



A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF DEBATE ON EMPATHY AMONG STUDENT TEACHERS.

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Abstract :

Empathy is an essential attribute for all teachers to be effective in class. An empathic teacher is able to relate with the difficulties and challenges that learners face, exhibit patience in resolving them, is able to listen actively and in a non-judgemental manner to her student. She will thus be able to enable a non-threatening and congenial atmosphere for learning. Debate as a strategy for learning can enable the participants to look at the multiple perspectives around a proposition and build their arguments. A debator while preparing for the debate normally puts herself in the shoes of the opposition and builds one's own defence and arguments. A question arose in the mind of the researcher, whether participating in debates will also help increase the level of empathy among the learners? Will it increase their ability to understand another person's circumstances, point of view, thoughts, and feelings? To seek answers to these questions, an experimental study was carried out where a module of debate was used to teach topics of the course Educational Management in the one-year B.Ed. course and the researcher made a tool on Empathy was administered to the students. The sample was divided into two categories on the basis of age, i) 21 to 30 years and ii) 31 to 40 years The pre-test and post test scores were compared to see if the debates had an impact on Empathy of the students' teachers. The post test of the experimental group showed a decrease in the scores of Empathy in the 21 to 30 years age group.

Keywords : *Debate, Empathy, Student Teacher.*

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Introduction :

Empathy is a very important attribute for teachers as they have the responsibility of developing a congenial classroom climate for the process of learning to take place. When the classroom climate is non-threatening students can learn better. Despite technology and all the advancement in communication, quality in relationships of all kinds is very essential for happiness and contentment. Teachers, parents, health care givers, bosses, leaders all need to have Empathy to be effective in asserting their roles. It is extremely essential for teachers to have Empathy for their students as it helps them teach better by providing their students a non-threatening environment, one built on mutual trust and confidence.



Empathic teachers are less judgmental and students are not afraid to make mistakes, and subsequently use these mistakes as stepping stones to success in classroom and school. Empathy is not only an essential social skill, but an academic one; research shows that successful learners are not only knowledgeable, but also empathic. Creating Empathy in class can contribute and raise the quality of teaching and learning and improve the behavior and cooperativeness of students (Cooper, 2004). Empathy is an extremely essential trait to be developed in all future teachers.

At higher education level the traditional methods of teaching like lectures do not provide much scope for exploring and constructing students own learning experiences as well as knowledge. On the other hand, when Debates are organized for the students in the classroom, it helps them develop multi-perspective thinking. It teaches them to research a topic thoroughly, analyze information critically, clarify the concepts and construct knowledge from it, examine different perspectives to an issue, take a stand and find ways of defending it, articulate this constructed knowledge before an audience, present the thoughts logically with clarity and confidence, understand and appreciate varied viewpoints, hone communication skills, and thus expand their horizon. It develops their critical thinking skills, leadership qualities, communication, inter personal skills, emotional, social intelligence and activism. It equips them with the skills necessary to survive in the real world. Besides it stimulates the classroom learning environment and provides students participatory and active learning experiences. Handled deftly, it can be a very potent and powerful strategy of learning.

Academic debate is a tool of empowerment for the learners. In the course of teaching and interacting with fellow colleagues and students, certain questions arose in the mind of the researcher, will using an active learning method like Debates at the B.Ed. enhance their Social Intelligence especially empathy? Will this in turn make the student teachers effective as full-time trained teachers? To seek answers to such questions the researcher proposes to carry out this study.

Statement of the Problem :

A study of the impact of debate on Empathy among student teachers.

Operational Definitions :

- **Debate**-In the present study, debate was taken as an activity carried out on the following guidelines
Division of a group of students into the proposing and opposing teams. The groups will defend and oppose the debate statement/question over three rounds, where each speaker speaks for not more than three minutes. The decision of the winning team, best answers and best oppositions will be decided by the moderator and the Debate will be summed up.
- **Empathy**-In the present study Empathy is taken as the ability to understand another person's circumstances, point of view, thoughts, and feelings. When experiencing Empathy, you are able to understand someone else's internal experiences. It includes listening non-judgmentally.



