

The Teacher-Empathy Model (TEM): Strategic Design for Secondary School Teachers in Nigeria

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Abstract

In order to address the current gap in promoting quality education, psychological well-being, and positive social cohesion outcomes in Nigerian secondary schools in particular, and in the Nigerian society in general, there is a need for a focused, practice-based intervention rooted in Counselor Education. This dissertation employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to conduct a formal diagnostic needs assessment of teacher-empathy among secondary school teachers in Nigeria. The quantitative phase, using the Empathy Assessment Scale (EAS), revealed a critical relational inconsistency: while teachers reported high levels of observable empathic Cognitive Behavior (CB), they, however, displayed low internal motivation for sustained or consistent Social Interaction (SI) and Emotional Identification (EI). The qualitative Semi-Structured Interview (SSI-Teacher), aside from confirming the critical relational inconsistency, also explained this motivational deficit. It identified a systemic absence of structured Restorative Conversation skills and a lack of intentional Self-Care/Self-Awareness practices, confirming the absence of a “self-paradigm” necessary for high-quality, sustainable empathic stances in the high-stress Nigerian context. The complementary and probing investigation conducted among secondary school students in Nigeria (SSI-Student) reveals a strong need for “active listening and genuineness” among secondary school teachers in Nigeria. Grounded in this evidence-based diagnosis, the research constructed the Teacher-Empathy Model (TEM). The TEM is a structured professional development framework designed to directly address the low SI and EI motivations by explicitly training teachers in self-awareness, self-care, and restorative dialogue. The TEM is a strategic design that provides a practicable, context-relevant solution to enhance the quality of teacher-student relationships, foster student relational and intellectual outcomes, and contribute to national progress.

Keywords: Empathy, Teacher-Empathy, Teacher-Empathy Model, Self-awareness, Social Interaction, Emotional Identification, Cognitive Behavior, Quality Teaching and Learning, National Cohesion.

Introduction

In Nigeria today, there are numerous state-of-the-art secondary schools, even of British, French, or European standards. However, most parents lack the financial means to send their children to these schools. They are left with the option of sending their children to the many poorly equipped and managed schools. This means that most secondary school teachers must teach under unfavorable conditions, and at times, teaching and learning opportunities are reduced to near zero. Quality education is a secure way through

which self-realization and self-empowerment can be achieved. When an individual is significantly empowered, a nation is likewise empowered.

The question remains: how can the majority of secondary school teachers, who work under unfavorable conditions, be motivated to engage and to deliver a quality education that can significantly empower students and the nation? How can the physical and mental burnout of teachers be addressed? The teacher's empathy behaviour is a strategic behaviour capable of achieving the required goals. A personal childhood experience of the researcher with an empathetic teacher motivated this project: it is an experience that fosters a feeling that drives one toward positive actions towards self-improvement. Empathetic individuals are less concerned about personal gain but are deeply concerned about the others' present and future welfare or self-empowerment. The role of “feelings” in education and human capacity building is evident: positive feelings have a positive impact across all dimensions of human competencies. The 21st-century definition and understanding of “literacy” have expanded to encompass not only the ability to read and write (UNESCO, 2025) but also the ability to engage creatively in life situations to solve problems and make decisions. It is the ability to engage in lifelong education that translates into significant transformations and impacts on human society.

Educational institutions would play a vital role in providing high-quality education that empowers future generations of learners. It implies that teachers are the core agents for the required social change: transforming learners through educational initiatives and strategies that channel their views and values in consonance with their lived experiences. Teachers must strategically roll out teaching methods and skills that favor relational and quality engagement with students: a teacher-student relationship that touches the heart. This involves feeling with others and understanding how they feel. In other words, intellectual education must be accompanied by character education embracing social and moral competencies (Education Revolution Association, 2024). This necessity remains valid in the 21st century. The implication for an inclusive understanding of literacy is that teachers are placed at the crossroads of multiple functions aside from the basic teaching role. They now have to build and safeguard emotional and relationship balances that can contribute to students' learning capability. Also, teachers must make significant efforts to connect classroom subject content to real-life experiences so that students not only acquire passing grades but also acquire life-enabling skills, behaviors, and models. In brief, teachers are obliged to play the role of counselors, taking care of the emotional and psychological needs of students, faculty members, and parents of students. The objective of such an updated understanding of literacy is to engage all learners (citizens) of the world in a lifelong self-learning experience that promotes basic human values for a peaceful life in societies. The question is: are teachers prepared for this multi-purpose role? Specifically, are Nigerian secondary school teachers prepared for this role?

In the effort to exploit the role of emotions in teaching and learning experiences, this work strategically focuses on “empathy” as a focal point for exploring how emotional balance among teachers, faculty members, and students could improve teaching and learning experiences in a school environment. The work proposes “teacher-empathy model” (TEM) as a necessary competency for 21st-century teachers, especially for teachers in secondary schools, where adolescents (students) stand on the bridge to adult life. As such, the work explores the relevance of counseling theories, skills, and attitudes in educational environments and activities. Strategically, it aims to use counseling tools to improve educational quality and, consequently, improve the act of good citizenry among Nigerians. The 21st-century educational packages must not be limited to knowledge acquisition; they must have the capacity to impact life skills

and foster positive attitudes in students, faculty members, and society, starting from the micro-society. Evaluating teaching or scholarly effectiveness must not always be limited to measuring students' passing rate, faculty members' performance, or the institution's overall performance rating. The measure of teaching effectiveness must encompass positive outcomes and impacts on the personalities of students and faculty members, as well as positive effects on human society, ranging from micro-society to macro-society (Chua & Baildon, 2024).

Review of Related Literature

This work adopts a thematic process for the review of related literature. First, stating the playground for the research work: the human existential life. Then, it proceeded to explore the meaning and effect of empathy and symbolic interactions in human life. The bedrock of human existence is the ability of humans to communicate with each other symbolically, and through these complex communication networks, can build healthy communities and societies. Second, it is believed that the ability to empathize improves the quality of human communication, and so explores the role of empathy in achieving quality education. Third, Nigeria's education quality is examined to evaluate its relevance in Nigerian society. Fourth, the role of empathy in establishing relevant educational policies and content that could strategically contribute to constructing a healthy and peaceful national identity in Nigeria and elsewhere was explored.

Human Life

Humanistic psychology, parallel with humanistic educational theories, focuses on the creative human capacities and abilities, in collaboration with the complex external factors, notably the environment, to create a quality human life. Carl Jung (1875-1961) explained that the aim of every human's growth and development was individuation. According to him, an individuated personality is a consequence of healthy growth and balanced human development (McLeod, 2025). Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) and Carl Rogers (1902-1987) named such an individuated person a self-actualizing individual (Perera, 2024). And according to Alfred Adler (1870-1937), a healthy personality is one with a sense of social interest or "community feeling" – Gemeinschaftsgefühl (Hoffman, 2025). Individuation, self-actualizing, self-realized, and social interest are all achieved through a developmental process where the individual moves from one stage of consciousness to the other, eventually arriving at a greater level of consciousness, not only of the "self - Eigenwelt," but also conscious of the "other - Mitwelt," and conscious of the "environment - Umwelt" (Martensen, 2021). Kohlberg, in his theory of morality, traced the moral development level of an individual from a lower level, where the individual is mainly pre-occupied and concerned with the self, to a more inclusive level, where the individual's moral views begin to respect the concerns of others, and finally respecting and showing concern for the entire human race: the universe (McLeod, 2025).

Human beings are naturally good and are created to seek out what is good (WGU, 2020, & Cherry, 2024). The realization of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is guided and informed by the belief in the inherent goodness of every individual. However, events in the history of human life leave one with the belief in the contraries. The existence of ideologies and policies contrary to human life, peace, and progress is evident. Against such tendencies that do not consider the "wholeness" of human life, this work appraises the concept-based approach to all human activities, especially in learning. Concept-based learning considers the varied and complex aspects of human life and existence and strives to focus on the connecting links. In this way, every individual is seen as part of the whole, and the whole is seen as

complex individuals; the context gives meaning to every event and experience in the lives of humans. In the same light, the context (environmental factors) of learning enables effective teaching and learning (Chua & Baidon, 2024).

It is now necessary, therefore, that efforts should be made towards building a pathway that respects the peculiarity of the individuals and, at the same time, appreciates the complexity of human life and relationships. What is needed is to construct a strategy that will motivate and enable mutual understanding of individuals, and more importantly, such understanding could lead to positive actions for the betterment of the “whole.” The question becomes how individuals must communicate to achieve a mutual understanding, since “understanding” presupposes “communication” or “interaction.”

Empathy

Empathy is a primary human natural capacity and means of understanding others and their personality. It is described as “Einfühlung,” meaning “feeling into”. Empathy is the disposition to understand someone else's feelings in real-time and in a given context. Because of its contextual implication, Philosophers have described empathy as a means of experiencing others and events in their phenomenological immediacy (Cherry, 2024). And what is “empathy?” Although many research works and works of literature have been written on empathy, it is under-researched. Psychologists agree that empathy is a multidimensional human concept that proves difficult to ascribe a clear definition. Empathy is generally understood as understanding others' feelings and perspectives and being moved emotionally. It could be described as both cognitive and affective experiencing in real-time of other persons' whole situation or condition (Depow, 2021). Cherry (2024) distinguishes three types of empathy: affective empathy – the ability to understand the feelings of the other person. Cognitive empathy: the ability to understand the mental state of the other person. Furthermore, somatic empathy is having a physical (body) reaction to the other person's experience. In their explanation of empathy, Jin et al. (2023) named “behavioral empathy” instead of somatic empathy. Behavioral empathy (action) clearly explains the outcome of both affective and cognitive empathy. It is more plausible to support the idea that all three types or levels of empathy should not be understood as separate events or experiences; rather, they could best be described as “three-in-one.” One type is not meaningful without the accomplishment of the other two. In this way, it becomes easy to differentiate empathy from sympathy. It is simply saying that genuine or authentic empathy triggers creative or positive action for the benefit of all parties, and it transcends the ties of family, tribal, or friendship proximities. The feeling of sympathy for the other person would remain on the level of emotions without any concrete action to help the individual avoid such negative feelings or events in the future. It is necessary to explain that empathy involves understanding others and feeling with them in their emotions; at the same time, one must distinguish one's feelings from the feelings of others.

Empathy as Emotional Intelligence

This explanation of empathy is fascinating as it allows us to question the quality of empathy expressed by children. Although infants can express empathy, we doubt if such empathy would yield any creative outcome. Research has also shown that women appear to show more empathy than men, and other factors, like age, may influence one's motivation to express empathy (Depow, 2021). This notion of women's domination in the show of empathy is seen to have given credence to the misconception of empathy as a “weak emotion” and, consequently, confirms the general misleading notion that identifies women as a weaker gender. In most human cultures, the male gender is taught from adolescence to resist expressing

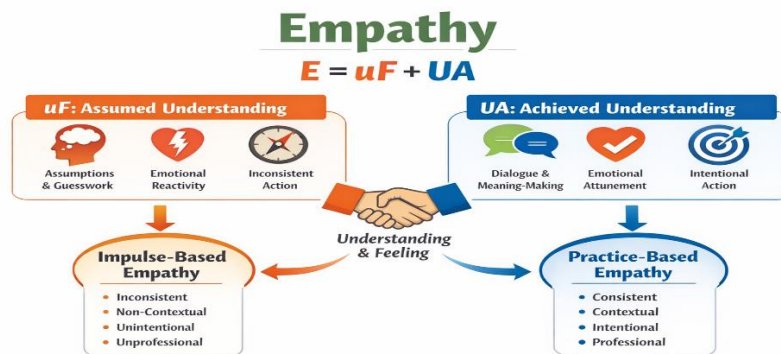
emotions like crying. These invariably must have contributed to the culture of shying away from the concept of “empathy.” This work identifies empathy as an expression of informed and mature consciousness that consequently leads to a quality decision to engage in any concrete and positive action or behavior for the parties involved. However, true empathy can only be achieved when the empathizer is capable of self-awareness and emotional regulation (Krol & Bartz, 2021 & Murphy, 2021). Summarily, in the context of a school environment (learning environment), empathy is a relation of understanding and feeling that yields a positive action for a perceived good:

$$E = uF + UA.$$

(Where “E” is empathy, “u” is understanding, “F” is feeling, and “A” is action).

