

Development and Validation of the Language Teachers' Empathy Skills Scale

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Abstract

Understanding others' feelings and thoughts and responding to them properly is called empathy and it is one of the fundamental features of language teachers. Despite the recognized significance of empathy in language teaching, there is currently a lack of a standardized scale to measure empathy skills specifically in the context of language education. Based on a sequential mixed methods design, at the first phase of the study a pool of 70 items was developed based on the literature. Expert views and face and content validity procedure reduced them to 23. A number of 255 English language teachers participated in the second phase of the study. Exploratory factor analysis was employed. Three sub constructs labeled as Emotional Attunement Skills, Active Listening Skill, and Perspective-taking Skill were found for the remaining 15 items. The findings revealed that the valid and reliable scale can be safely used to assess empathy skills.

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Introduction

Empathy plays a crucial role in education, particularly in language education, as it fosters positive relationships, enhances communication skills, and promotes understanding. In

recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of empathy in the field of education, with researchers and educators emphasizing its impact on student learning, well-being, and outcomes (Bridenbaugh, 2024; Cañero Pérez et al., 2019; Licsandru et al., 2026; Meyers et al., 2019; Morales-Rodríguez et al., 2020; Phan, 2026). There is no universal agreement on the definition of empathy. The differences depend on the authors' point of view and what they wish to emphasize. However, empathy is usually defined as the ability to understand individuals' internal states in order to respond and behave appropriately which is definitely a vital skill for educators.

Empathy provides different positive consequences including social understanding, mutual understanding, moral behavior, caring for and regulation of aggression (Astutik & Sidabutar, 2025; Derman & Başal, 2014; Lotfi & Shakaroyan, 2013; Miller, 2018; Yaghoobi et al., 2026). It also plays an important role in relation to cognitive processes specially associated with socio-emotional competence and emotional intelligence (Altavilla et al., 2021; Canlı et al., 2025; Pantelides, 2024; Xing et al., 2025). According to the definition, empathy enables us to understand others' feelings and behaviors; therefore, it is possible to predict their behaviors which is important for teachers because it helps to respond appropriately (Allison et al., 2011; Zava et al., 2025; Zohoorian & Faravani, 2021). It is also a tool to create an effective educational relationship to promote self-esteem, to identify potential abilities, encourage students, and to promote compassion for the students (Calloway & Thomas, 2010; Cura & Atay, 2023; Fergusson et al., 2026; He et al., 2024). In the context of non-native speakers, empathy assumes a heightened significance as these students often experience a sense of inadequacy despite their proficiency in their native language. Their challenges in communication can lead to feelings of isolation, being overlooked, and potential misunderstandings. Accordingly, for such groups of students there is a need for extending empathy and recognizing their special needs in order to provide the required support toward both academic and personal growth (Cooper, 2011). Empathy is considered a crucial factor in mitigating prejudice, excluding discrimination, and promoting inclusivity. Empathy can also lead to the facilitation of comprehension among individuals whose values, beliefs, behaviors, or norms differ (Altavilla et al., 2021; Gazo et al., 2021; Junaid et al., 2025). Thus, the need for the development of a reliable and valid scale to measure empathy skills seems to be undeniable. Such a scale can be used as an instrument for assessing language teachers' empathy skills (Zohoorian & Zeraatpishe, 2020).

Literature Review

Empathy as a complex concept has received increased attention in educational contexts due to its potential impact on student outcomes (Aliverti, 2025; Barton & Garvis, 2019; Gupta et al., 2026; Zhang, 2022). Based on the theoretical and conceptual perspectives of empathy, it is conceivable that it is a multi-faceted phenomenon including both cognitive and affective components (Ferguson & Wimmer, 2023; Mattan et al., 2016; Roth & Altmann, 2021). Its cognitive component involves the ability of understanding another

person's perspectives; while, the affective component comprises the capacity of experiencing and responding to others' emotions (Decety, 2010; Gerdes & Segal, 2009; Jia et al., 2025).

Several theoretical models of empathy have been suggested by different scholars. One that focuses on the skills required for empathy is the Theory of Mind (ToM). The theory clarifies how people can develop an understanding of others' mental states. Accordingly, mental states can be used as a source to deduce others' mental states. Those with an advanced level of ToM have higher understanding and prediction of others' behavior which helps them in the development of interpersonal relationships (He et al., 2024). Thus, they are more prone to engage in pro-social behaviors including cooperation, altruism, and empathy (Ceylan et al., 2011; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992). Empathy is closely linked to ToM, as it involves the ability to comprehend and share the emotions and experiences of others. To empathize with someone, one must be able to deduce mental states, including feelings, beliefs, and intentions, and utilize this data to comprehend viewpoints and react rightly (Ecer et al., 2026; Perosanz et al., 2024). This requires the utilization of cognitive processes that are related to ToM, such as mentalizing and perspective-taking.

Empathy

Empathy is a concept that is defined differently based on the author's perspectives. In the 1980s, Feshbach (1975) acknowledged that defining and measuring empathy is challenging. Multiple definitions of empathy exist, including caring for others, having a desire to assist them, experiencing the emotions of others, understanding what others feel or think, empathizing with others by putting oneself in their place, and attempting to think like them (Stojiljkovic et al., 2013).

