TVET lecturer empathy and student achievement

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Abstract. This study aims to highlight the importance of empathy in TVET lecturers to
develop healthy lecturer-student relationship. Because healthy lecturer student relationship is
 crucial for better student learning, achievement and lecturer’s own well-being. Therefore, this
article is important in helping TVET lecturers to understand the importance of empathy and
enhance their ability to empathize with their students. This is an effort to make realize the
importance of empathy towards creating strong bonds with students for their better learning
and ultimately producing good human beings.

1. Introduction
Most of the educational research nowadays is in search of the utmost effective factors in teaching and
learning. In this search, researchers’ main focus have been on lecturers as a factor of effective
learning. Recently, emotional abilities of a lecturer are considered to be highly important for effective
teaching and learning. Although, it is believed that lecturers just need brain power to undergo through
all the tasks, yet there is a growing evidence that they also need emotions as the compulsory fuel for
the higher functioning of the brain [1-5]. Hence, emotional abilities are increasingly regarded as an
ingredient that contributes to the effectiveness of lecturers.

Among several emotional abilities, empathic ability of a lecturer is often cited as an important
characteristic of an effective lecturer [6]. Because for an effective teaching and learning, developing
healthy lecturer-student relationship is very critical. And to establish it, empathy is considered as
fundamental component by many researchers [7,8]. It is therefore important to ensure that lecturers
have the ability to empathize especially in the field of TVET. TVET requires lecturers not only with
technical skills yet an ability to have strong bonds with students and can create a safe classroom
environment. Hence, this study will therefore highlight the role of lecturer empathy towards
developing healthy lecturer-student relationship.

2. Background
TVET is an educational field that emphasizes on skills, mastery and competence of its individuals.
Thus, TVET lecturers need to ensure that students are mastering the skills and knowledge efficiently.
A study reveal that TVET lecturers are less committed towards their jobs, lack dedication, showing
carelessness towards their duty and are lacking of ability [9]. Which can affect the reputation of
teaching profession.
The way lecturer behaves with students and act in classroom puts a long lasting effect on students’ learning and their lives. If the lecturer cannot empathize with students or cannot create a better learning environment, that lecturer will make a new generation of lame [9]. Thus, it is very crucial for a lecturer to have the ability to empathize.

3. Empathy

The term empathy, started to be used in 1880 by a German psychologist named, Theordore Lipps who created it from the term Einfühlung which means, in feeling. It is also believed that it was conceptualized by both Lipps and another psychologist Edwards Titchener [10]. This ability of a person allows him/her to get aware of how others feel and understand as well as contextualize others thoughts, emotions, feelings and actions [11]. It recognizes other’s feelings, points out their possible causes and share their emotional experience from outside.

Empathy consists of two components, namely, cognitive and affective [11]. Cognitive component of empathy is the mental activity that accurately infer, what others thinking or feeling [12]. Whereas affective empathy is the person’s emotional response to the affective state of the other person [11]. In other words we can say that the former involves understanding people’s thoughts and feelings and the latter involves a sensation resulting from people's feelings or thoughts.

4. LECTURER EMPATHY

Lecturer empathy is the fundamental teaching skill for the promotion of positive learning atmosphere to students. Lecturer empathy is the ability of a lecturer to show concern and tune into the perspective of a student [13]. These are the lecturers that become a role model for their students by developing strong bonds with them. These strong bonds and positive interaction with students, make students self-efficacious and motivate them towards their studies [14]. Furthermore, these lecturers have high moral standards, can communicate with the students by keeping their emotional states in mind and also encourage them communicate effectively with others [8].

A research study got the views of college students about their best and poorest lecturers with the help of student evaluation [15]. The lecturers that they reported as best lecturers were the ones who exhibited empathy towards them. Another similar study also had the same findings as mentioned above [16]. On the other hand, a mixed mode study conducted by Ceylan, on 216 lecturers found that lecturers with high empathic ability also possess high self-esteem [17]. Thus, empathy is an ability of a lecturer that cannot be overlooked, instead it should be encouraged in lecturers.

5. Lecturer Empathy and Lecturer-Student Relationship

Every student is different from one another based on their demographics, nature and the experiences that they have in their lives. For TVET students to be more motivated towards their education and academic achievement, they need to believe that their lecturer can relate to them. This can happen when TVET lecturers will have empathy towards their students.