The formula recognises the complexity in the attempt to define empathy, and at the same time, affirms that empathy is one human behavioral concept. It is not a ready-made reality with mathematical accuracy functions, but a reality that is created through positive human interactions and engagements. It is the reality that emerges on the complex road of human engagements. The “u” represents the often assumed or presumed understanding. The resulting empathic action is often inconsistent, non-contextual, unintentional, and unprofessional. The “U” represents the understanding achieved through a symbolic interaction or meaning sharing. The resulting empathic action is always consistent, contextual, intentional, and professional.

Figure 1: Empathy Diagram (Copilot Graphic)



Like a phenomenological experience, an empathic stance seeks to see the other in their natural or true self without stereotypes or judgments. It considers what can emerge (be discovered) from the other through positive reflections on the individual’s behaviors and shared experiences. Although in itself, empathy may not be readily subjected to the measurement of natural sciences and procedures, its outcome and impact, however, could easily be observed, measured, and evaluated. When focusing on achieving creative and positive outcomes, one could say that empathy is an expression of authentic emotion. It includes all efforts made by individuals or groups to translate feelings (emotions) into relevant and acceptable commitments or actions. If it is not so, then it is not empathy but sympathy. It is the quality of one’s feelings (affective) and knowledge (cognitive) of the other’s situation that motivates one into action (behavior).

According to Westman (2021), it involves observing others’ tone, voice, body language, and facial expression in real time. It is making a conscious effort/sacrifice/disposition by one individual to listen and understand the feelings of others as different from their own feelings. This conscious understanding consequently leads to effective and positive behavior for the benefit of all.

Symbolic Interaction (SI)

At the core of all human interactions are internalized symbolic or meaning-making exchanges that are often beyond human observation. Symbolic interaction (SI) theory analyzes human interactions in society by trying to understand the subjective meanings that individuals impose on objects, events, and behaviors. In this analysis, the individual's subjective meaning is given primary attention because it is believed that people behave based on what they believe and not what is objectively true. Then, how are the social communities constructed? Social communities are constructed through human interpretation of others' behaviors, and these interpretations are referred to as the "definition of the situation" (Ashly, 2024). This is to say that the quality of social communities would depend on the quality of the interpretations given to the individual's subjective meaning to arrive at a shared meaning. This "shared meaning" contributes to the building of cohesive human societies (Mardon, 2021). It is necessary to have a quality and authentic understanding of the other's subjective meaning, and empathy plays a necessary and irreplaceable role. Like empathy, symbolic interaction strives to understand individuals in their immediate context and situation, giving an interpretation that corresponds with what is genuine and authentic for a quality life in human society.

We had earlier expressed the divisiveness as against "wholeness" that exists in our present human society, which has yielded to negative consequences like discrimination and violence. What is the origin of such inhuman behaviors and tendencies? It has become necessary to examine the role of educational institutions in building integrated and peaceful human societies.

Education and Nation Building

In the following lines, we wish to examine the role of educational institutions in constructing a human society where everyone is respected and given opportunities to achieve self-realization. In other words, it builds an empathic society where no one is left behind in social responsibilities and privileges. There is an urgent need to cultivate empathic behaviors among the world's citizens. The Western world had been keen on cultivating intelligence and individualistic tendencies, but little or no attention was paid to cultivating empathy. In the United States of America, for instance, Hall (2025) expressed the need for empathy in American society. In exploring the role of education in nation-building and peaceful cohesion among world citizens, it becomes significant to inquire about the "how" of such engagement: How can educational institutions contribute to building a peaceful human society?

Nigeria, as a nation, needs such a strategy to contribute to national peace and unity. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the sixth in the world. It is one of Africa's most densely populated countries, with approximately 218.5 million people living in an area of 923,768 km² (356,669 sq. mi). (Udo, 2023). It will be a waste of human and natural resources of a nation when the nation's educational programs do not lead to a significant level of students' educational capacity and peaceful cohesion among its citizens. This is the case in the multicultural country of Nigeria, where more than six hundred thousand (600,000) students graduate each year from Universities (Aririah, 2024). Nevertheless, many individuals remain intellectually unproductive, and peaceful cohabitation among her culturally diverse citizens remains a pipe dream. According to Aremu (2024), Nigerian society generally lacks the expression of empathy. He insisted on the need for an intentional empathic culture in the country

There exists a strong correlation between stress, poverty, and empathy: stress and poverty have negative impacts on the motivation of an individual to engage in an empathic behavior (Nitschke & Bartz, 2023). The Nigerian experience is one laden with political, social, economic, and religious uncertainties (Onwuka,

2024). These unpredictable climates have constantly left most of her citizens in fear of the unknown. These uncertainties continued to negatively impact her educational policy and quality. It is often the case that teachers and lecturers are not paid on schedule or are not paid their salaries for long periods. In most government or public schools, no adequate and conducive structures that could positively impact teaching and learning experiences. It is also possible that unqualified teachers are employed due to a lack of trained and qualified teachers, coupled with the financial inability of many school proprietors to hire and pay qualified teachers. Perhaps the relational effects between learning and emotion could help us explain Nigeria's low-quality and unproductive educational and national policies. Positive emotions enhance and motivate learning, whereas negative emotions deter learning and reduce students' learning efficacy. Negative emotional states like anger, sadness, stress, worries, and trauma reduce learning efficacy as they deter students from making decisions and retaining learning content. As negative emotions affect learning negatively, they also affect teaching negatively. An emotionally stressed teacher is likely to appear aggressive and impatient with students. This negative emotion could also result in a low motivational stance for teaching (Chen, 2021). It becomes necessary to make efforts, no matter how little, to initiate engaging teaching and learning strategies that would improve educational standards and impact adolescents' interactions with others in Nigeria. These quality interactions gained through teacher empathy are hoped to ensure, in the long term, a good level of collaboration among Nigerian citizens and world citizens.

Empathy and Nation Building

Therefore, to answer the “how” of educational institutions contributing to nation-building, this work suggests improving educational quality among secondary school students using the empathic teaching model. This model strategically empowers students through the empathic teacher-student relationship. As an empathic model, it considers learners' contextual emotional and social situations and creatively cooperates with them for a better outcome and impact.

The International Commission on the Future of Education (ICFE), established by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2019, presented nine (9) concrete actions for the advancement of education in future societies. These nine (9) suggestions would be better described as “empathy-motivated suggestions”; they vividly express the need for connectedness in human society, especially for realizing an educational package relevant to today's society. Consequently, there is a need for collective living and identity, improved teacher-student relationships or interactions, global solidarity, and educational content and methodology that is relevant to learners of all ages (UNESCO, 2020, 2021)

In Nigeria, the age range for secondary school students is ten (10) to eighteen (18) years; it is the adolescent stage. According to Erik Erikson (1902-1994), this stage of life is a transitory bridge where individuals pass from childhood to adulthood, and the question of self-identity preoccupies one in this stage (Orenstein, 2022). The major physical changes in this stage of development are the biological changes. These changes are associated with puberty and sexual development that occur in both boys and girls; the boys grow taller and more muscular, with deep voices, and the girls develop in the breast region, and the hips expand. The girls also begin to experience menstruation. This stage of life is characterized by decision-making, leaving home, self-evaluation, commitments, and finding a career path in the world. The adolescent begins to accommodate others in a mutual interpersonal dependency, engaging in serious relationships with peer groups and others.

According to Jean Piaget (1896-1980), the cognitive development level achieved here is the Formal Operational level; adolescents can now reason logically and aim for qualities they desire in themselves and others (Malik & Marwaha, 2023). Although adolescents are generally egocentric, consideration for others and social care are present, and adolescents are readily involved in service-learning and volunteering activities. Through these, adolescents seek effective ways to express their concern for others. This stage of development is one where the adolescent is in search of personal identity to attain self-establishment, and finding a role model is very important to them. When this does not happen, the consequence is that the adolescent experiences gender and gender role confusion. This could further lead to depression, drug use and abuse, violent behaviors, and low self-esteem. The success of this stage is for the adolescent to engage in a meaningful relationship and be actively involved in peer group activities. Searching and confirming the “self” (Eigenwelt) is a severe concern at this stage. For the first time, the “other” (Mitwelt) begins to have a place in the self and, with the self-given, achieves greater community (Umwelt) influence. The cognitive milestone achieved in this stage and the adolescent's zeal for engaging in meaningful relationships with the self, others, and community have informed our choice to focus on this stage to model empathic educational strategy.

Teacher-Empathy

Educational institutions are places for teaching and learning, and the basis for teaching is to achieve an understanding. We now wish to explore teacher empathy and its significance in teaching and learning experiences. The call for applying empathy in learning and teaching experiences is to humanize teaching and learning experiences, where the zeal to add value to the lives of learners is a priority over any profit-making. Research evidences attest that empathic stances improve teaching and learning experiences (quality education) (Ampofo, 2025). Teacher-empathy is an attempt to express and describe the model of teachers required to create positive impacts among adolescent students of the 21st century. It is believed that this model of teachers would positively impact students' academic and social lives, reproducing educationally balanced, morally correct, and socially inclusive citizens for the present and future centuries. In this work, an inclusive understanding of empathy will be implied: it is understanding what others might be thinking (cognitive) and how others might be feeling (affective), and consequently, these understandings lead one to a positive behavioral (action) response for others. Simply put, empathy is the motivation to translate emotions into actions or behaviors. So, for any quality empathy, the underlying emotional state of the individual must be balanced.

Like many other Humanistic Psychologists, Abraham Maslow believes that students have an inherent desire to achieve self-realization when a conducive environment is provided. This is also a call for educators to be willing to make sacrifices and often go outside the curriculum (outside the box) and apply social skills, feelings, and practical skills in teaching students. Concretely, educators or teachers can listen to students' ideas, opinions, and concerns, provide verbal and non-verbal motivational stances, and encourage group interactions and work among students. Then, opportunities and dispositions are created for teachers and learners to engage in creative initiatives, manage resources, and collaboratively prevent situations whereby already existing teaching and learning disadvantages trigger more disadvantages (UNESCO, 2021). These existing teaching and learning disadvantages in Nigeria include insufficient and improper learning structures and materials, and poor teacher welfare schemes.

Westman (2021) suggests eight (8) approaches teachers could use to engage with students empathically:

1. Eliminating trauma or stress triggers, not focusing on traumatized or stressed students, watching out for les avant events or triggers of trauma or stress.
2. Ensuring teacher clarity for classroom management – ensuring all students understood all instructions during class periods.
3. Cultivating a sense of belonging by building relationships – teachers do not use classification or discriminatory approaches in communicating or organizing student groups.
4. Promoting feelings – checking and validating students’ feelings daily, more importantly, before the start of lessons.
5. Tapping into intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic rewards - teachers must encourage the natural motivational strength inherent in everyone, rather than rewarding students for every good action or grade.
6. Giving consequences instead of punishments – students better understand the negative consequences of their behaviors rather than punishment.
7. Having restorative conversations – teachers could find time to explain or apologize to students for an earlier negative encounter.
8. Practicing self-care – teachers must first be able to empathize with the self (emotionally balanced) if they are to empathize with their students. This goes with the saying that no one gives what they do not have (p. 23).