As there is no agreement on the definition of empathy, it is challenging to describe its skills without a clear definition. Empathy is the capacity to share another's internal world of thoughts and emotions. Empathy as a soft skill for language teachers (Ísiguzel, 2025), is the act of imaginatively stepping into someone else's shoes, understanding their feelings and viewpoints (Durmaz et al., 2019), and using that understanding to guide one's actions (Astutik & Sidabutar, 2025).

Moreover, empathy has two different aspects including cognitive and affective. According to the definition, in an empathetic process it is supposed to understand one's thoughts and feelings. But it needs to be considered that it is also needed to feel as that person feels (Heyers et al., 2025; Thompson et al., 2022). It is worth mentioning that there is a difference between the two aspects of empathy; cognitive and affective. The affective aspect includes feeling one's feeling or inner state which is somehow passive and receptive while the cognitive aspect which is understanding and interpretation of the perceived feeling is an active process (Reed, 1984).

The cognitive component conveys the meaning of understanding individuals' feelings and trying to have their perspective; on the other hand, the affective component consists of an appropriate emotional response to another person's emotion (Jia et al., 2025; Stojiljkovic et al., 2013). To be empathetic, teachers need to show concern for the students and take the students' perspectives into account (Swan & Riley, 2015; Wang et al., 2025). Empathy concerns with both commonality and difference. On one hand, empathy is a skill to understand individuals' emotional and mental states and find a common language (Karacaoglu, 2025); on the other hand, it requires accepting differences beyond commonalities (Lotfi & Shakaroyan, 2013; Sultan & Khan, 2025; Yaseen & Foster, 2019).

Empathy Skills

The development of empathy skills is clearly linked to enhancing a range of cognitive and behavioral (communicational) skills, including increasing self-awareness, active listening, respect, and tolerance, being reflective, open-minded, and receptive to feedback. These skills are essential for teachers to possess in order to be empathetic. It has been emphasized by Karacaoglu (2025) that empathy is among the twenty first century basic skills that are required of educators.

According to Cooper (2011), there are different types of empathy but all of them consist of different characteristics or sub-skills. The first ability that is described by Cooper is acceptance or openness that means teachers must accept the students' beliefs without judgment or criticism and respond to them with "sensitive language and voice tone" in a positive way and allow them to express themselves comfortably (Tsou et al, 2021). Another point that is vital for empathetic teachers is giving attention; it is important to be attentive toward the students (Hashim et al., 2019; Yasnita et al., 2025) as it improves "engagement", "communication" and "learning". The third skill, which is probably the most important one, is listening. Teachers are required to hear students' perspectives and give them enough time to talk because it will help them to clarify their understanding and gives them the chance to be more open. It needs to be mentioned that if teachers listen to the students carefully and respond to them in that way, it makes the students accept their responses and suggestions (Cooper, 2011).

Another considerable point for empathetic teachers is showing interest (Lotfi & Shakaroyan, 2013) in the students' talks when they speak. If the teacher shows that she is interested, it makes the students feel valued and worthy (İsiguzel, 2025). The other point is having a "positive and affirmative approach" toward the students in the relationship that you have with your students. This one is closely related to the points mentioned before; "listening" and "showing interest". This point requires expressing the affirmation and praising the students directly whenever it is needed which is a key point. Accordingly, the point is that the student's efforts and achievements must be recognized (Bridenbaugh, 2024).

Lorié et al. (2015) also point out some communicational arguments or means of communication that must be applied by teachers to have and create an empathetic relationship. First, they express the importance of "facial expression" and "interactions". Two facial expressions are discussed, eye contact and smile which are important to create positive communication. The other way of communication that is mentioned is gesture and body language. Using different means of communication makes a "relaxed and interactive" relationship that also engages the students.

The importance of fairness and treating students without prejudice and bias are expressed by (Paul & Elder, 2019). Empathetic teachers apply different methods and lesson plans for different classes according to students' responses and needs (Yasnita et al., 2025). Ross (2019) expressed different skills and traits that individuals need to be more empathetic: first, it is listening more without judgment or without necessarily giving advice. Also, what is important is being curious. If you want to be empathetic you need to be curious about individuals' problems, points of view, and opinions. In addition, you have to use your imagination to understand somebody's situation. She also discussed that it is vital to create an environment where everyone is able to open communication and contribute thoughts and feelings (Vomund & Miller, 2025).

Wink et al. (2021) proposed that a critical requirement for empathetic teachers is stress management to be able to understand the students' feelings and more importantly respond to them properly and effectively. It can thus be concluded that stress management is an essential empathy skill (Manke et al., 2025). In the following sections a number of related skills to empathize are discussed.

Empathy and Tolerance

Based on De Silva (2011) tolerance and empathy are strongly connected. Shady and Larson (2010) depicted that empathy and tolerance are not separable because tolerance without empathy is inadequate, on the other hand, empathy without tolerance can be problematic. Tolerance refers to accepting or enduring something negative or undesirable. Otherwise, tolerance is not meaningful (Lahdesmaki et al., 2022).