Objectives of the Study :

1. To compare the pre and post test scores of student teachers of Experimental group on Empathy on the basis of Age.
2. To compare the post test scores of student teachers of Control and Experimental groups on Empathy on the basis of Age.

Hypotheses of the Study :

Null hypotheses are formulated for the present study. They are as follows:

1. There is no significant difference in the pre and post test scores of student teachers of Empathy on the basis of Age.
2. There is no significant difference in the post test scores of student teachers of Control and Experimental groups on Empathy on the basis of Age.

Research Methodology :

In the present study, the researcher aimed at collecting data by finding the effectiveness of Debate on Empathy and therefore, the two group Pre-test -Post-test Quasi-experimental design was used.

The Variables of the Study

1. Independent variable
Instructional modules based on Debate
2. Dependent variable
Empathy
3. Confounding variables
Age (Age group 21-30 and 31-40 years)

Hypotheses of the Study :

The population of the present study comprised of student teachers of English medium aided and unaided Colleges of Education affiliated to University of Mumbai (One Year B.Ed. course), situated in the city of Mumbai. From the population the sample was selected randomly by the **Simple Random Probability Sampling technique**. The sample was selected through a three-stage selection process, the total sample size was 192 student teachers studying in English medium, aided and unaided Colleges of Education affiliated to University of Mumbai.

Tools used for the Present Study:

The following tools were prepared by the researcher for the present study:

1. Personal Data Sheet
2. Questionnaire on Empathy which was a **Five-point rating scale in which** 19 items were constructed, from which 12 were positive and 7 negative. The 5-point scale was Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.
3. Six Debate Modules for three topics from Educational Management



4. Modules based on Debate

The topics in the course of Educational Management that could be taught through Debates were identified. The debate question/statement were formulated from them. They are given in the table below:

Table 1.1 Debate question/statement based on the topics from the Syllabus

Sr. No.	Topics	Debate question/statement
1.	Stress Management: Concept and Strategies	Teacher burn out is the norm today
2.	Democratic Institutional Climate	Democratic Climate-A Myth or Reality
3.	Indian and International Systems of Education	Are students from International Boards smarter than those studying in Indian boards?

Format of Debates :

By referring to various formats of debate that are followed for competitive or academic purpose the format for debate was adapted from **Global Youth Debates**, a global collaborative project provided through ‘Connections’. It was modified to include more participants in the debate.

Scoring for Empathy :

The positive and negative statements in the rating scale for **Empathy** were assigned values as follows:

**Table 1.2
Values Assigned to Rating Scale of Empathy**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Positive Statement	5	4	3	2	1
Negative Statement	1	2	3	4	5

The minimum score was 19 and maximum was 95 for the **Empathy rating scale**.

Data collection :

The pre-test on Empathy was administered to both the Experimental and Control groups. The Control groups were taught the three topics through Lecture cum Discussion method, while Debate was used as the strategy for teaching the Experimental group.

From the three selected topics one debate question or statement was formulated, thus three debate questions or statements were formulated in all. Two debate sessions with the same topic were conducted, since the points to be covered under each topic were many. Hence, 6 debates for three topics were conducted in all. After each Debate the researcher summarised the topic and focused on the essential aspects.

The post test on Empathy was administered at the end of all the lecture cum discussion to the Control group, while at the end of all the debate sessions, to the Experimental group. The tool was scored, tabulated, and analyzed.



Data Analysis and interpretation :

In order to interpret the data and arrive at conclusions, the critical t test was used to test the hypotheses. The obtained results are as follows:

Testing Hypothesis 1 :

1. **There is no significant difference in the pre and post test scores of student teachers of the Experimental group on Empathy on the basis of Age.**

The computed t value 3.48 (pre and post test scores of Experimental groups on Empathy in the Age group of 21 to 30) is greater than the table value 1.99 at 0.05 level and 2.65 at 0.01 level hence, it is significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels.

Hence it was concluded that there is a significant difference in the pre and post test scores of student teachers of Experimental groups on Empathy in the Age group of 21 to 30.

The computed t value 1.33 (pre and post test scores of Experimental groups on Empathy in the Age group of 31 to 40) is less than the table value 2.08 at 0.05 level and 2.83 at 0.01 level and hence it is not significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels.