The essence of the empathic teaching and learning relationship is that both the teacher and students engage in relationships with the “whole person,” not only with the intellectual mind but also with a feeling heart. Intrinsically, it involves validating academic content and making sure foundational facts in human life, works of literature, philosophy of life, and history are prioritized. Ultimate external questions are asked: purpose, meaning, and value of life. Moreover, all teaching and learning challenges are embraced, and no child is unteachable.

It is necessary and required that teachers go beyond the standard work requirements and engage in an open and concerned relationship with students. Westman (2021) also suggested that another way of teaching with empathy or transmitting empathy is through literature reading and storytelling. Through these, students become aware of the life stories of others who are different from them or not as socially stable as they are. Also, forming students into temporary groups has proven to help them cultivate empathy with their fellow students and learn how to collaborate (p. 52). Student grouping helps to cultivate a sense of belonging by building a quality empathic relationship between teachers and students, among teachers and students. In a school environment, belonging to a “learning community”, learning is the focus, and it is neither race, religion, gender, nor grades.

Quality Empathy

For a professional adult (the teacher) to model empathy, Westman (2021) explained that there is a need for the teacher to attain a level of life balance through the process of self-reflection. She enumerated three pedagogical steps to help professional adults attain self-balance (p. 66):

Step 1: It involves teachers identifying their emotions and answering the question: How do I feel?

Step 2: It involves teachers validating their feelings and honestly answering the question: Why do I feel this way?

Step 3: It involves teachers focusing on what they can control and setting an action goal. It answers the question: What can I do?

The ability to constantly self-reflect helps teachers maintain and achieve quality role modeling to their students without any social overboarding, consequently making an honest evaluation of their teacher-empathy styles. It is essential to mention here that the ability of teachers, as professional significant adults, to assess the situation and figure out “what they can control” is a necessary step in actualizing quality empathy in a controlled environment like the school. This means that teachers can set a goal that is relevant, achievable, and repeatable. Only such a goal can be observed and evaluated in terms of short-term and long-term outcomes and impacts. Teacher empathy does not mean lowering academic content and standards or increasing students’ grades; it means diligently validating and eventually removing or minimizing obstacles that could impair students’ learning and retention capacity. In this study, empathy would be defined and understood as the ability of one individual to understand the feelings or behavior of another individual (affection) and experience an emotional reaction to such feelings or behavior (physiology). Eventually, the one is motivated to engage in any creative action or behavior (behavior) for the well-being of the other individual. This definition or understanding embraces three main aspects of empathy, here referred to as the three empathy models:

1. Social interaction (SI) or affection. 2. Emotional identification (EI) or physiology. 3. Cognitive behavior (CB) or action (Malakcioglu, 2022). In this study, these aspects of empathy are referred to as empathy models for easy and logical comprehension. The three models are considered to be inseparable. Conclusively, quality empathy is achieved only when the individual is able to attain a significant level of emotional balance through self-reflection and self-awareness. This is to say that the individual can distinguish their emotions from the emotions of others.

Empathy and Educational Policies

The need for a quality human life prompts us to examine how societies are affected by the various governmental and institutional policies. Specifically, we want to focus on educational policies and how they affect national identity and cohesion among citizens. Undeniably, education plays a leading role in assuring creative and sustainable social change in human societies. In discussing educational policies, we want to explore how these policies have contributed to national growth and peace among citizens of the nation and what role empathy plays in national growth and peacebuilding. Convincingly, the quality of the civilization of any nation or society depends on the quality of its educational policies. Consequently, educational policies cannot be formulated without regard to contextual societal issues and conditions. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), speaking on the recent, perceptive condition of world peace and health, emphasized that the role of education in global peace and health must be the focus now, and that educational programs and activities can no longer be run as usual: “Education cannot thrive with ready-made content built outside of the pedagogical space and outside of human relationships between teachers and students. Nor can education be dependent on digital platforms controlled by private companies” (UNESCO, 2023, p. 6).

UNESCO (2024) insists that for educational policies and models to be relevant in the 21st century, they must favor the global human capital and resources, advocating for global citizenship and social justice, with a significant level of accountability and responsibility, it must include strategic planning and self-empowering, and recognizing the global society but respecting the multicultural dimension of people. Educational policies cannot be constructed or drafted without the collaboration of all stakeholders, especially those who are the focus of the policies. UNESCO (2024) further noted that traditional life values of care and equity are often neglected in the quest for economic profits and gains. That is, policies are

often constructed without any reference to the local context for adequate validation. The result is that educational policies and leadership are set up but are grossly irrelevant to the population for which such policies were formulated. The long-term impact of such educational policies is the production of students who are intellectually and morally uninformed. Such students, as is often the case, become exposed and disposed to all forms of violent behaviors in society. The focus of any meaningful educational policy and leadership is the people, and when this is not the case, then there is no education, policy, or leadership. The relevance of any educational policy is dependent on the level of its empathic nature: Is it caring, contextual, and inclusive? Bamgbose (2022) lamented the irrelevance of the Nigerian educational system. He argued that the educational curriculum and programs disconnect with societal needs and aspirations, and some individuals have described the Nigerian educational system as a “scam” (fraud or fake). One is tempted to ask: to what extent does this educational disconnect in Nigeria contribute to the proliferation of discriminatory and social violence in Nigerian society?

Again, in the wake of global positive appraisal for the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in classrooms for more effective teaching and learning experiences, there are, however, some skeptical opinions on this positive appraisal of AI as a teaching and learning tool. There are doubts about the capacity of AI-generated prompts and content to adequately respond to real contextual and creative human needs. Also, could AI-generated content respond qualitatively to the emotional and social needs of teachers and students? These doubts are more worrisome when the concern is about quality classroom lesson content delivery. Would AI robots, for instance, be capable of delivering lesson content in a way that triggers quality students’ motivation, and improve lesson content retention? According to Jenkins (2025) and Revzin & Revzin (2025), despite global appraisal for AI tools, there is still a significant need for humanness in the classroom. It requires human agency to generate quality and positive emotional interactions between teachers and students. These interactions build and improve students’ intellectual and social skills. This further affirms the significance of this research project.

Therefore, given the economic hardship and political instability that have created consistent psychological and physical stress among most Nigerian educators, there is a need to focus on empathy styles or models that are practically affordable and easy to implement. Additionally, it must be relevant to translate into quality teaching and learning outcomes in Nigerian secondary schools, ultimately impacting national peace and cohesion in the long run. The literature review aimed at exploring, through a linear consequential projection, the relevance of empathy in human society and how empathy, when applied in the field of education, can lead to an individual’s self-realization and, consequently, contribute to a peaceful and healthy societal or national identity. It is believed that adolescents can develop quality empathy when adequately modeled by significant adults. This is to say that consistent teacher empathy behavior would motivate and initiate similar behaviors among students. In the long term, such empathic behaviors are transformed into enduring behavior among students and in Nigerian society. The empathy formula above expresses the quality of empathy that could be modelled to students by their Principals and Teachers. The students can then engage in an empathic interaction with other individuals: fellow students, teachers, family members, and others. When adolescents are empathically motivated, in the long run, it yields more positive social behaviors among citizens of nations. It is interesting to mention here that the validity of an empathy stance lies in its focus on content in context interpretation, which is symbolic and meaningful to the individuals.

Research Gaps

It is evident that many research works have been done on empathy, and its positive role in education has been implied. However, there is strong evidence of a lack of concrete or intentional expression of empathy in human society, specifically in educational institutions. This work focused on the impact of empathy in Nigerian secondary schools and, therefore, identified contextual and methodological gaps as the main gaps relating to the focus and objective of the study.

In Nigeria, Aremu (2024) expressed that empathy is missing in Nigerian society. This, however, is not to be understood as a total absence of empathic behaviors in Nigerian society. Inferably, intentional empathic stances capable of contributing positively to educational and national well-being are missing. Abba et al. (2020) had expounded the need for schoolteachers to connect with their students to enable an inclusive educational package in Nigeria. In other words, there is a perceived lack of quality emotional engagement in educational institutions in Nigeria. The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) (2013), in enumerating the codes of conduct for teachers, included “empathy” as a guiding principle to regulate the relationship between teachers and students. The code of conduct, however, did not express concretely how empathy could be engaged in an educational environment to achieve effective teaching and learning experiences. Empathy is a complex attitude or behavior, and pedagogical initiatives or steps are needed for its implementation. Therefore, it becomes necessary to investigate and explore the various strategies Nigerian secondary school teachers use to connect with their students, colleagues, and parents of students, and determine to what extent these behaviors can be considered quality empathy.

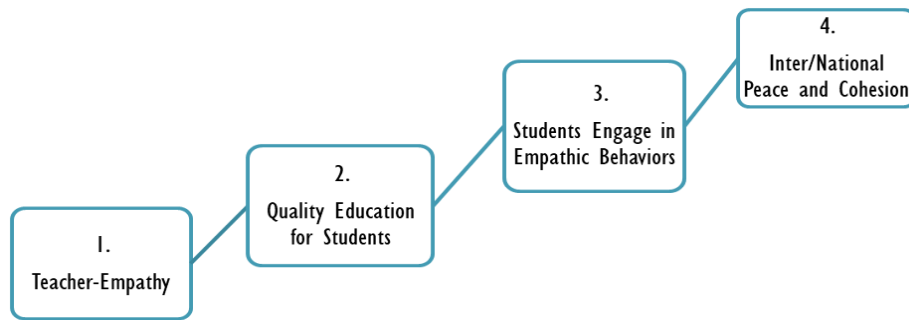
This project investigates the various strategies, in the form of actions or behaviors, that Nigerian teachers use to express empathy. The strategies that are beneficial to teaching and learning are collected, and awareness of these strategies will be created among Nigerian secondary school teachers. The relevant strategies will include those that help to improve students’ learning capacity and collaborative skills. In this way, these strategies become proactive, preventive, and curative educational initiatives that would be used to advocate and promote quality empathy stances in the Nigerian secondary schools.

Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives

Theoretical Perspective

The project aligns with a positive humanistic view of human nature. This is the view that humans have the natural capacity to self-develop in an enabling environment. Carl Rogers (1902-1987) enumerated three (3) core conditions that can trigger self-development in individuals: congruence or genuineness, unconditional positive regard (UPR), and empathy. These conditions form the enabling environment for the positive enabling of individuals. He further described this enabling environment as a psychological one in which individuals are regarded unconditionally and positively (McLeod 2025). Alfred Adler (1870-1937), for instance, believes that individuals are motivated by social relations and connectedness to achieve meaning in life.

Figure 2: Theoretical Perspective



The teacher-empathy model is a student-centered approach to teaching where teachers make efforts to “feel” the “feelings” of students and engage in strategic initiatives toward achieving an effective teaching and learning process. In these efforts, whether individually or collectively, teachers focus on strategically transmitting knowledge, skills, life values, and attitudes to students. These empower students to achieve improved educational outcomes and social well-being. The teacher-empathy would create an enabling environment/opportunity for students' quality learning and social behaviors in the school environment, in particular, and society in general (Westman 2021 & Kley 2024).

Conceptual Perspective

The conceptual framework of the project subscribes to concept-based learning, where every dimension of human life is important for impactful learning. It advocates for quality and relevant educational packages for practical and peaceful living in human society. These concepts are identified as: empathic behavior, self-awareness, affective behavior, quality education, and nation-building.