Khitruk and Ulianora (2012) have emphasized that teachers require empathy, and tolerance is a crucial aspect of empathy. They explained that tolerance involves acknowledging diverse viewpoints and recognizing one's right to be unique, rather than identical to others. To be tolerant means to endure beliefs or actions that one may dislike or disapprove of. The practice of tolerance can foster a positive relationship and atmosphere for oneself and others (Khan et al., 2025). Tolerance is closely intertwined with empathy, perspective-taking, and emotional intelligence (İsiguzel, 2025). In order to practice tolerance, certain conditions or requirements must be met. It is essential to provide individuals with opportunities to speak liberally without any form of pressure, even if one has the power to restrict their speech.

Hammond (2006) mentioned some values and related requirements which can be applied to be able to empathize and have tolerance with others. The first value is accepting the fact that everyone "has a voice that should be heard". Then, it is supposed to give the others time to talk. The second value is that "every idea deserves consideration", so it is essential to listen to other's opinions and respond to them positively. The other values relate to the importance of being open-minded that requires listening to the individuals with different ideas and showing respect (Hammond, 2006; Lotfi & Shakaroyan, 2013).

Empathy and Openness

Butrus and Witenberg (2012) argued that there exists a significant link between tolerance, open-mindedness, and empathy. Price et al. (2015) stated that being open-minded is the "willingness to consider a verity of intellectual perspectives, values, attitudes, opinions or beliefs, even those that contradict the individual's prior opinion". A person who is open-minded considers any kind of received information about others in an unbiased way. On the other hand, a close-minded or dogmatic person has the tendency to consider information with a kind of bias (Guo, 2026). They process information to support and prove their bias or prior opinion or expectation. As Lambie (2014) emphasizes, open-mindedness is an essential element of empathy and is strongly associated with it (Dolbier et al., 2024).

Empathy and Critical Thinking or Accepting Criticism

An important empathy skill is accepting criticism. To have acceptance toward criticism one needs to be open-minded and have willingness to receive different messages. In addition, some characteristics are necessary; first of all, having a thoughtful attitude toward criticism and trying not respond immediately and spontaneously, also listening carefully and being a reflective listener (Motukeeva et al., 2026). A good listener tries to listen to "what a person is saying rather than planning how to react" the last point is evaluating criticism objectively and not emotionally and based on your emotions (Canlı et al., 2025). Empathy requires more than understanding what others feel or believe but also how and why (Metz et al., 2020).

Empathy and Bias

Research has indicated that empathy can help mitigate biases and stereotypes by encouraging individuals to adopt the perspective of others (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000, cited in Sukhera, 2019). One helpful technique for reducing biases is to engage in mindfulness exercises that involve attentively listening to what is being said and striving to avoid making judgments or assumptions. Sukhera (2019) has recommended self-reflection or critical reflection as an effective means of overcoming biases.

Empathy and Active Listening

Active listening is a necessary factor in creating an empathetic relationship. It is one of the most important skills or strategies for establishing relationships to understand somebody's thoughts and emotions (Azarchi & Hanover, 2020; Susanto & Anggara, 2026). Listening to the learners and giving them opportunities to talk is emphasized in a way that they can express themselves and their values. In addition, it is suggested that giving students a voice contributes in understating their perspectives (Cai et al., 2023; Demetriou, 2018; Yassin et al., 2026). Educators may feel concerned about encouraging student participation thinking that they may lose class control. However, through adapting a more open attitude, it is possible to experience the profits of encouraging student engagement as well as dialogue (Demetriou, 2018).

Empathy and Observation

Another factor that is central for empathy is observation as it permits considering others' experiences by carefully attending to nonverbal signals, body language, as well as context. Through observing, one can gain insight into their emotions and needs. Furthermore, actual communication through identifying and responding to the indirect distinctions related to social situations can happen. Attending to such interpersonal interactions, one can advance empathetic abilities (Hartman et al., 2017; Singh & Chauhan, 2026). Also, empathetic capacity is strongly related to the ability to read or understand an individual and understanding an individual requires paying enough attention to others' reactions and behaviors. Thus, active observation, active listening and the ability to interpret what you see and hear are pivotal (Iqbal & Jami, 2025).

Empathy and Communicational Skills

Empathy and communication skills are vital for effective teaching. Empathy allows teachers to comprehend their students' exclusive needs, perspectives, as well as backgrounds (Ampofo et al., 2025; Baker et al., 2017). Developing empathy and communicational skills is indispensable for creating a constructive and active learning environment (Megawati et al., 2026).

Empathy in Language Education Contexts

As a critical skill for language teachers for creating a positive learning environment, empathy is particularly vital in the context of language education. This is due to the fact that students may be dealing with challenges of learning a new language specially in a foreign context (İsiguzel, 2025). One of the most central skills is active listening which involves paying close attention to what the students state through their body language and even tone of voice. Active listening permits the appreciation of students' viewpoints as a means used for modifying instruction. It will boost trust and admiration as a vital element for creating constructive learning environments (Caldwell, 2025). Research suggests that teachers' active listening can lead to understanding students' wants to provide more functioning support or supervision (Newton, 2024).

Perspective-taking is the next essential skill involving visualization of oneself in the student's place to view the world from their side. It assists teachers to understand challenges of the students to be respectful of their needs. Research findings highlight that perspective-taking leads to understating students' needs to provide effective support (Kokko & Rätty, 2018; Zee, 2025).