Hence it was concluded that there is no significant difference in the pre-test and post-test scores of student teachers of Experimental group on Empathy in the age group of 31-40.

Table 2.1

Relevant statistics of Significance of difference of pre-test and Post-test of the Experimental group on Empathy on the basis of Age using the t test.

Age group		N	Mean	S.D.	S.E.M.	df	t-value	Sign level (0.05 and 0.01)	
21-30	pre	72	70.72	6.68	0.78	71	3.48	0.05	0.01
	post	72	66.42	7.75	0.91			Sig	Sig
31-40	pre	22	70.55	5.80	1.23	21	1.33	0.05	0.01
	post	22	68.59	7.15	1.02			N.S.	N.S.

Testing Hypothesis 2 :

2. **There is no significant difference in the post test scores of student teachers of Control and Experimental groups on Empathy on the basis of Age.**

The computed t value for 4.12 (pre and post test scores of Experimental groups on Empathy in the Age group of 31 to 40) is greater than the table t value 1.97 at 0.05 level and 2.60 at 0.01 level and therefore it is significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels.

Hence it was concluded that there is a significant difference in the post test scores of student teachers of Control and Experimental group on Empathy in the age group 21-30.



The computed t value 0.03 (pre and post test scores of Experimental groups on Empathy in the Age group of 31 to 40) is less than table t value 2.05 at 0.05 level and 2.76 at 0.01 level and hence it is not significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels. **Hence it was concluded that there is no significant difference in the post test scores of student teachers of Control and Experimental group on Empathy in the age group 31-40.**

Table 2.2 Relevant statistics of Significance of difference of post-test of the Control and Experimental group on Empathy on the basis of age using the t test

Age group		N	Mean	S.D.	S.E.M.	df	t-value	Sign level (0.05 and 0.01)	
21-30	Con	83	70.98	6.02	0.66	153	4.12	0.05	0.01
	Exp	72	66.42	7.75	0.91			Sig.	Sig.
31-40	Con	8	68.50	6.43	2.28	28	0.03	0.05	0.01
	Exp	22	68.59	7.15	1.52			N.S.	N.S.

Discussion

Pre and Post Test of Experimental Group

On comparison of the pre-test and post-test of the Experimental group on Empathy, a decrease was observed in the scores in the age group of 21-30. The pre-test and post-test of Experimental group on Empathy of age group 31-40 was found to be similar.

The hidden curriculum of teacher education conveys empathy but the experience of debate has perhaps aroused the competitive spirit in the students. Putting across their points forcefully and effectively perhaps became their priority and putting oneself in the other's shoes to understand others point of view took a secondary position, and as a result their scores have decreased in the post test.

The achievement on Empathy of the 31-40 age group in the pre-test and post-test was similar, this could be because they are more mature and less competitive and hence did not look at debating as a competitive clash, and their perception on Empathy hence did not show a significant decrease.

Post-test of Control and Experimental Group

On comparison of the post-test of the Control and Experimental group on Empathy a decrease was observed in the age group 21 to 30 while no change was observed in the 31 to 40 age group.

The exposure to Debate perhaps has brought out the competitive spirit of the students as a result their purpose was to speak and support their own stands to win the argument. The exposure did not facilitate them to examine other perspectives or listening attentively. In the 21-30 age group individuals are volatile in nature, competitive and ready to argue to prove their point. Debate provided them a platform to exert these tendencies, as a result the competitive spirit was aroused and hence the achievement of student teachers of 21-30 age group was lower on Empathy than student teachers in the 31-40 age group.



Conclusion :

Academic debate has immense potential for developing multitude of faculties in the learners. Debate provides the participant an opportunity to examine the topic from both the proponent as well as opponent's point of view to prepare oneself with the arguments. Empathy involves putting oneself in someone else's shoes and look at things from their perspective, listening actively and non-judgmentally. However, when debate was organized in the class it encouraged the feeling of one team out beating the other in the spirit of competition and hence a decrease in the scores of Empathy were observed.

In order to increase the Empathy among learners the researcher suggests other active learning strategies other than debate to be explored for further research. Perhaps a sustained exposure to Debate also needs to be explored in increasing the Empathy of students.

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