Figure 3: Conceptual Perspective



In this study, the strategic objective (SO) is to improve the quality of educational content and outcomes. This is believed to impact national peace and cohesion in the Nigerian society positively. However, such an SO requires a strategic methodology (SM): quality empathy behaviour. Quality empathy behaviour is achieved through quality self-awareness, which in turn motivates quality relationships in social life (affective behaviour). At the same time, quality empathy styles, in any learning environment, empower teachers and students for effective teaching and learning experiences.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is seen in its effort to suggest a solution for the needed improvement of educational quality and a peaceful lifestyle in Nigeria. In this effort, the work harnesses and explores the human capacity (empathy) to enhance educational initiatives and improve human life in the present and future centuries. It strives to empower the adolescents of the 21st century with knowledge, life skills, and attitudes for a peaceful and collaborative lifestyle in Nigeria. The project attempts to answer the need for guidance and counseling training for teachers using a focused, relevant, and practical approach. Although teachers have an ethical responsibility towards students, parents, and society, they lack the necessary guidance, counseling skills, and competencies for effective outcomes. The research proposes a teacher-empathy model (TEM) that will provide pedagogical steps for teachers. It presents the TEM as a strategic educational model that could remain valid for the Nigerian nation and other nations. It privileges human agency as the proper motivational force, and its significance extends beyond the 21st century.

Research Questions

Diagnostic: 1. Given the perceived non-evident empathic behaviour in the Nigerian society, what is the level of empathy among Nigerian secondary school teachers (Aremu 2024)?

Explanatory: 2. To explain the perceived non-evident empathic behavior, it is necessary to ask how Nigerian secondary school teachers understand and express empathy.

Solution-Oriented: 3. In view of proposing any solution, it is necessary to ask how Nigerian secondary school teachers' perceived empathy styles impact the students (Aririah 2024)?

Methodology

The objective of the research was to construct an empathy model or guide that would enable the researcher to engage in long-term advocacy for an empathic teaching style in Nigerian secondary schools. So, there was a need and concern to examine Nigerian secondary school teachers and investigate, firstly, their empathy style level. Secondly, how they understand and practice empathy. And thirdly, the impact of such empathic practice on students. As such, it was necessary to construct a mixed-design investigation strategy to maximize the collection of quality data for the study. Also, considering the intended long-term engagement in the research domain, the researcher has opted for a more participant-friendly consent design. In this concept, participants are seen as future collaborators rather than subjects, and in turn, they are motivated to own the project and offer quality commitments to the study.

Research Design

The mixed-method research design using the explanatory sequential process was adopted in this research. It investigated the quality of empathy among secondary school teachers in Nigeria (public and private) using an empathy questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. It strived to acquire data that most represents the real-time feelings of teachers. The design was accomplished in two phases: first, the quantitative questionnaire was distributed, collected, and analyzed. Second, the qualitative interview questions were distributed, collected, and analyzed. On the one hand, the empathy questionnaire used to collect the quantitative data gave an exploratory representation of teachers' empathy level and their motivational level of empathy practices. These helped construct the content of the semi-structured interview. On the other hand, the semi-structured interview was used to collect the qualitative data. It

helped to check and explain teachers' responses to the empathy questionnaire for quality affirmation of their responses (Tegan, 2022 [Revised] & McLeod, 2024). As a research work in education and counseling, requiring both quantitative (statistics) and qualitative (thematic) data contents, respectively, the mixed-method design was strategically chosen to provide data that could respond to educational and counseling inquiries. The quantitative diagnosis was necessary to identify the scope of the problem, and the qualitative phase was necessary to explain the cause of the problem. Sequentially, these data contents were used to construct the teacher-empathy model.

The quantitative investigation was achieved through an Empathy Assessment scale questionnaire (EAS) distributed among principals and teachers in secondary schools across Nigeria. The pilot test of the EAS questionnaire included evaluative questions that sought to inquire about the instrument's suitability in the Nigerian context. The qualitative investigation was conducted through a semi-structured interview constructed by the researcher based on the results of the empathy questionnaire. Individual consent from every participant was required before the online distribution of the pilot test questionnaire, the EAS questionnaire, and the interview questions. The instruments were evaluated by an expert. The outcome of the interview results was used to construct a Teacher-Empathy Model (TEM), which will serve as the instrument for advocating for quality education across Nigeria and elsewhere.

Participants

Quantitative Participants

The researcher used a purposeful sampling research investigation to target secondary school teachers across Nigeria. A total of one hundred and fifty (150) teachers were targeted for the quantitative study design (Strba, 2024). The participants were recruited through Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp's platform of the Nigerian Teachers. Thirty (30) participants were selected to respond to the pilot-test questionnaire. These participants were not recruited to take part in responding to the actual EAS questionnaire but were eligible to participate in the SSI.

Qualitative Participants

The qualitative participants were the same population sample used in the quantitative design: Nigerian secondary school teachers. This was to ensure that the data collected throughout the research were homogeneous in content and had been collected from an informed and controlled group of individuals, like teachers. The number of participants in the qualitative study design was dependent on the response saturation limit.

The demographic information on the participants showed the inclusive criterion for participation in the research. It attempts to ensure that no individual teacher in Nigerian secondary schools was purposely excluded from the study.

Researcher-Participant Relationship

The research process promoted a respectful relationship with all participants. The recruitment and consent letter explained that participants were free to withdraw their consent at any stage of the research. They were also informed of the confidentiality of their personal details. It is hoped that by this way, to establish a collaborative relationship with all participants necessary for both the present research and for future research and advocacy.

Measures

The research method was mixed (quantitative and qualitative) using an explanatory-sequential design. The research instruments were the standardized Empathy Assessment Scale (quantitative) and the Semi-

Structured Interview (qualitative), constructed by the researcher. The project supervisor evaluated the quantitative and qualitative instruments.

Quantitative Instrument

Empathy Assessment Scale (EAS). The quantitative questionnaire was the standardized empathy assessment scaling questionnaire, comprising thirteen (13) questions and no reverse scoring. It is presented in a Likert format with five (5) response options ranging from "Never" (N) to "Always" (A). It is an empathy assessment scale that investigates empathy levels of individuals in social interactions (SI) with four (4) items, cognitive behavior (CB) with five (5) items, and emotional identification (EI) with four (4) items. It is suitable for research interventions in an educational environment (Malakcioglu, 2022). The instrument has a concurrent validity value of Pearson correlation " $r=0.467$ ", and test-retest reliability values (r) within four-week intervals were all above 0.60 at a 0.01 significance level. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.696 (social interaction, four items), 0.802 (cognitive behavior, five items), and 0.964 (emotional identification, four items). The total Cronbach's alpha was 0.845 (Malakcioglu, 2022, pp. 360-362). The SI items investigate the ability of an individual to recognize and connect with others through their feelings (affective). The CB items investigate the ability of an individual to understand and engage with others through positive actions or behaviors (cognitive). The EI investigates the extent to which an individual can understand and be affected by other people's behaviors (physiological).

The instrument explores all factors of empathy and, as such, was suitable for the present concern of this research project. It helped to explore and predict the respondents' weak and strong emotional connecting domains (SI, CB, and EI). It was highly preferred for its simple grammatical structures and few items: thirteen (13) items. As such, it was easier to accomplish.

The questionnaire helped to gain a general view of teachers' level of practice of empathy in the school environment. The SI items helped explore whether teachers recognize or feel when students have emotional or social concerns or learning concerns. The EI items helped explore whether teachers express their concerns about students' behavior or learning outcomes. The CB items helped to explore whether or not teachers are willing to engage concretely to help or address students' concerns or learning-related concerns. Thus, the EAS questionnaire enabled the researcher to evaluate teacher-empathy quality in the school environment and construct the interview questions sequentially. A pilot test of the empathy questionnaire was conducted to ensure the instrument was easily understood. Also, respondents did not find it time-consuming to accomplish. The pilot test included evaluation items that sought to gauge participants' opinions on the suitability of the instrument for use in the Nigerian context. An expert inquiry into the suitability and quality of the EAS instrument was also conducted.

Qualitative Instrument

Semi-Structured Interview (SSI-Teacher) Questions

The qualitative part of the research was achieved through semi-structured interviews (SSI-Teacher) conducted by the researcher. This was to investigate how teachers understand and concretely express empathy in school and specific contexts. It also explored the impact of such teacher empathy on students' behaviour and their capacity to collaborate with others in a peaceful style of life. The SSI-Teacher provided the opportunity to understand participants in a real-time context, which was hoped to contribute to the quality and reliability of both quantitative and qualitative data collected. This further explains the significance of the qualitative design.

The research proposed four (4) questions that investigated the objective of the research. The questions strategically self-probe to attain a deeper understanding of respondents' lived experiences vis-à-vis empathy. These included: (1) How would you explain empathy? (2) Give one example of how you model empathy in the school. (3) Name one impact your empathy style is making among the students. (4) What specific empathy style would you suggest, and why? The teachers' understanding of empathy is very significant for the objective of this research work. As such, the qualitative instruments investigated the research question: What is the quality of understanding of empathy among Nigerian secondary school teachers? One can only practice what one has understood. Strategically, questions one (1) and two (2) complement each other to provide for a significant level of evaluation of teachers' understanding and practice of empathy. They also provide diagnostic and explanatory information on the perceived teachers' empathy styles. Questions three (3) and four (4) are self-complementary to provide for a significant level of evaluation of empathy styles suggested by teachers. The question provided solution strategies and information for the construction of a practicable and relevant TEM.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

The research paper adopted the standardized EAS questionnaire's original validation and reliability values. The EAS instrument was also evaluated and graded by an expert. The project supervisor evaluated the SSI questions to achieve content validity. Content validation ensured that the instruments measured the intended factors or objectives for which they were constructed.

Procedure

Recruitment and Consent Letter

The project used online platforms for the recruitment of participants and the distribution and collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The consent letter was distributed to participants at the pilot-test stage and the quantitative design stage, and remained valid for the qualitative design stage. However, participants were duly informed that they are free to withdraw their consent at any stage of the survey. Aside from the demographic information, participants' online media details and information were not collected in this study. It was desired that all individuals who participated in the quantitative design be available to participate in the qualitative design. Nevertheless, it was considered that other participants from the research population sample could provide further information on the central phenomenon under study, and so, would add to the quality of the research investigation. Evidently, getting numerical values (quantitative) and descriptive values (qualitative) from different individuals from the same research population sample was beneficial to the objective of the research design (Creswell, 2022). In this research, individuals who were selected to participate in the pilot-test questionnaire were not selected to participate in the actual questionnaire exercise. This was to ensure fair participation and the convenience of respondents in the study. The online platforms used in this study are the Nigerian Teachers' Facebook and WhatsApp platforms.

Quantitative Data

The research used Google Forms (online) to distribute and collect the pilot test and the empathy questionnaire data. The researcher is a member of the Nigerian Teachers' Facebook and WhatsApp platforms, and the platforms were used to invite secondary school teachers (including principals) on the platform to participate in the research survey. Permission was sought from the administrators of the platforms. The Facebook and WhatsApp platforms provide two-way, easy access to the distribution and collection of research data (Wallace & Llewellyn, 2024).