Having self-awareness is another crucial skill for empathy. Self-awareness can help in handling one's own emotions, prejudices, and assumptions, which can lead to improved interactions with students (Karacaoglu, 2025). Additionally, it enables teachers to avoid imposing own experiences or offering impartial feedback and guidance.

Moreover, empathy can facilitate teachers in comprehending students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Aliverti, 2025). In classrooms including diverse linguistic backgrounds, empathetic teachers can recognize the difficulties faced by multilingual students. Studies demonstrate that teacher empathy can foster an inclusive learning environment that caters to the requirements of every student (Deci et al., 1999). It is also believed that integration of empathy can enhance multicultural awareness and will ensure inclusivity, especially in English language teaching contexts (Aliverti, 2025).

Hence, empathy skills can benefit teachers to develop a more profound understanding of the emotional and social aspects of language learning. Learning a new language can be a demanding and intimidating experience, predominantly for students who are learning it in a foreign context. Empathy skills are required for teachers in language learning contexts to create a positive and supportive learning environment. The skills including active listening, perspective-taking, and self-awareness are essential for teachers to advance empathy. By prioritizing empathy skills in language education contexts, teachers can create a more inclusive learning atmosphere (Konotop et al., 2026).

Methodology

A mixed method design of the type exploratory sequential design was used. This design is usually used in development and administration of a new survey instrument to interpret the two sets of results. In fact, the quantitative results can verify, confirm or generalize the initial qualitative results (Hesse-Biber, 2010). The qualitative phase included the collection of data from the literature. Definitions related to empathy skills were found in literature accordingly. This deductive step of reviewing the literature is used for generating an item pool in developing scales (Morgado et al., 2017; Slavec & Drnovšek, 2012).

To analyze the qualitative data, emergent thematic coding was conducted. Thus, pattern and theme finding were used for analysis (Miles et al., 2014). Based on the guidelines presented by Rattray and Jones (2007), the generation of controversial or emotive items was avoided. The thematic coding type employed in the current study was emergent

thematic coding (Stemler, 2001). For the quantitative data analysis for this study, SPSS Version 25 was used to perform exploratory factor analysis and to estimate the reliability index.

Participants and Setting

The total number of the individuals who completed the teacher's empathy skill questionnaire voluntarily was 255. They were language teachers having majors of language teaching and literature. The participants were between the age of 18 to 60 and all of them were Persian speakers. Out of 255 participants, 76 were males while 179 were females. Two participants held Post Docs, while 20 participants held PhDs, also 134 participants were master holders and 99 participants had a BA or were students of BA. The participants had from 1 to 10 years of experience in language teaching.

Instrument Development

After a comprehensive review of the literature and previous studies in order to conceptualize empathy skills, for item development, a number of 116 items were extracted. The extracted items were revised and the items with overlaps in meaning were merged. So, the total number of the items reduced to 70.

The face validity and content validity of the items were ensured by three experts. After receiving expert comments, items were merged as follows: 3, 17, 21, 39, 50 and 1 with 59 (I have a sense of sharing and understanding in my language learners' success and failure.), 38, 7 and 16 with 4 (I notice nonverbal messages from my language learners.), 10, 13, 30, 62, 31 and 56 with 22 (I try to facilitate my communication with my language learners.), 45 and 11 with 34 (I show interest in my language learners' personal world.), 36 and 60 with 14 (most of listening I have in my class is through critical listening.), 15, 64 and 35 with 32 (I can perceive feelings within myself.), 47, 18, 67, 53 and 51 with 58 (I keep my smile when communicating with my language learners.), 8 with 66 (I try to comfort my language learners in class.), 70, 65, 19, 69 and 44 with 68 (I am capable of distinguishing spoken from behavioral expressions of my language learners' emotions by recognizing emotive facial expressions.), 2 with 41 (I try to understand the worldview of language class members), 9 with 29 (I try to provide justice in my language class.), 12 with 66 (I try to comfort my language learners in class.), 43 and 55 with 42 (I try to learn about my language learners' cultural practices, norms and values.), 40 with 63 (Time giving is my strategy to let my language learners feel valued.), 54 with 5 (I accurately understand the meanings of the students' messages even when the messages are conflicting.). Also, based on the comments, items 25, 48, 24, 33, 52, 61 and 28 were omitted. Furthermore, based on the proposed comments, item 4 was modified. Therefore, the number of items reduced to 23 which are presented in Table 1. Consequently, to evaluate the proposed scale, the respondents were asked to rate the relevance of each item to their teaching experiences by choosing one of the given options on a five-point

Likert scale to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each statement, using (1) very untrue of me, (2) untrue of me, (3) neutral, (4) true of me, (5) very true of me.

Scale Validity and Reliability

In order to assess the validity and reliability of the proposed scale the following stages were conducted.

Content validity: content validity deals with “the question of whether the test adequately covers the dimension to be measured and is particularly relevant to achievement tests” (Domino, 2006). Therefore, the first stage was the assessment of the proposed scale’s content validity which was examined by 5 experts in language education and educational psychology.

Face validity: face validity assesses if a test “appears to be measuring what it claims to measure” (Kline, 2000). In this case, for the face validity the experts were required to analyze the items.

