



The Role of Empathy in Learning and Psychological Well-Being from a Social Cognition Perspective: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Empathy improves social relationships and also plays a role in students' academic achievement and mental health. However, no previous systematic review has synthesized evidence on empathy's role in classroom group dynamics, learning outcomes, and psychological well-being simultaneously. This systematic review followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Eight databases (PubMed, Scopus, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, Magiran, SID, Noormags, and Civilica) were searched for papers published between January 2015 and December 2025. Two independent reviewers screened records, and quality was assessed. The initial search yielded 196 records. After screening, 17 studies met the inclusion criteria. Based on the findings, empathy is directly or indirectly related to increased learning ability, academic achievement, responsibility, positive interactions with peers at school, and psychological well-being on the one hand, and a decrease in undesirable social behaviors such as bullying and aggression on the other. However, considerable heterogeneity in study designs (cross-sectional, quasi-experimental, longitudinal, and qualitative) and outcome measures precluded meta-analysis. Considering such results, the necessity of designing psychoeducational packages focused on empathy in schools becomes evident. Strengthening empathy in educational settings may simultaneously improve academic achievement and psychological well-being while reducing bullying and maladjustment. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, standardized empathy measures, and active control groups to establish causality.

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Introduction

Empathy is a multidimensional construct that, although it has been primarily examined within psychology, has also stimulated extensive research in sociology and neuroscience (Schurz et al., 2021). This concept is sometimes mistakenly conflated with related notions such as sympathy or compassion; however, it has a fundamentally distinct nature. In experiences of sympathy or compassion, individuals attempt to understand the other person's feelings or pain while remaining in their own role. In contrast, empathy requires role reversal. Role reversal, which is considered a core technique in psychodrama, involves individuals exchanging their own role with that of another person in order to both understand the other more deeply and gain greater insight into themselves (Giacomucci, 2021).

Numerous models and theories of empathy have been proposed. Simulation theory is one such framework, which conceptualizes empathy as a neurobiological mechanism whereby the activation of neural structures associated with one's own experiences enables the modeling of others' mental states and the formation of intersubjective understanding (Preston & Hofelich, 2012). According to this view, when an individual observes another person experiencing an emotion, the observer's brain activates similar neural patterns, effectively "simulating" the other's experience. This simulation process is believed to occur automatically and below the level of conscious awareness, providing a biological basis for empathic understanding.

Another important theory relevant to the present study is the theory of vicarious emotional appraisal. This theory views empathy as integrated with emotion and conceptualizes it in terms of vicarious emotions arising from the appraisal of others' situations. Although this theory shares similarities with simulation theory, unlike that framework, which focuses solely on congruent responses, it also emphasizes empathic responses that may be incongruent with others' situations (Wondra & Ellsworth, 2015). For example, an observer might feel anger on behalf of a friend who has been treated unfairly, even if the friend does not feel angry. This incongruent empathic response is difficult to explain through pure simulation but is well accounted for by vicarious appraisal theory.

Empathy encompasses biological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Cognitive and emotional empathy give rise to empathic and prosocial behaviors and, through this process, enhance students' psychological well-being (Han & Yoo, 2024; Schurz et al., 2021; Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2019). In addition, empirical studies have shown that empathy training in schools leads to increased group activities and social responsibility and, while reducing behavioral problems and anxiety, improves academic performance (Bezzina, 2022; Silke et al., 2024; Xiang et al., 2022). These findings suggest that empathy is not merely a social-emotional skill but also a potentially powerful lever for academic improvement.

It seems impossible to separate empathy from social relationships and group interactions, as empathy is fundamentally regarded as a social and interpersonal construct. Social relationships not only play a crucial role in the emotional experiences of children and adolescents but also influence their functioning at school. For this reason, students' social relationships in school settings have been the focus of numerous recent research studies (Schlesier et al., 2025).

Group work multiplies opportunities for the generation of new knowledge and enhances motivation for learning. It represents a dynamic and multidimensional process that involves individual willingness and collaboration with others in carrying out activities to achieve shared goals, engaging in tasks that require information exchange, assuming responsibilities, resolving conflicts, and contributing to collective improvement and development. In the context of classroom group learning, the following outcomes emerge:

- Positive interdependence: Occurs when each group member understands that his or her success is measured by the success of other group members and, subsequently, the group itself.