In June 2024, the consent letter was posted on the Facebook and WhatsApp platforms of teachers, and they were required to indicate their willingness to participate in the study by sending a “I am happy to participate in the study” message to the researcher. From July 2024 to January 2025, ninety-eight (98) teachers were recruited online, and thirty (30) teachers were sent the pilot test questionnaire (following the order of recruitment). A total of twenty-seven (27) teachers completed the pilot-test questionnaire. A total of sixty-eight (68) teachers were sent the EAS questionnaire, and sixty (60) of them completed the questionnaire. In February 2025, an on-site distribution of the EAS questionnaire to ninety (90) teachers was conducted, and sixty-six (66) completed the questionnaire. A total of one hundred and twenty-six (126) Teachers in Nigeria responded to the EAS questionnaire, with sixty (60) responses collected online and sixty-six (66) responses collected onsite. The onsite distribution and collection of data was done among secondary school teachers in Nigeria (a convenience purposive population). Oral permission was obtained from school management, and the consent letter was read and explained to teachers. They were informed that the accomplishment and submission of the questionnaire paper would serve as physical evidence of their consent. The onsite responses were input into the Google form statistics to achieve the SPSS statistical analysis.

Qualitative Data

The SSI-Teacher text question was distributed asynchronously to participants through their online media platforms. The online platforms were Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp texts. The language for the interview was English. Participants were at liberty to respond to the interview questions through any online media. The respondents were also free to respond at their convenience without any undue stress. These measures ensured, first, that respondents had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the interview question, meaning, and objective. Consequently, they were able to provide relevant and quality responses to the questions. Second, respondents had the opportunity to withdraw their consent to participate in the survey if they considered the content of the interview question ethically disturbing.

The choice of online media for the delivery and collection of data was for a sole reason: the instruments would be easily accessible to respondents. This enabled many respondents to access the instruments through their mobile phones, laptops, tablets, and desktop computers. Consequently, responding to the questionnaire and SSI-Teacher would be convenient, too. The choice of online media interviews was to enable the researcher to access teachers from every part of Nigeria and save the cost and risks of traveling around the country.

In March 2025, after the descriptive analysis of the quantitative data, the researcher reconstructed the SSI-Teacher questions and distributed them online to all recruited participants. Also, an on-site distribution of the interview questions to twenty (20) teachers was conducted, and nineteen (19) responded to the questions. As of October 2024, a total of three (3) teachers responded online. Therefore, a total of twenty-two (22) Teachers in Nigeria responded to the SSI-teacher questionnaire, with three (3) responses collected online and nineteen (19) responses collected onsite. The onsite distribution and collation of data were done among secondary school teachers in Nigeria (a convenience purposive population). Oral permission was obtained from school management, and the consent letter was read and explained to teachers. They were informed that the accomplishment and submission of the interview questions would serve as physical evidence of their consent. The onsite responses were input into the Google form statistics.

Data Analysis Procedure

Empathy Assessment Scale Questionnaire Analysis (quantitative)

The research empathy questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS Statistics (version 20). The frequency and percentage of each item in the empathy questionnaire were calculated using SPSS Statistics, followed by an evaluative and descriptive data analysis. Descriptive analysis helped to identify any patterns or exceptions in the dataset, including both weak and strong behavioral patterns. The empathy scoring key served as a guide for this discussion.

Empathy Scoring Key

According to the scoring key, each item in the questionnaire has a grading score from one (1) to five (5) in a Likert format. The options “Never” have a grade of one (1), “Rarely” has a grade of two (2), “Sometimes” has a grade of three (3), “Often” has a grade of four (4), and “Always” has a grade of five (5). There was no reverse scoring in the instrument (Malakcioglu, 2022). This project relied on the proposition that every human being could show empathy. Individuals could express empathy when situations or events present themselves, and with the right motivations. The scoring key guided the researcher in evaluating teachers' capacity to show empathy, which may not necessarily represent the quality of such empathic behavior.

Empathy Scaling Interpretation

In this research, and for easy interpretation and understanding, the response options of “NEVER and RARELY” were interpreted as representing a significant indication of one’s unwillingness to show empathy (very low motivation for empathy). “OFTEN and ALWAYS” were considered and interpreted as a significant indication of one’s willingness to show empathy (high motivation for empathy). “SOMETIMES” was considered a significant indication of one’s unwillingness to show empathy (low motivation for empathy).

Table 1: Empathy Scaling Interpretation

Items	Interpretation	Code
Never and Rarely	very Low Motivation for Empathy	vLME
Sometimes	Low Motivation for Empathy	LME
Often and Always	High Motivation for Empathy	HME

Semi-Structured Interview Analysis (qualitative)

Data Coding Process

The thematic analysis method was used to analyze data collected from the interview. This method of analysis allowed for high accessibility and flexibility in the interpretation of data collected. Also, inductive and deductive coding analysis could be applied using this method, Braun and Clarke (2012) & (2020), as cited by Ahmed (2025). Since this research aims to develop a teacher-empathy model formulated based on real-life situations, the thematic analysis method was a suitable method for the investigation: it focuses on existential realities and contexts of participants where they narrate life events as they see and understand them. It is information-driven or data-driven, enabling the researcher to reflectively discover the actual realities of the population under study. The coding process was guided by the six-phase reflexive process as enumerated by Braun and Clark (2020) as cited by Ahmed (2025). It includes: (1) data familiarization, (2) data coding, (3) generating initial themes, (4) developing and reviewing themes, (5) refining, defining, and naming themes, (6) writing reports (p.2).

Table 2: SSI-Teacher Hand Coding Process

No	Phase	Action
1	Preparing data for analysis.	The data was printed out into a hard copy for easy viewing.
2	Reading and studying the data.	The researcher read the data repeatedly to understand any particular or general view in the responses. (Bracketing mode).
3	Summarizing the raw data.	Each response was summarized to capture and keep the main ideas in the response. (Bracketing mode).
4	Data coding.	Codes (in the form of short phrases that capture the central experience, as expressed in the raw data) were assigned to each response. (Reflexive mode).
5	Assigning categories.	Suggestive categories were initially assigned to the responses. Eventually, categories were reframed, retained, or merged. (Reflexive mode and memos).
6	Theme formulation.	Suggestive themes were initially assigned to responses. Eventually, they were reframed, retained, or merged. (Reflexive mode and memos).

The SSI-Teacher questions provided the line of focus throughout the coding process.

1. Diagnostic strategy: How would you explain empathy? Attention was focused on whether respondents' explanations underscore the three main empathy models: SI, EI, and CB models.
2. Explanatory strategy: Give one example of how you model empathy in school. Attention was focused on whether respondents' explanations underscore the CB empathy model.
3. Solution strategy: Name one impact your empathy style is making among the students. Attention was focused on whether or not the respondents' explanation underscores students' ability to engage in any of the three empathy models: SI, EI, and CB empathy models, and other creative and inclusive initiatives.
4. Solution strategy: What specific empathy style would you suggest, and why? Attention was focused on the empathy style with the highest suggestion, and contains the three empathy models (SI, EI, and CB).

In this research, the teachers' responses were rephrased and considered as raw data. These raw data were further transcribed into codes to trace out any pattern in the responses. The codes enabled the researcher to detect the categories emerging in the response, and finally, the categories guided the formulation of themes to adequately represent the meaning of the raw data. In exploring and respecting the unique perspective and characteristics of behavioral research, the nomenclatures: homogenous codes (questions 1 and 4) and phenomenal codes (questions 2 and 3) were used to describe the characteristics of the codes and consequently affirm that the various aspects of the concept under study had been captured. This affirmation enabled the estimation of the saturation proximity of the dataset (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022, & Sandelowski, 2008, as cited by Mpfu, 2025).

Ethical Considerations

The empathy questionnaire and the semi-structured interview were administered after proper consent was obtained from the participants. The accomplishment and submission of the quantitative questionnaire and qualitative interview response were used as physical evidence or proof of respondents' consent. The

research has no reference or connection to any financially interested party, and the researcher accepted and ensured the responsibility for the confidentiality of participants' personal information. The permission for distributing the research questionnaire was obtained from the appropriate authorities. In this study, participants were not at any stage placed in danger, and the maximal convenience of participants, including respect and human values, was upheld. The confidentiality of personal details of all participants were not disclosed in this paper or during the study. The research was designed to use the online method for data distribution and collection. However, neither the quantitative nor the qualitative data collected attained the required sample size. It became necessary to engage in on-site data distribution and collection to make up for the required sample size. In all stages of the research, the required methodological rigors were observed.

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

Pilot Test Result

The pilot test was conducted to investigate the suitability of the EAS questionnaire for the study and to determine whether respondents understood the instrument. It was distributed to thirty (30) recruited teachers. However, only twenty-seven (27) of them responded to the questionnaire. The instrument was found to be significantly easier to understand, and both experts and respondents rated it as suitable for use in the Nigerian context.

The pilot test was conducted among participants across Nigeria, with 11.1% in the north, 11.1% in the south, 18.5% in the east, and 59.3% in the west. The pilot test results of the EAS instrument in a different context significantly indicate that the instrument explored the feelings and cognitive behaviors of the Nigerian secondary school teachers vis-à-vis the three empathy models factoring in the instrument: social interaction (SI), emotional identification (EI), and cognitive behavior (CB). A total of twenty-seven (27) teachers (female: 44.4%, male: 55.6%) responded to the questionnaire, resulting in a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.705, which indicates reliability and average internal consistency of the items. An expert and respondents' ratings of the instrument’s suitability in the Nigerian context were high. The instrument was rated from 1 (Not suitable) to 10 (Highly suitable). The lowest rating was 5 (five), and the highest was 10 (ten). The resulting alpha value of 0.705 (acceptable internal consistency) indicates that the instrument is reliable in exploring teachers' affective, physiological, and cognitive behavior (Islam, 2025).

EAS Questionnaire Result

The objective of the Empathy Assessment Scale (EAS) was to gain an exploratory level of empathy among secondary school teachers in Nigeria. It enabled the prediction of the level of teachers' motivation to engage in empathic behaviors in the school environment. As such, it provided the answer to the research question one (1). It shows the level of teachers’ motivation to socially interact (SI), emotionally identify (EI), and cognitively engage with others in behaviors (CB).

Table 3: EAS Result in SI, EI, and CB Sequence

	EAS Items	vLME	LME	HME
1SI	Being together with a sad person, I feel sad too.	12.7%	38.1%	49.2%
4SI	Somebody else’s happiness makes me feel happy too.	12.7%	27%	60.3%
10SI	Among worried people, I become anxious.	17.4%	50.8%	31.7%

12SI	Seeing a person is made surprised, I feel excited too.	9.5%	39.7%	50.8%
3EI	I get angry at the wrongdoer character in a story.	13.5%	46%	40.5%
7EI	Watching dramatic movie scenes, I cry tears of sadness.	38.9%	37.3%	23.8%
9EI	A funny cartoon entertains me.	15.9%	36.9%	45.3%
13EI	I get scared of the characters in horror movies.	22.2%	55.6%	22.2%
2CB	I sincerely congratulate my successful opponent.	7.2%	6.3%	86.5%
5CB	I don't hesitate to help a harmless animal in hardship.	27%	40.5%	32.5%
6CB	I try to calm someone who is afraid.	11.9%	31%	57.1%
8CB	I understand people's feelings from their behavior.	2.4%	37.3%	60.4%
11CB	I don't go after someone who is angry.	31.8%	33.3%	34.9%

EAS Result Summary 1

1. There is a high level of teachers' motivation for empathy (HME).
2. There is a low level of teachers' motivation for empathy (vLME + LME).

Tale 4 further provides a modified presentation of result.