Construct validity: For the construct validity of the study, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was applied. Exploratory factor analysis is a statistical technique used to identify the underlying factors or dimensions that explain the variation in a set of observed variables. It is a data reduction technique that helps to simplify complex data sets by grouping related variables together and identifying common patterns or themes (Yong & Pearce, 2013). In the quantitative phase, EFA was employed to evaluate the construct validity of the study.

Results

After extracting the initial item pool and preparation of the first version of the proposed scale, the scale was sent for face and content validity to the experts. Table 1 presents the finalized proposed scale including 23 items.

Table 1

The 23 Finalized Items

	Items
1	I notice nonverbal messages from my language learners.
2	I accurately understand the meanings of the students’ messages even when the messages are conflicting.
3	I may perceive affective messages inaccurately.
4	Most of the listening I have in my language class is critical.
5	I can build a confidential and trusting relationship with my language learners.
6	I try to facilitate my communication with my language learners.
7	I am creative in my language teaching.
8	I influence the language class atmosphere with jokes and personal exchanges and non- academic conversations.
9	I provide my language learners with simple reflections.
10	I try to provide justice in my language class.
11	I can perceive feelings within myself.

12	I show interest in my language learners' personal world.
13	I use an affirmative and respectful language in relation to my language learners.
14	I try to understand the worldview of language class members.
15	I try to learn about my language learners' cultural practices, norms and values.
16	I can see the negative outcomes of my actions.
17	I am aware of the impression I make on my language learners.
18	I keep my eye contact when communicating with my language learners.
19	I keep my smile when communicating with my language learners.
20	I have a sense of sharing and understanding in my language learners' success and failure.
21	Time giving is my strategy to let my language learners feel valued.
22	I try to comfort my language learners in class.
23	I am capable of distinguishing spoken from behavioral expressions of my language learners' emotions by recognizing emotive facial expressions.

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, variances, minimum, and maximum for the Empathy skills scale.

Table 2

Teachers' Empathy Skills Questionnaire (TESQ)

	TESQ
Mean	85.8937
Median	88.0000
Mode	88.00
Std. Deviation	12.60217
Variance	158.815
Range	55.00
Minimum	57.00
Maximum	112.00

Checking Normality

The normality of data distributions was checked. Values for Skewness and Kurtosis were calculated. As Table 3 shows, all values are within the "very good" range. Therefore, normality of the distributions for all the tests in the study it can be assumed.

Table 3

Test of Normality for Teachers' Empathy Skills Questionnaire (TESQ) Data

	TESQ
Skewness	.37
Std. Error of Skewness	.15
Kurtosis	-.37
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.29

Reliability Analysis

According to Table 4 the Cronbach's alpha reliability of the scale is 0.89. This value is an indication that the scores based on the questionnaires are reliable. The reliability of Factor 1, Factor 2, and Factor 3 were .76, .69, and .77, respectively.

Table 4*Reliability Statistics*

Factor	Reli	No. Items
1	.76	6
2	.69	6
3	.77	3
Full scale	.89	15

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

The EFA analysis was conducted in SPSS (version 25) to specify the factorial structure of the scale. Before running an EFA, items with reverse scoring were initially recoded to ensure that all items are scored to achieve the conceptual direction of the latent variable, that is, high scores indicate high levels of the construct. Then, the suitability of data for factor analysis was tested.

Inspection of a correlation matrix of all items showed a high majority of correlations above 0.30. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity assumptions were also tested. The value of KMO was 0.90, which was well above 0.60. The result for Bartlett's test of sphericity was also statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) indicating that variables did not have equal variances and were appropriate for structure detection.

The 23 items of the scale were subjected to principal axis factoring (PAF) with a varimax rotation. PAF was preferred over a principal component analysis (PCA) because the aim was to explore the factors or latent constructs that underlie the response patterns of respondents. In PAF, it is assumed that total variance can be partitioned into common and unique variance. Researchers have argued that PAF has no distributional assumptions (Fabrigar et al., 1999) and can better recover weak factors (Briggs & MacCallum, 2003; De Winter & Dodou, 2012). Varimax rotation, as an orthogonal factor solution, was also used because it allows for the factors to be uncorrelated. This technique minimizes mid-value factor loadings and maximizes low- and high-value factor loadings.

The results of PAF in the first run of the factor analysis revealed the presence of 5 factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1, which accounted for 30.37%, 6.57%, 5.11%, 4.45%, and 4.26% of the variance, respectively.

Table 5 illustrates factor loading results. Items which cross-loaded on two or more factors, had low factor loadings, single items which formed only one factor, or did not load on any factor were identified. Here, thorough an iterative process, items with low factor loading < 0.40 , or with a secondary loading were removed (Schonrock-Adema et al., 2009). At each step of iteration, items were deleted one after another, and EFA was repeated to achieve easy-to-understand and theoretically meaningful results.

*Rotated Factor Matrix with 23 Items***Table 5***Rotated Factor Matrix*

Items	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
1					.578
2			.530		
3			.440		
4					
5		.505			
6					
7					
8					
9		.454			
10				.793	
11					
12	.629				
13		.443			
14			.657		
15			.562		
16	.450				
17	.663				
18		.459			
19	.461				
20	.461		.456		
21	.524				
22		.517			
23					

The final result of this process was the removal of 8 items (i.e., 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 20, and 23) leaving 15 items. The final analysis revealed a 3-factor solution (See Table 6) explaining 30.52%, 7.52%, and 6.35% of the variance.