In any educational field, the role of lecturer empathy cannot be ignored. If lecturers become empathic to their students, it will result into students who will feel more connected to lecturer, and when lecturer takes the perspective of students, it inspires the lecturer to make the learning more relevant to the students [18]. Increasing lecturer’s ability to be empathic leads towards understanding and responding their students' needs appropriately [19]. It is a professional asset for lecturers, social workers, physicians and everybody who works with people.
that enhances the quality of learning and teaching. The empathy of lecturer could enhance lecturer-student relationship and having positive lecturer-students relationship leads towards improving student performance [21]. However, there has been very limited literature found that emphasize on TVET lecturers being empathic, which is research gap in the field of TVET. The following studies will therefore discuss the role lecturers’ empathy in general, not specifically on TVET, due to the lack of studies in the context of TVET. Nevertheless, the following studies do give an idea that lecturers’ empathy is important regardless of their particular educational field.

Peck and fellows studied the role of empathy in partnership between lecturer and student. The lecturers who were more empathetic described their relationship with students in a positive way and the lecturers who reflected critical view, showed dissatisfaction with their relationship to students [22]. On the contrary, Barr examined the relationship between lecturers’ empathy and perceptions of their school culture. School Culture Scale and Interpersonal Reactivity Index were used for this purpose. Out of the other findings, one of the finding was that empathy was not related to student-lecturer relations [19]. It takes more than empathy to deal with the complex relationship of student-lecturer. However, this study was the first attempt to examine the relationship between these two variables. Lecturer empathy is yet a term which is not studied largely; also this particular study was conducted on a small sample, so it cannot be generalized. Thus, lecturer empathy may play an important role in improving school culture.

Lecturer empathy also facilitates learning by creating a psychologically safe classroom environment for student. Coffman found that when lecturers show empathy towards their students, it creates an empathic classroom environment. He also found that the students who thought their lecturer as empathetic had higher grade expectations [23]. However, the methodology of the study is questionable as the researcher used a convenience sampling that is the participants were researcher’s and his colleagues students, also the instrument he developed to measure empathy, the validity and reliability of the instrument was not defined. Instead of the fact, it is noticeable that this study does provide a support that empathic lecturers create an empathetic classroom environment that enhances students’ learning. On the other hand, Cooper also claims that lecturer’s role is significant in creating a learning environment, being responsive to the needs of students and also the concerns of their students [24]. Similarly, Muhammad and his fellows argue that TVET lecturers’ role is holistic and comprehensive, he/she has to establish an atmosphere where their students feel free to search all aspects of itself. Further they add that TVET lecturer should be caring and friendly with the students in order to create a positive learning environment [9].

In developing relationships between TVET lecturer and student, understanding the perspective of students is required for TVET lecturer. Empathy makes a strong bond between lecturer and student and enhances care. A caring, empathetic TVET lecturer helps students emotionally, academically and socially by building connections with them.

In a qualitative research, novice and experienced lecturers were asked about the important characteristics of a lecturer they believe should be. The findings indicated that creating a caring relationship with students was common response of all the responses. After creating five overall categories that were divided into sub categories as “effective” and “ineffective” they verified the reliability of their results by having two independent scores classify 100 of the statements. That yielded in 97% of the agreement rate [25]. This research provides good evidence that the ability of lecturers to create caring relationship with students is considered as effective lecturers.

Similarly, Collier state that empathy is the source of effective lecturer student relationship, it builds trust and friendship between lecturer and student. And this trust leads students towards better learning [26]. Kordi and his colleagues concluded several factors that contribute in the development of relationship with students. First, as lecturer’s willingness to give attention or concern to the goals and needs of the students or being sensitive to the needs and moods of the students was considered as a contributor in developing caring relationship. Second, the positive atmosphere of the class created by the lecturer by showing supporting and helpful attitude in the class enhances the attention and learning of the students. Third, spending plenty of time with students and designing activities for them. Fourth
when they explain the confusing and ambiguous points patiently to students [27]. Thus empathy is critical for TVET lecturers to develop relationship with students and create a healthy classroom climate.

Hence, empathy is the characteristic that can help TVET lecturers in promoting strong bonds with students, better learning environment, higher student achievement and a caring attitude towards students.