Table 4: EAS Result in vLME+LME and HME Difference

	EAS Items	(vLME+LME) - HME
1SI	Being together with a sad person, I feel sad too.	-1.6%
4SI	Somebody else's happiness makes me feel happy too.	20.6%
10SI	Among worried people, I become anxious.	-36.5%
12SI	Seeing a person is made surprised, I feel excited too.	1.6%
3EI	I get angry at the wrongdoer character in a story.	-19.0%
7EI	Watching dramatic movie scenes, I cry tears of sadness.	-52.4%
9EI	A funny cartoon entertains me.	-7.5%
13EI	I get scared of the characters in horror movies.	-55.6%

2CB	I sincerely congratulate my successful opponent.	73.0%
5CB	I don't hesitate to help a harmless animal in hardship.	-35.0%
6CB	I try to calm someone who is afraid.	14.2%
8CB	I understand people's feelings from their behavior.	20.7%
11CB	I don't go after someone who is angry.	-30.2%

The minus sign (-) indicates that the percentage sum of vLME and LME is greater than the percentage value of HME. This indicates that the factor being measured has a low-level impact.

Result Reliability

The Cronbach's Alpha of 0.754 was achieved using SPSS Statistics (V. 20). The alpha value is considered acceptable; nevertheless, it indicates that the level of reliability of the results is not excellent. (Islam, 2025). The resulting alpha value of 0.754 indicates the level of coherence of teachers' responses in exploring their affective (SI), physiological (EI), and cognitive behaviors (CB). This "acceptable alpha value" provides the basis for a statistical evaluation and prediction of the quality of empathy as practiced by secondary school teachers in Nigeria. To achieve this, the project analyzed the SI, EI, and CB data values relying on their statistical percentage outcomes.

EAS Result Summary 2

1. There is a low level of teachers' motivation to socially interact [SI].
2. There is a low level of teachers' motivation to emotionally identify [EI].
3. There is a good level of teachers' motivation to engage in cognitive behavior [CB].

Therefore, based on the results of summaries 1 and 2, there is evidence of teachers engaging in empathic behavior. However, there is a low-level motivation among teachers to express SI and EI.

The quality of SI and EI determines the quality of empathic behaviors (CB). This result reviews the poor quality (unprofessional) of teachers' empathic behaviors.

The diagnostic result indicates variability in motivation, indicating that Nigerian secondary school teachers' motivation to engage in empathic behavior is significantly inconsistent and unprofessional. Perhaps this inconsistency in empathy motivation may have contributed significantly to the description of the Nigerian citizenry as generally lacking in empathy. Also, the obvious low motivation to socially interact (SI) and emotionally identify (EI) would confirm and explain this inconsistency, leading to a non-significant impact. It further confirms the proposition that most African modern cultures consider empathy (show of emotion) as a show of weakness rather than a show of intelligence, and so do not significantly engage in empathic behaviors (Aremu, 2024). Therefore, there was a need to further investigate teachers' understanding of empathy. This further investigation paid attention to whether such understanding includes the ability to socially interact (SI) and emotionally identify (EI) with the feelings of others. The quality of their feelings for others will determine the quality of their empathic actions or behaviors (CB). Logically, a quality understanding of empathy would certainly lead to effective modeling of empathy.

Qualitative Results

The objective of the qualitative investigation achieved with the semi-structured interview (SSI-Teacher) was to confirm the results or the outcomes of the quantitative investigation. First, it strived to attain significant clarity on the understanding of empathy by Nigerian secondary school teachers. Second, it investigated how Nigerian secondary school teachers concretely engage in empathic behavior. Third, it exploited the quality of such empathic behaviors. Fourth, the qualitative investigation sought to inquire from teachers about any suitable empathic behaviors that could contribute positively to teaching and learning experiences in the Nigerian context. A total of twenty-two (22) teachers from across Nigeria responded to the SSI.

Question 1

Twenty (20) respondents' (Rs) explanation of empathy indicated an unconditional positive stance (UPS), expressing the ability to socially interact (SI), emotionally identify (EI), and be motivated to engage in cognitive behavior (CB). One (1) respondent (R) indicated a conditional positive stance (CPS), expressing the ability to EI and CB. One (1) R indicated a positive action stance (PAS), expressing the ability to CB. There is a high level of understanding of empathy among Nigerian secondary school teachers.

Memo:

1. SI and EI are directly unmeasurable (latent variables).
2. Homogeneous codes.

Question 2

In indicating one (1) example of how they model empathy in the school, a total of eight (8) Rs indicated a positive action stance (PAS), expressing their ability to SI and CB. Five (5) Rs indicated a positive verbal stance (PVS), expressing their ability to SI and CB. Three (3) Rs indicated a positive cognitive stance (PCS), expressing their ability to SI and CB. Three (3) Rs indicated a positive listening stance (PLS), expressing their ability to SI, EI, and CB. And one (1) R indicated a self-awareness stance (SAS), expressing the ability to SI, EI, and CB.

There is evidence of a high SI and CB empathy models, with lower evidence for EI.

Memo:

1. Only one (1) R indicated modeling self-awareness.
2. Safe-awareness is significantly necessary to distinguish one's feelings from others' feelings.
3. Do teachers' job-oriented responsibilities qualify for teacher empathy behaviors?
4. Do teachers' parenting role-play behaviors qualify for teacher empathy behavior?
5. Phenomenal codes.

SSI-Teacher Q1 and Q2 Probing

The Q1 reveals evidence of a high level of understanding of empathy by Nigerian secondary school teachers. However, Q2 reveals a low level of EI and a low level of self-awareness by teachers.

Question 3

In naming one (1) impact their empathy style is making among the students, a total of three (3) Rs mentioned positive intellectual impact (PII). Eight (8) Rs mentioned positive psychological impact (PPI). Seven (7) Rs mentioned positive behavioral impact (PBI). One (1) R mentioned quality self-disclosure (QSD). And one (1) R mentioned quality self-awareness (QSA). There is evidence of positive psychological (SI and EI) and social behavioral (CB) impacts. However, there is low intellectual impact.

Memos:

1. Although there is a significant affirmation of psychological (PPI) and behavioral (PBI) impacts, there is a low affirmation of intellectual impacts (PII).
2. Quality self-awareness (QSA) is a prerequisite for quality self-disclosure (QSD).
3. Phenomenal codes.

Question 4

In suggesting a specific empathy style and giving the reason for their suggestion, two (2) Rs suggested a purposive sharing empathy style, expressing the need for SI and CB. Four (4) Rs suggested an active listening empathy style, expressing the need for SI, EI, and CB. Four (4) Rs suggested a compassionate empathy style, expressing the need for SI and CB. One (1) R suggested a safe-space empathy style, expressing the need for SI, EI, and CB. One (1) R suggested a perspective-taking empathy style, expressing the need for SI and CB. Eight (8) Rs suggested a cognitive empathy style, expressing the need for SI and CB. One (1) R suggested an affective empathy style, expressing the need for SI and CB. One (1) R suggested dialogue empathy style, expressing the need for SI and CB. One (1) R suggested a person-centered empathy style, expressing the need for SI.

There is a strong suggestion indicating the need for SI and CB, but a weak suggestion indicating the need for EI.

Memo:

1. EI and SI are directly unmeasurable (latent variables)
2. There is low evidence of the EI model.
3. Homogeneous codes.

SSI-Teacher Q3 and Q4 Probing

Q3 reveals evidence of the positive impact of Nigerian secondary school teachers on the students. These impacts included intellectual, psychological (SI and EI), and behavioral (CB) impacts. Nevertheless, the result also indicated low-level motivation for self-awareness and self-disclosure. Q4 reveals similar findings and further reveals the need for EI.

SSI-Teacher Result Summary

In the analysis and coding of the SSI-Teacher responses, two characteristics of the data sets were obvious: homogeneous and phenomenal. The homogeneous character of data sets reveals codes that are similar in meaning. While the phenomenal character of data sets reveals codes that are diverse in meaning, focusing on human behavior. The understanding and explanation of empathy by Nigerian secondary school teachers convincingly contained all aspects of empathy: SI, EI, and CB. Additionally, their various empathy models encompass affective, physiological, and behavioral empathy. However, the investigation also revealed a low level of EI and low motivation for self-awareness practice among Nigerian secondary school teachers. Westman (2021) reveals that quality empathic behavior necessarily includes two elements: the motivation to have restorative conversations and the motivation to practice self-care. These two (2) items are indispensable for a quality empathy behavior, which is always the result of “a shared meaning” of reality between the teacher and the student. This said, one begins to doubt the quality of such empathic models as practiced by teachers in Nigerian secondary schools, and to what extent they can make positive and enduring impacts among students and faculty members in Nigerian secondary schools.

Complementary Investigation Procedure

The need for a complementary investigation was motivated by the project’s objective of constructing a TEM that is relevant in the learning environment. It was necessary to interview the student population to evaluate their teachers' empathy styles and provide complementary responses to teachers’ self-reported

empathy styles, impacts, and needs. This is believed to contribute to the relevancy of TEM and ensuring quality teacher empathy behavior.

Sample Population

The sample population for the complementary investigation was the Nigerian secondary school student population. A random convenience sample population was targeted, and a total of five (5) students were selected, comprising three (3) female and two (2) male students of the third-year high school.

Instrument

The instrument was a semi-structured interview for students (SSI-Student) constructed by the researcher. It followed the format of the semi-structured interview questions used to investigate the empathy styles of Nigerian secondary school teachers (SSI-Teacher). It contained four (4) questions:

1. How would you explain empathy?
2. Give one example of how your teachers model empathy in the school.
3. Name one impact your teachers' empathy style is making among the students.
4. What specific empathy style would you suggest for your teachers?

Data Distribution and Collection

A concept and permission letter was sent on-site to the principal of the targeted school, and an accomplished consent letter was requested from the principal.

The distribution, administration, and collection of the semi-structured interview (SSI-Student) were done on-site. The content, purpose, and objective of the interview were duly explained to the selected students. The confidentiality strategy of the interview was also explained to the students.

Data Analysis and Results

Question 1

The five (5) students' (Ss) explanation of empathy indicated an unconditional positive empathic stance (UPS), expressing the ability to socially interact (SI), emotionally identify (EI), and be motivated to engage in cognitive behavior (CB). There is evidence of a high understanding of empathy by the research sample population of Nigerian secondary school students.

Question 2

In indicating how their teachers model empathy in the school, two (2) students indicated a positive behavioral stance (PBS), expressing the ability of their teachers to SI and CB. Three (3) students indicated a positive emotional stance (PES), expressing the ability of their teachers to SI, EI, and CB. There is evidence that Nigerian secondary school teachers engage in empathetic behavior, as expressed by the research sample population of students.

SSI-Student Q1 and Q2 Probing

Q1 reveals a high understanding of empathy by the sample student population. Q2 also reveals a quality empathy behaviour of the Nigerian secondary school teachers, as indicated by the student sample population.

Question 3

In naming one (1) impact their teachers' empathy style is making among students, four (4) Ss mentioned positive psychological impact (PPI). One (1) S mentioned a positive intellectual impact. There is evidence of psychological impacts (SI, EI, and CB), and low intellectual outcomes as revealed by the research sample population of Nigerian secondary school students.

Memos:

1. Positive psychological impacts are expected to have a positive impact on intellectual outcomes.

Question 4

In suggesting specific empathy style for their teachers, three (3) Ss suggested quality listening, expressing the need for SI, EI, and CB. Two (2) Ss suggested genuineness, expressing the need for SI, EI, and CB. There is a strong need for SI, EI, and CB among Nigerian secondary school teachers as indicated by the student sample population.

SSI-Students Q3 and Q4 Probing

Q3 reveals evidence of positive psychological impacts (SI, EI, and CB) and low intellectual impact. Q4 reveals a strong need for SI, EI, and CB empathy styles.