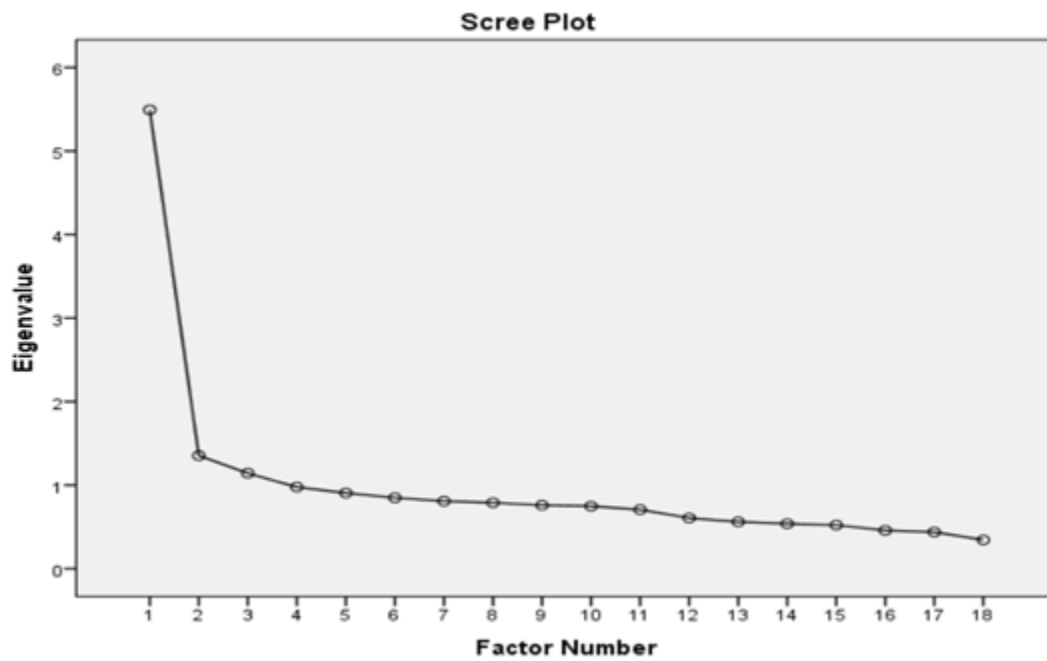
The degree of reliability for the 15-item scale was investigated using Cronbach alpha coefficient, and the value of 0.89 was obtained, suggesting good internal consistency reliability for the scale with this sample. The reliability of Factor 1, Factor 2, and Factor 3 were .76, .69, and .77, respectively.

Table 6
The Three Factor Solution

Factor			
Item	1	2	3
2			.52
5		.55	
7		.40	
9		.40	
11	.42		
12	.61		
13		.46	
14			.72
15			.57
16	.43		
17	.67		
18		.45	
19	.43		
21	.52		
22		.55	

Figure 1, the Scree plot clearly shows an elbow after the third factor which is evidence of a three-factor solution.

Figure 1
Scree Plot Showing the Number of Factors



An analysis of the scree plot shows the presence of three factors. As can be seen in Figure 1, the three factors have eigenvalues over 1, which are considered as ‘strong factors’.

Based on the items contents under every factor and relying on the literature, factor 1 (Attunement Awareness Skills) included 6 items of 11, 12, 16, 17, 19, and 21. Factor 2 (Active listening Skill) included 6 items of 5, 7, 9, 13, 18, and 22. Factor 3 (Perspective-taking Skill) included 6 items of 2, 14, and 15 (Table 7).

Table 7

The Four Factors and the Related Items

Factors	Items
Factor 1 (Emotional Attunement Skill)	I can perceive feelings within myself.
	I show interest in my language learners’ personal world.
	I can see the negative outcomes of my actions.
	I am aware of the impression I make on my language learners.
	I keep my smile when communicating with my language learners.
	Time giving is my strategy to let my language learners feel valued.
Factor 2 (Active listening Skill)	I can build a confidential and trusting relationship with my language learners.
	I am creative in my language teaching.
	I provide my language learners with simple reflections.
	I use an affirmative and respectful language in relation to my language learners.
	I keep my eye contact when communicating with my language learners.
	I try to comfort my language learners in class.
Factor 3 (Perspective-taking Skill)	I accurately understand the meanings of the students’ messages even when the messages are conflicting.
	I try to understand the worldview of language class members.
	I try to learn about my language learners’ cultural practices, norms and values.

Table 8 shows the means, and standard deviations of the items. Discrimination (corrected item-total correlations) as well as Cronbach’s Alpha if item deleted values for the 23 items identified are presented in Table 9. The indices indicate that all the items contribute to the definition of TESQ.

