terms of the students' comprehension of different emotions and their willingness to empathize with others. Additionally, the qualitative data gathered through non-reactive communicative dialogue and personal storytelling added depth and richness to the analysis, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the students' experiences and perspectives.

However, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations of this research. Firstly, the sample size of 20 students may not fully represent the diverse range of experiences and backgrounds within elementary schools. A larger and more diverse sample would provide a more robust foundation for generalizing the findings. Secondly, the study primarily focused on sixth-grade students, and it would be beneficial to explore the effectiveness of empathy-based activities across different age groups to assess any developmental variations. Lastly, the research was conducted within a specific school setting, and the findings may not be fully applicable to other educational contexts.

Despite these limitations, the outcomes of this research have significant implications for promoting empathy and gender sensitivity in elementary schools. Educators can utilize empathy-based approaches as a valuable tool in creating a more inclusive and respectful learning environment. By addressing the lack of empathy and fostering a deeper understanding of gender dynamics, schools can contribute to the development of empathetic individuals who are equipped to challenge gender stereotypes and contribute to a more equitable society.

This research highlights the potential of empathy-based activities to enhance gender awareness and provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers aiming to cultivate

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empathy and promote gender equality in educational settings. Future studies with larger and more diverse samples could further strengthen the evidence base for incorporating empathy-based approaches in schools.

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