SSI-Student Result Summary

The investigation reveals a high level of understanding of empathy by the research student sample population. It indicated a quality of empathy styles practiced by their teachers. Also, it reveals a positive psychological (SI, EI, CB) impact of teachers’ empathic styles on the students. However, the students indicated a low intellectual impact, and further indicated the need for quality empathy style, focusing on the need for teachers to engage in “active listening” with students, and genuinely (intentionally) interact with them.

Table 5: SSI-Teacher and SSI-Student Comparative Result

Question No	SSI-Teacher	SSI- Student
1	There is evidence of a high level of understanding of empathy among Nigerian secondary school teachers.	There is evidence of a high level of understanding of empathy among Nigerian secondary school students.
2	There is evidence of a high SI and CB empathy models, with low evidence for EI.	There is evidence that Nigerian secondary school teachers engage in a quality empathy style (SI, EI, and CB).
3	There is evidence of positive psychological (SI and EI) and social-behavioral (CB) impacts, with low intellectual impact.	There is evidence of psychological impacts of SI, EI, and CB, with low intellectual impact.
4	There is a strong suggestion indicating the need for SI and CB, with weak suggestions indicating the need for EI.	There is strong evidence indicating the need for SI, EI, and CB.

Mixed-Methods Integration

From Diagnosis to Solution

The explanatory sequential process QUAN/QUAL achieved the primary objective of serving as a formal strategy for diagnostic needs assessment. As such, the project began by identifying a problem (inconsistent empathy) and explaining its precise causes, thereby justifying the required components of the Teacher-Empathy Model (TEM).

Integration of the Diagnostic Gap

The initial quantitative findings revealed a significant relational deficit, specifically a diagnostic inconsistency in the empathy styles of Nigerian teachers. Specifically, the Empathy Assessment Scale (EAS) confirmed that while Nigerian secondary school teachers reported high capacity for observable Cognitive Behavior (CB) (the "what I do"), they simultaneously demonstrated low internal motivation for Emotional Identification (EI) and Social Interaction (SI) (the "why I do it"). This indicated that empathic behavior was present but lacked the intentionality and relational depth necessary to translate into quality student psychological and social well-being. This gap between external performance and internal commitment served as the central problem of practice requiring explanation and solution.

The Qualitative Explanation of Inconsistency

The semi-structured interviews (Phase 2) were strategically deployed to explain why this motivational deficit (low SI/EI) existed. The thematic analysis of teachers’ responses revealed a critical absence of two key competencies, directly aligning with the deficiencies so identified. These two key competencies, as revealed in Westman’s (2021) model and counseling principles, include:

1. **Lack of Restorative Conversation:** Teachers, despite expressing an understanding of empathy (RQ1), lacked specific, intentional models for engaging students in conflict or distress situations, demonstrating a practical barrier to deep Social Interaction (SI). It is important to mention that the capacity of teachers to engage in restorative conversations with students strongly depends on their ability to engage in self-awareness practice. Restorative conversation happens when a teacher has reflected on a previous negative encounter with students and decides to amend the encounter.
2. **Absence of Self-Care and Self-Awareness:** Teachers did not report strategies for managing the physiological and emotional stress inherent in the Nigerian educational environment. This lack of a "self-self-paradigm" explained their low capacity for sustainable Emotional Identification (EI) with others, confirming the theoretical proposition that personal distress limits empathic outreach and quality.

The thematic analysis of students' responses (SSI-Students) revealed a significant need for active listening and the genuineness of teachers in interacting with students. Implicitly, these needs reveal a significant lack of intentionality in the seemingly empathic behavior of teachers. This lack directly affects the quality of teachers’ empathy behavior.

Justification for the Teacher-Empathy Model (TEM)

The integrated results provided the evidence-based foundation for the necessity of TEM. The model is therefore designed as a direct, structured solution addressing the identified gaps.

Table 6: Justification for the TEM

Identified (QUAN)	Deficit	Explanatory/Barrier (QUAL)	Required Component (SOLUTION)	TEM
Low Social Interaction (SI).		Absence of structured intentional skills for addressing conflicts and distress.	Module on Restorative Conversation and intentional SI skills.	
Low Emotional Identification (EI).		Lack of self-care and stress management skills	Module on Teacher Self-Care and Empathic Resilience.	

	in a consistently stressful environment.	
Inconsistency and Insignificant Impact.	Lack of methodological rigor/intentionality in processing empathic behavior.	TEM as a Strategic Structure, Intentional empathic process, and Self-Care.

Discussion

The objective of this research work was to develop a teacher empathy model (TEM): a guide that will help teachers initiate empathic stances in their interactions with students in the classroom and the school environment. In this way, every teacher becomes an empathy model to their students. The outcomes of quantitative and qualitative investigations were used to formulate the empathy model for teachers in Nigerian secondary schools. This empathy model would also serve as an advocacy tool to promote quality education, citizens' peaceful, and collaborative lifestyles. Furthermore, the advocacy will create awareness for the inclusion of Teacher Empathy as a core teacher competency in the Nigerian Teacher Education Curricula.

Needs Assessment (Diagnostic Exploration)

The perceived low-quality educational outcomes and social impacts in the Nigerian society had motivated this research work. Aririah (2024) and Bamgbose (2022) attested to the consistent non-productive educational policies and strategies in Nigeria. The result of the EAS achieved in the quantitative part of this research showed that there was a seemingly high level of Nigerian secondary school teachers engaging in empathic behavior. The result also revealed low levels of Teachers' motivation to socially interact (SI) and emotionally identify (EI) with their students. These outcomes had led to the description of the quantitative result as "inconsistency". This helped to provide an answer for the first research question, enabling us to name and understand the nature of the problem: there is inconsistency between self-reported empathic behavior (CB) and internal empathic motivations (SI and EI) among Nigerian secondary school teachers.

Explanation of Diagnostic Findings

The result of the thematic analysis of qualitative data (SSI-Teachers and SSI-Students) reveals a strong motivation of Nigerian secondary school teachers to engage in empathic behavior. However, they were not motivated to engage in restorative conversations with the students. Also, there were no strong indications of any motivation to engage in self-care or self-awareness practices (Westman 2021). These findings confirmed and explained the low level of Teachers' SI and EI stances. There is significant doubt about the capacity of such empathic behaviors, as practiced by secondary school teachers in Nigeria, to translate into quality learning and teaching experiences that could, in turn, lead to quality psychological and social well-being for Nigerian citizens. This helped answer the second research question, enabling an explanation of the inconsistency in the diagnostic inquiry: the absence of self-care and restorative behavioral skills among Nigerian secondary school teachers.

Therefore, Nigerian secondary school teachers' understanding of empathy is incomplete, leading to empathy expressions that lack quality and effectiveness.

Solution Based on Diagnosis and Explanation Findings

The SSI-Teachers and SSI-Students revealed significant affirmation of the psychological and behavioral impacts of teachers' empathy behaviors on the students. However, both investigations also reveal a low

impact on students' intellectual achievements and a low self-awareness stance. These results, once again, cast doubts on the quality of the psychological and behavioral impacts of teachers' empathy styles. The unsatisfactory results of the quantitative investigation were explained by the qualitative investigations, which revealed a lack of context-focused and methodological (intentionality) processes in teachers' empathic behaviors (Aremu 2024). First, one could ask: did teachers perform the "empathy action" in the psychological and cognitive context of promoting effective learning? Second, did teachers arrive at a "shared meaning" of the "empathy action" with the students? The SSI-Student responses had indicated the need for intentional empathic practice by teachers, specifically on the need for "active listening and genuineness. In Nigeria, evidence-based experience has shown that the quality of educational packages and their corresponding impacts are not impressive (Aririah, 2024). It becomes necessary and urgent to engage in advocacy action to create more awareness in favor of quality empathic behaviors among secondary school teachers in Nigeria. As Practice-Based research, and given the economic and social hardships in the Nigerian context, any solution proposed must be practicable (affordable) and relevant to the targeted population. The project suggests the TEM as a purposeful and intentional empathy process to achieve the required outcome. Inferentially, the third research question provided informative data for the construction of the TEM.

Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives

The theoretical grounding for this research was based on the significant role of empathy (emotion) in human learning and retention capabilities: positive emotions enhance positive behaviors and improve intellectual and social capacities. Teachers' empathy styles consequently provide the enabling learning environment for students. As such, students become intellectually and socially motivated and empowered for a productive life in society, leading to significant progress in national peace and cohesion. However, the result of the investigation revealed a lack of quality teacher-empathy styles in the Nigerian secondary schools. This had resulted in the non-significant educational impacts and a peaceful national life.

The conceptual perspective highlights the significant role of various human concepts in ensuring the holistic development of the human person. This research identified the concepts of self-awareness as a necessary criterion for quality empathy. A quality empathic behavior is an affective behavior that provides the needed platform for quality educational outcomes. When students engage in quality education, it contributes significantly to personal development and lays the foundation for building a peaceful society. The research findings identify and attribute the insignificant impact of empathy, as practiced by Nigerian secondary school teachers, to a lack of quality self-awareness. Conclusively, there is a need to engage teachers in intentional and professional empathy behaviors grounded in the professional self-awareness practice. In this way, teachers become significant role models to their students, leading to significant positive impacts on learning and teaching experiences in Nigerian secondary schools.

Implications of the Study

This research work proposes an advocacy for teacher empathy in Nigerian secondary schools. This advocacy will take its lead from evidence-based experiences of the Nigerian secondary school teachers, focusing on what is practicable and relevant. The TEM was based on the responses given by teachers on how they practice empathy in their various institutions and on the empathy style they had suggested during the qualitative stage of the research. The student population was also interviewed, and the results provided further evidence for the construction of the TEM. Importantly, one must take note of the negative effect of stress on an individual's capacity to perform empathic behaviors (Nitschke & Bartz, 2023). The presence of stress discourages individuals from engaging in empathic actions or behaviors. As we had

mentioned earlier, the Nigerian environment is one full of stress due to economic, political, and social uncertainties. Therefore, if any empathy advocacy should be realized, such engagement must be focused on what is practicable and relevant in an educational environment. Even when salaries are meager, or when teaching and learning facilities are not adequate, or when there are no reliable electricity sources, quality teaching and learning opportunities should not be halted to zero. This is to say that the core content of the TEM must be affordable so that no Teacher is left behind due to financial or material deficit. The objective of the TEM advocacy is not to appraise one “individual empathy hero”, but to inspire and motivate several “passionate teachers” who are capable of maintaining a moderate and professional teaching ease even in less favorable teaching conditions. Should not the definition and scope of professionalism include the ability of the one to navigate material (material intelligence) and emotional (emotional intelligence) irregularities to achieve a desirable outcome and impact? Furthermore, the strategy for quality empathic behavior is “self-awareness” (Westman, 2021). Only emotionally self-aware or emotionally balanced individuals can adequately navigate the emotional boundaries between the self (EI) and others (SI). Therefore, the empathy model suggested in this research work includes an opportunity for teachers to check their capacity for self-care/self-aware, and self-control. These strategies respond to the contextual and methodological gaps created by insignificant levels of teacher empathy, which contributed to the poor quality of educational content production and delivery in Nigerian secondary schools.