Table 8*Means, and Standard Deviations of the Item*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1	3.79	.979	254
2	3.33	1.053	254
3	2.98	1.055	254
4	3.20	0.944	254
5	4.02	.966	254
6	3.99	0.992	254
7	3.70	0.965	254
8	3.72	1.031	254
9	3.81	0.933	254
10	4.04	.938	254
11	3.78	.918	254
12	3.57	1.159	254
13	4.18	0.841	254
14	3.62	1.142	254
15	3.41	1.158	254
16	3.57	1.045	254
17	3.83	0.918	254
18	4.23	0.883	254
19	3.81	1.207	254
20	3.72	1.181	254
21	3.60	1.076	254
22	4.09	.896	254
23	3.88	.865	254

Table 9*Item-Total Statistics for the TESQ Items*

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I1	82.11	144.672	.560	.405	.884
I2	82.56	142.145	.620	.469	.882
I3	82.92	150.171	.291	.197	.891
I4	82.69	152.974	.212	.137	.892
I5	81.87	147.758	.431	.292	.887
I6	81.91	143.319	.611	.461	.883
I7	82.20	146.767	.475	.301	.886
I8	82.17	147.841	.396	.244	.888
I9	82.08	150.318	.333	.199	.890
I10	81.85	149.622	.362	.289	.889
I11	82.11	147.292	.479	.297	.886
I12	82.32	140.993	.598	.483	.883
I13	81.72	148.813	.453	.279	.887
I14	82.28	140.564	.626	.523	.882
I15	82.49	140.733	.609	.464	.882
I16	82.33	147.905	.386	.258	.889
I17	82.06	146.127	.534	.400	.885
I18	81.66	147.980	.468	.298	.886
I19	82.08	140.326	.596	.443	.883
I20	82.17	138.426	.684	.538	.880
I21	82.30	143.276	.558	.373	.884
I22	81.80	148.404	.440	.301	.887
I23	82.02	152.229	.274	.131	.891

Discussion

This study was an endeavor for initial developing and validating of an empathy skills scale for language teachers. The developed and validated questionnaire encompasses three primary factors of emotional attunement, perspective taking, and active listening, all together representing the key dimensions related to empathy skills. The study findings can have a contributing role in the increasingly growing literature that stresses the role of empathy specifically in educational settings. Empathy skills are central elements in effective communication and the establishment of strong relationships (Chan et al., 2023), particularly in educational settings to comprehend and fulfill students' needs (Altavilla et al., 2021; Kokko & Rätty, 2018).

Relying on the theoretical viewpoint, the extracted factors align well with the conceptualization of empathy as a multidimensional construct entailing not only affective but also cognitive and behavioral aspects (Decety, 2010; Ferguson & Wimmer, 2023; Thompson et al., 2022). Empathy involves the processes of recognizing others' emotional states and understanding their perspective which leads to responding appropriately through interpersonal interactions. Such processes are closely connected with the theory of mind emphasizing the ability of inferring others' mental states, and simulation theory suggesting that individuals internally simulate others' emotional experiences with the intention of understanding them (Ecer et al., 2026). The identified factors can be a reflection of empathy in language teaching contexts.

Emotional attunement as the first factor, involves the ability of identifying and understanding the emotions of others. It reflects the teachers' ability of recognizing as well as responding to language learners' indications. This dimension relies on the affective dimension. While language classrooms are characterized by anxiety or communication apprehension together with the fear of making mistakes, such emotional awareness can be particularly significant. Language teachers who have well-developed emotional attunement skills can not only perceive but also respond effectively to their students' emotional states (Canlı et al., 2025; Pantelides, 2024). Earlier research also highlights teachers' responsiveness to enhance learners' psychological safety as a means of increasing engagement (Ampofo et al., 2025; Cai et al., 2023). This factor also reflects self-other differentiation as mentioned by Hojat (2007) as teachers have to remain aware considering their own emotional states and concurrently have to recognize the emotional states of their learners. Keeping the sort of balance will enable teachers to have empathetic responses, avoid becoming overwhelmed emotionally, or project their own feelings onto learners. The developed and validated questionnaire includes items that assess the teacher's skill of recognizing and distinguishing their own emotions from those of their students. This leads to a more empathetic and supportive learning environment (Sinoforoglu & Balcikanli, 2020; Tafazoli et al., 2018).

Perspective taking which is another factor involves comprehending and considering the viewpoints as well as experiences of others (Ishii et al., 2019) and it represents the cognitive dimension of empathy in an educational setting like a language classroom, this skill allows teachers to understand behaviors as well as challenges in learning rather than only relying on instructional viewpoints. Previous research also suggests that perspective taking plays a focal role in building student-teacher connections and it promotes inclusive learning environments (Meyers et al., 2019; Vomund & Miller, 2025). While language classrooms basically experience cultural, social, and linguistic diversity, perspective taking becomes an important issue. Language teachers who can understand differences can have a better ability in adapting the required instructional strategies or communication styles to satisfy learners' needs. Research emphasizes that perspective taking is an essential competency for language teachers (Aliverti, 2025; Kokko & Rätty, 2018).

The last factor found was active listening which is a fundamental skill for effective empathetic communication emphasizing how empathy is enacted. The questionnaire emphasizes active listening as a critical strategy for language teachers to demonstrate empathy towards their students (Azarchi & Hanover, 2020). Active listening involves giving undivided attention to the speaker, maintaining eye contact, providing verbal and nonverbal cues, and reflecting on the speaker's emotions and perspectives. Effective listening allows teachers to validate students' experiences and encourage open communication (Miller, 2018; Newton, 2024). In a language learning environment, the role of active listening is dominant as classroom communication plays a dual role of medium and objective of teaching. Language teachers can create a secure and supportive environment that fosters understanding, trust, and open communication. Teachers demonstrating active listening can respect students' contributions and thus enhance participation and collaboration (Phan, 2026; Susanto & Anggara, 2026). The questionnaire includes items that assess the teacher's active listening skills and their ability to reflect upon and respond to their students' emotions and perspectives.