- Individual and group responsibility: Occurs when all group members accept responsibility for performing the task assigned to them while at the same time being aware of the duties of others and being responsive and supportive when needed.
- Promotive interaction: This interaction takes place face-to-face between group members so that they support each other in the learning process by sharing resources, knowledge, and past experiences.
- Social and group work skills: These are skills that students learn as a result of the need to interact. These skills include negotiation skills, decision-making, conflict resolution, building social networks, presenting creative ideas, and constructive criticism and accepting criticism.
- Group reflection: Through this process, the performance and dynamics of the group are evaluated, as well as the extent to which the results match the proposed goals. This allows for changes and optimal suggestions for future work to be identified and ensures that all members receive feedback on the positive aspects and areas for improvement in their performance (Guevara et al., 2023).

None of the above is possible without empathy. Despite the substantial body of research on empathy in educational settings, significant gaps remain. First, most previous reviews have focused either on social relationships alone or on academic outcomes without considering group processes. Second, the mechanisms through which empathy influences group-based learning remain underspecified. Third, no systematic review to date has specifically examined the role of empathy in the intersection of classroom group dynamics, learning outcomes, and psychological well-being simultaneously.

Therefore, the most important goal of the present study is to review the results of recent research studies on the role of empathy in students' learning and psychological well-being, with an emphasis on group activities, in order to emphasize the importance of this issue. Specifically, this systematic review aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What is the association between empathy and students' learning outcomes (academic achievement, learning ability, responsibility) in group-based classroom settings?
- What is the association between empathy and psychological well-being (mental health, subjective happiness, adjustment) among school students?

Method

Study Design and Registration

The present study, which is classified as a literature-based study, is a systematic review. This review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 statement (Page et al., 2021).

Search Strategy

This study is the result of a careful search of reputable national and international electronic scientific databases and resources (such as Magiran, Scientific Information Database [SID], Noormags, Civilica, Scopus, PubMed, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar). The search was conducted in January 2026 and covered papers published between January 2015 and December 2025 (the last ten years). Considering that the subject under study was very broad and the materials reviewed were numerous and varied, the researchers encountered many concepts related to empathy, group dynamics, group learning, collaborative learning, and cooperative learning throughout the study. However, given the research objective, the main criteria for selecting articles were the direct relevance of the articles' topics to the subject of the present study, publication within the last ten years, and the credibility of the article and the journal. The specific search string used in scientific databases and resources was constructed using Boolean operators as follows in Table 1.

Table 1. List of keywords and Boolean combinations used in the search

OR		OR		OR		OR
empathy		group learning		academic		psychological well-being
empathic concern		collaborative		achievement		mental health
cognitive empathy	And	learning	And	learning outcome	And	subjective happiness
emotional		cooperative learning		academic		student well-being
empathy		group dynamics		performance		adjustment
affective empathy		teamwork		educational outcome		
		peer learning				

Eligibility Criteria

To ensure transparency and reproducibility, the eligibility criteria were specified using the framework as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for studies in the present systematic review

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication date: January 1, 2015 – December 31, 2025	Publication date: Before January 1, 2015 or After December 31, 2025
Language: Persian or English	Language: Other than Persian or English
Study design: Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods)	Study design: Non-Empirical studies
Population: School students (elementary, middle, high school; ages approximately 6-18 years)	Population: University students, adults, clinical populations, preschool children
Outcomes: (a) Learning outcomes: academic achievement, learning ability, responsibility, academic performance; OR (b) Psychological well-being: mental health, subjective happiness, school belonging, adjustment, reduced burnout/anxiety	Studies reporting only personality traits, parent empathy, or empathy in teachers (without student outcomes)

Screening Process

The screening process was conducted in three stages following PRISMA guidelines:

Stage 1: Removal of duplicates. All identified records were exported to reference management software (EndNote). Duplicate records were identified and removed.

Stage 2: Title and abstract screening. Two independent reviewers (the authors) screened the titles and abstracts of all remaining records against the eligibility criteria. Each record was categorized as "include," "exclude," or "uncertain." Records categorized as "uncertain" proceeded to full-text review. Given the agreement between the reviewers, there was no need to resolve the disagreements.

Stage 3: Full-text screening. The full texts of all records classified as "include" or "uncertain" were retrieved and assessed. Reasons for exclusion at this stage were documented and are reported in the PRISMA flow diagram.

Study Selection

In the initial search phase, 196 articles were found, of which only 17 fully met the selection criteria for the present study. The PRISMA 2020 flow diagram is presented in Figure 1.