6. Lecturer Empathy and Student Achievement
Currently, there are few researches that have attempted to see the correlation between lecturer empathy and student achievement. Nevertheless, they do give an idea that lecturer empathy is vital for student achievement.

Muller analyzed the students’ and lecturers’ perception of one another and the effects of those perceptions on student achievement. He used National Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS) and taking public school lecturers and students as population. He found that the students who perceive their lecturers as caring spend more effort in their academic achievement. And when lecturers perceive their students as they are making an effort to expend their academic performance, there is positive lecturer student relationship [28].

On the other hand, Bostic studied the relationship between lecturer empathy and students’ scores on a standardized test. A correlational research design was used to see the relationship between lecturer empathy and students score on a standardized test. To measure lecturer empathy, he used a subscale of perspective taking from Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) [18]. Although, the study indicated no relationship between lecturer empathy and students’ scores on standardized test. However, it is arguable here that the scores on standardized test possibly may not be liable lecturer characteristics. Also, the standardized test scores might be measuring just the small amount of student achievement and that the research findings have threats to its generalizability.

McAllister and Irvine did a qualitative research from a diversity perspective. They conducted a training program on diversity for the lecturers to train them about being empathetic to their students from different cultures. They found that this training program, gave a deeper understanding to the lecturers about the diverse cultures and this understanding lead them to be empathetic to their diverse students. Also, it helped them to be more effective in the classroom. Above all, the lecturers realized that being empathetic towards their students enhanced their interaction with them and that resulted in more positive learning environment [29].

Nordina and colleagues state that there a need for TVET lecturers to develop strong relationship with their students in order to improve student achievement. TVET lecturer should make sure that he/she is friendly, has a trust worthy relationship with the students and is able to understand their students [30]. The main focus of TVET education is to develop mastery skilled and competent workforce and for that it is very crucial for lecturers to make sure that students are satisfied with the lecturer and are learning skills and knowledge effectively [9]. To achieve this goal creating a psychologically safe classroom environment for learning is important. Which can be developed by having empathic TVET lecturers.

7. Research Design and Method
The research design adapted for the study is correlational research design. Correlational research design is used when a researcher is interested in the extent to which two or more variables are correlated, that is, when changes in one variable are reflected in changes in the other [31]. The researcher has chosen this research design because, this research will examine the relationship between TVET lecturers’ empathy students’ achievement.

Data collection will be done by distributing a Likert scale questionnaire of 30 items. The questionnaire will be measuring empathy of TVET lecturers. The researcher is using questionnaire in the study because it is considered suitable when the study is intended to investigate the perspectives, opinions and attitudes of respondents regarding certain characteristic or problem [31].
This study will have two groups of respondents as the target populations for the study. They include TVET final year degree students and the lecturers who are teaching those students in the Faculty of Technical and Vocational Education (FPTV) and Faculty of Technology Engineering (FTK) from University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM). There are eight faculties in the UTHM, however only two faculties are chosen. They are chosen purposely for this study because both of them share the similar degree programmes that is mechanical, electrical and civil engineering. Since they share similar degree programmes, the researchers intend to see the difference in the lecturers’ empathy sharing similar programmes yet with different educational background. Which are FPTV lecturers with education background and FTK lecturers with non-education (technical) background. As based on the previous research findings, it shows that individuals who have education background tend to have better understanding of empathy than the individuals who come from different educational background and then choose teaching as a profession [32].

T-test will be used to find out the difference between the level of empathy of TVET lecturers in FPTV and FTK from lecturers’ perspective and from students’ perspective. Then, after getting the perception of lecturers and students from both the faculties, they will be correlated by using Pearson correlation to find out the relationship between the lecturers’ and students’ perception. Finally, Pearson correlation will also be used to find out the relationship between lecturer’s empathy and students’ achievement in both the faculties.

8. Conclusion
Overall, empathy of a TVET lecturer needs to be encouraged and enhanced for creating healthy relationship with students. Which makes students self-efficacious, motivated towards their studies, positively affect their academic outcomes and ultimately shapes a good human being. In addition, lecturer empathy not only help students but also is good for lecturer’s own well-being and keeps them determined towards this noble task.

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10. References
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