These extracted constructs can function as interrelated components to enable teachers to identify and respond to language learners' emotional and cognitive states. For instance, emotional attunement can reflect the teacher's capacity of differentiating self from others. This helps in allowing for appropriate responses based on students' needs. The next factor, perspective taking, focuses on other-oriented perspectives presenting why understanding learners' viewpoints can have a critical stance. Similarly, active listening can serve as the practical mechanism enacted in classroom interactions, highlighting the significant role of responsive communication to build trust or openness.

One significant contribution of this study lies in its emphasis on empathy as a skill rather than as a personality trait. Several researchers have made attempts to develop empathy scales. For example, one of the earliest was developed by Hogan during 1960s. The scale

focused on only measuring high and low empathy and its constructs included social self-confidence, even-temperedness, sensitivity, and nonconformity. Another empathy scale was developed by Malakcioglu (2022). In this scale the factors underlying empathy were social interaction, cognitive behavior, and emotional identification. Another Questionnaire to measure Emotional Empathy was developed by Mehrabian et al. (1988). It only focused on a one-dimensional aspect and that was emotional empathy. The empathy scale of Wang et al. (2003) was developed to measure ethno-cultural empathy. There is one recent empathy scale developed by Wang et al. (2023) which was designed to measure teachers' empathy level. The constructs included cognitive, negative affective, and positive affective, and empathy. While previous research has provided valuable insights, the current study developed the empathy skills scale specifically for language teachers and based on an educational context while other researchers' works focused on empathy as a variable in several social contexts and for any respondents rather than empathy skill as a variable for language teachers. An interrelated nature connecting these components is also confirmed through the findings of this study. While emotional attunement helps in recognizing emotional states, perspective taking leads to interpretation and active listening provides a communication channel to respond to needs. These factors all together create an integrated perspective emphasizing the connection between cognitive understanding, emotional sensitivity, and responsive communication (Manke et al., 2025; Meyers et al., 2019).

The present study findings have several implications for the field of language teaching. Firstly, the scale can be used not only for self-reflection or professional development, but also for teacher training or teacher education programs. Thus, it can be effectively employed as a diagnostic tool. Moreover, it can be used as an assessment tool by educational administrators for having institutional policies as it can measure language teachers' competencies.

Notwithstanding its contributions, the study is limited to its sample which included only language teachers in one single geographical area which may limit the generalizability to other cultural or educational settings. Furthermore, the study relied heavily on self-report data. Such data might have been based on social desirability rather than actual practice. Moreover, cross validation and confirmatory factor analysis with various samples can strengthen the scale. Accordingly, future research can extend the findings through cross-cultural applicability examining it in other contexts. In the same vein, qualitative methods or longitudinal research can be employed by future researchers for deeper insights to investigate empathy skill development through time and how it practically affects learners.

Conclusion


This study aimed to develop and validate an empathy skills scale for language teachers. The theoretical foundations of empathy were explored, highlighting the importance of


Theory of Mind (ToM) and simulation theory in understanding and measuring empathy. The findings of this study contribute to the field of empathy research by providing a validated scale specifically designed for language teachers. The scale consists of 15 items that assess three key factors: Emotional Attunement, Active Listening, and Perspective-taking. These factors encompass various aspects of empathy, including perceiving feelings, showing interest in learners' personal world, building trust, providing reflections, and understanding cultural practices and values.


It is important to acknowledge that empathy is a complex construct influenced by various factors, including cultural differences, individual differences, and contextual factors. The scale can be particularly useful in administrative contexts, where the evaluation of teacher tendencies of empathy can play a vital role. Researchers can explore the relationship between empathy skills and other traits, such as individualistic variable to gain a deeper understanding of the interplay between empathy skills and various aspects of language teachers, informing pedagogical practices and interventions.

The study was delimited to studying internal factors related to the skills. While cultural factors can influence the expression and perception of empathy, this research study explored empathy skills among English language teachers in Iran. Also, the study relied on a self-report measure to assess empathy skills and such measures are subject to potential biases including social desirability bias or participants' subjective interpretation of empathy. Future research could explore the applicability of the TESQ in different cultural and linguistic contexts to further validate its cross-cultural validity and generalizability. Additionally, longitudinal studies could investigate the impact of empathy skills on academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being of language learners. In the same vein, qualitative methods such as interviews and observation can be employed to further investigate the applicability of the items and gain deeper insights. This could provide a more comprehensive understanding of empathy skills in language teachers.

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Zahra Zohoorian: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Writing - Original Draft

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Generative AI Use Disclosure Statement

AI tool was not used for generating research data, conducting statistical analysis, or interpreting findings. All research design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and final academic decisions were made solely by the authors.

Ethics Declarations

World Medical Association (WMA) Declaration of Helsinki–Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Participants

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Mashhad Azad University. The participants were provided with written consent forms to be filled prior to their participation, and their participation was voluntary.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Data Availability

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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