Teacher-Empathy Model (TEM)

Table 7: TEM Template

SESSION ONE (1)		
TEACHER-EMPATHY MODEL		
No	Item	Content
1	The Objectives of the Teacher-Empathy Model	Teachers appreciate the role of students’ emotional state in learning and retention of lesson content. For improved teaching and learning experiences for teachers and students, respectively.
2	What is Teacher Empathy	The ability of a teacher to feel (EI), understand students (SI), and engage in positive action (CB) with them for better impacts.
3	Teacher-Empathy Paths: Empathy Models	
	1. Purposive Sharing - Communicating care.	a. For example, encouraging students to engage in small group study and revision.
	2. Active listening - For a quality understanding of students. Self-confidence building. For a quality emotional connection.	a. For example, routine emotional checks on students, paying attention to students' body and facial reactions during lessons.

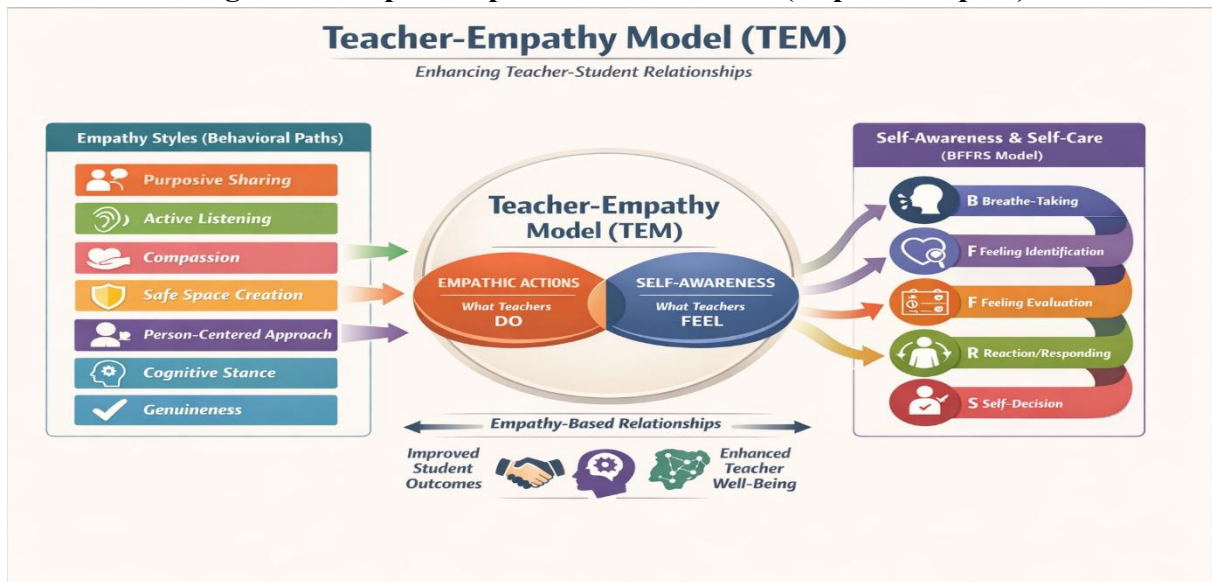
	3. Compassion - For quality understanding, trust, and rapport building.	a. For example, “no shaming attitude of students when they respond wrongly to a lesson question”. b. The teacher engages students in restorative and self-disclosure conversations.	
	4. Safe space - For self-authentication of students.	a. For example, the teacher encourages students to observe a level of confidentiality about classroom incidents. b. The teacher holds a Break period (BP) meeting with students.	
	5. Person-centered - For a quality understanding of others.	a. For example, the teacher engages in “a Portfolio-Connect” (PC) with a particular student or group of students for lifelong learning motivation.	
	6. Cognitive stance – For understanding reality and others. For quality decision-making.	a. For example, the teacher proposes works of literature or evidence-based events that could engage students’ curiosity about the purpose and meaning of life.	
	7. Genuineness style – it creates a safe and welcoming environment for students.	a. For example, teachers should be honest and intentional in their interactions with students.	

<p>SESSION TWO (2) SELF-AWARENESS/SELF-CARE [BFFRS]</p>			
B	Breathe-Taking	Take a break and breathe (separating yourself from your situation)	
F	Feeling Identification	Identify how you are feeling at the moment (one emotion at a time: regret, sad, tired, fear, angry, helpless, hopeless, frustrated, or their opposites)	
F	Feeling Evaluation	Ask yourself why and how long you have felt that way (to identify the source)	
R	Responding/Reaction	Ask yourself how you have been responding or reacting to it (self-evaluation).	
S	Self-Decision	Ask yourself if you are willing to continue that way (taking responsibility). And decide by yourself (no one takes it for you).	

The TEM is a continuous process with two (2) distinct but inseparable parts: empathy styles and self-awareness or self-care exercise. The quality of one’s self-awareness determines the quality of one’s empathic behavior. Reciprocally, the quality of one’s empathy behavior could lead to a quality understanding of the self. In every case, the outcome is a positively emotionally balanced individual (PEB). In the long term, with consistency in empathic behaviors, individuals become almost genetically motivated

to engage in empathic behaviors. When this happens, the consequential impacts would be greater opportunities for improved educational policies. Also, there will be greater opportunities for improved social well-being and collaboration among Nigerian citizens, notwithstanding the multicultural reality of the nation. In this way, the input and impact processes, as proposed in this work, would have been achieved. It is worth noting that the strategies proposed by the TEM, as a qualitative model, could need more time than the usual teacher lesson time to accomplish. It proposes a new approach to teaching and learning that is softly not time and grade-conscious, but strategically measures students’ educational, emotional, and social progress.

Figure 4: Graphic Representation of TEM (Copilot Graphic)



The call for an empathic approach to education has been persistent for a long time, not only in Nigeria but also in the global educational arena. Its fundamental advocacy has remained the same over the decades: for quality educational policies and initiatives that are capable of achieving quality teaching and learning experiences, and empowering present and future learners for quality social life and national cohesion. The central motivational idea of Zych’s (2021) call for positive school climate was due to the necessity to raise awareness that schools must not be viewed as a closed system, but as a germinal ground. As such, the role of teachers would not be viewed as controllers, but as gardeners (educators) who, through empathic interactions, set the students on the path for self-actualization through guided lifelong learning experience.

Limitations of the Study

The study adopted online data distribution and collection for easy and cost-efficient management of the distribution and collection processes. Also, to ensure that the targeted population is adequately covered. However, achieving the required number of the study population through online recruitment was very challenging. Although participants were free to withdraw from the research investigation at any time, the

cost and availability of a reliable electricity source and phone data in Nigeria could have contributed significantly to participants' unsatisfactory response to the online investigation. As a result, an on-site data distribution and collection was conducted to make up for the required research population size.

Another limitation of the study was in tracing and identifying the emotional behavior of teachers and students in the qualitative study; it was not easy to perfectly separate SI from EI, and predict whether the quality of SI and EI, as expressed by individual teachers, could motivate them to any quality behavior (CB). And so, the research identified the subtle challenge of interpreting or translating numerical values (quantitative) into behavioral genuineness (qualitative). Again, participants' responses could have been affected by the social desirability effect and personal biases.

The results of the quantitative and qualitative investigations exposed the low-quality impact of empathy styles of Nigerian secondary school teachers. This was linked to the weak ability to socially interact (affective) and emotionally identify (physiological) with their students. It is consequential that if Nigerian secondary school teachers engage in quality self-awareness exercises, they would improve their capacity to socially interact and emotionally identify with their students. However, the EAS questionnaire used in the study, for example, does not contain any item that investigates the capacity of individuals to self-evaluate or identify when the individual needs to take a rest (self-empathy). The focus of most empathy questionnaires is on the connection of the self with others, or with animals; they rarely contain any item that evaluates the self. That is, no item engages the individual in “self-self-paradigm”, only in “self-other-paradigm”.

Implications for Further Research

In the 21st-century educational and counseling programs, with a greater need to cultivate quality empathy behavior among young learners, there is a need to construct an empathy instrument that is capable of leading the individual to connect with self, others, and the environment, that is, an inclusive empathic behavior. There is an absolute need for younger learners to pay attention to the necessity for a global clean environment (GCE), global mental health (GMH), and global peace (GP). The empathy instrument used in this study does not trigger or train the individual to pay attention to their immediate environment, specifically to the cleanliness of their environment, and the well-being of plants around them. The educational slogan, “no one should be left behind”, could be reformulated to say: “nothing in the environment should be left behind”. The emotional needs of every individual, animal, and plant should be the concern of all. This is because individuals cannot be completely healthy in an unhealthy environment. So, there is a need to construct an inclusive empathy instrument that would meet the needs of 21st-century citizens. A healthy environment is a prerequisite for a healthy mind, and consequently, a quality education and quality human interactions.

Conclusion

The Teacher-Empathy Model—An Imperative for Practice

This dissertation began with a fundamental problem of practice: the perceived persistent failure of Nigerian secondary education to consistently foster psychological well-being and social cohesion necessary for national progress. This work concludes that this systemic deficit is deeply rooted in a critical gap in teacher competency—the ability to engage in intentional and integrated empathy behavior. It is the strategic application of a professional standard, an evidence-based concept to interpret a local behavior to achieve a greater positive behavioral outcome.

The Evidence-Based Diagnosis

Utilizing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, this research served as a formal needs assessment, delivering a definitive diagnosis: Nigerian secondary school teachers exhibit a questionable inconsistency pattern in their empathic engagement. While their self-reported Cognitive Behavior (CB) suggests a willingness to act, this is undermined by significantly low levels of Emotional Identification (EI) and Social Interaction (SI) motivations. The qualitative findings precisely explained this motivational void: current practices lack the essential methodological components of Self-Awareness, Self-Care, and Restorative Conversation Skills required to sustain any quality relational behavior in a high-stress environment.

The Counselor Education Intervention

The Teacher-Empathy Model (TEM) is the resulting evidence-based intervention, moving this work decisively from advocacy to action. The TEM is not merely a conceptual suggestion; it is a structured professional development framework designed to inoculate teachers against the very barriers identified in this study. Grounded in the principles of Counselor Education, the TEM focuses on cultivating the "self-self-paradigm" first, recognizing that a teacher's capacity for sustained SI and EI is dependent on their Positively Emotionally Balanced (PEB) state. By explicitly training teachers in the missing competencies of Self-Care and Restorative Dialogue, the TEM provides the intentional, practicable methodology needed to transform inconsistent behavior (CB) into genuine, impactful relational presence.

Project Strategy Action

The TEM is presented as a necessary teacher competency for quality teacher education and professional development in Nigeria. It is an indispensable tool for equipping teachers to be more than just lesson delivery agents; they must become relational architects capable of navigating complex cultural and emotional landscapes. This project concludes that by adopting and implementing the TEM, educational policy can finally acquire the specific, evidence-based intervention required to enhance teacher competencies, foster quality student relationships, and ultimately, lay the foundational emotional, intellectual, and social groundwork for a more cohesive and collaborative Nigerian citizenry. The path to quality education begins with intentional empathy, and the TEM provides the map for the initial motivation of teachers, empowering them with in-depth psychological and physical strength to navigate strenuous circumstances and deliver quality educational content. The TEM emphasizes consistent teacher-empathy behavior by highlighting the need for teachers to engage with students in the proper physical and psychological contexts. In this way, teachers are able to professionally engage with all students despite students' geographical, social, and intellectual differences and abilities. Also, maintaining the proper context motivates teachers to engage in quality empathy behaviors, notwithstanding various material and emotional obstacles.

Project Evaluation

As practice-based research, the Tem modules will be evaluated by teachers who have attended the workshop. The participants' evaluation will contribute to the continuous updating of the modules. The TEM will be updated or reviewed after five (5) workshops and after critical analysis of teachers' evaluation reports. This is to ensure that the TEM contents are always aligned with the objective of the study, and that they remain relevant and practical. The evaluation form will be distributed to participants at the end of every workshop session.

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