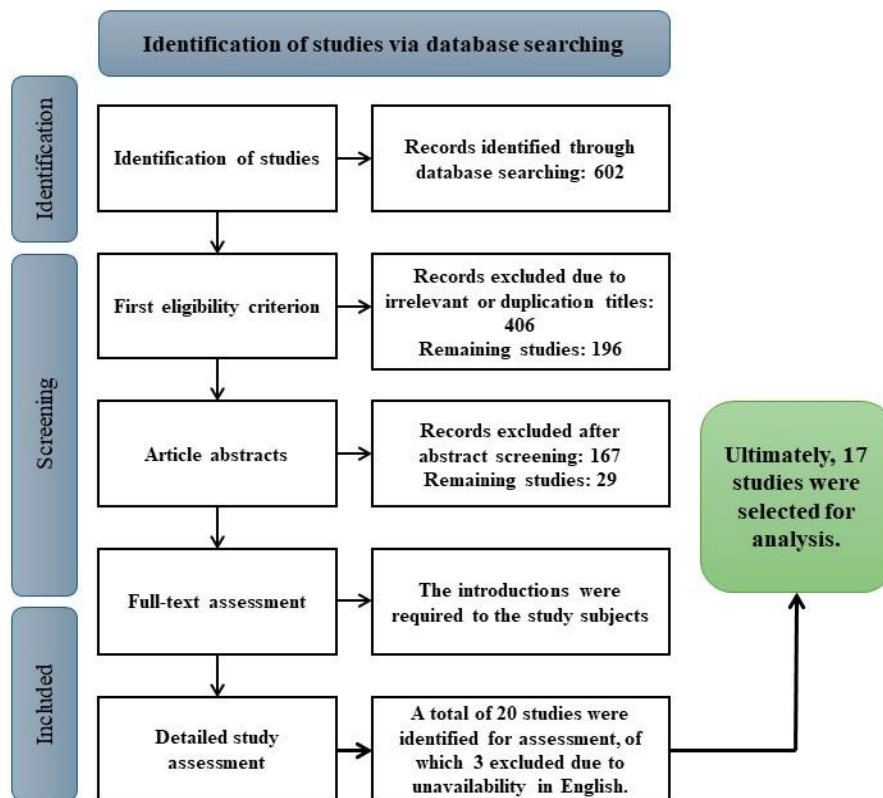


Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process in the present research

Results

The selected articles' characteristics, methodological quality and summary of results are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of selected articles' results

Author(s) & Year	Title	Journal	Country	Sample size	Study design	Summary of results	Quality
Usán Supervía et al. (2025)	Empathy, Confidence, and Collaboration: Exploring STAD's Impact on Students' Social-Emotional Development	Journal of English Language Studies	Indonesia	9	mixed-methods	Empathy enhances learning and psychological well-being by fostering mutual respect and support among students during group work.	Moderate
Usán Supervía et al. (2025)	The Mediating Role of Academic Goal Orientations in the Relationship Between Empathy and Subjective Happiness in Adolescent Students	SAGE Open	Spain	1664	Cross-sectional	Empathy is positively correlated with subjective happiness and task orientation in students and promotes adaptive behaviors.	Moderate
Makal & Çepni (2024)	Increasing Students' Empathy Levels in Science Education: A Thematic Review	Journal of Baltic Science Education	Turkey	N/A	Thematic review (Qualitative)	Empathy promotes ethics and character development in educational environments, leading to increased mental health in students. Collaborative learning environments, known for improving empathy skills, positively impact students' emotional and cognitive skills and improve group dynamics and overall learning experiences.	Moderate

Author(s) & Year	Title	Journal	Country	Sample size	Study design	Summary of results	Quality
Soto-García et al. (2024)	The TEI Program for Peer Tutoring and the Prevention of Bullying: Its Influence on Social Skills and Empathy among Secondary School Students	Social Sciences	Spain	738	comparative, ex post facto study	Peer tutoring programs increase empathy, social skills, and conflict resolution among students and create a supportive group environment. This also contributes to the mental health of students. On the one hand, empathy promotes harmonious development, and on the other hand, it increases group participation and friendly interactions among students. This is positively correlated with cognitive empathy and peace of mind, contributing to psychological well-being and effective collaboration in group work, ultimately improving classroom dynamics and relationships.	High
Schipor et al. (2024)	Exploring the Relationship between Empathy, Friendliness, and Group Inclusion in Primary School Social Dynamics	Revista Romaneasca pentru Educatie Multidimensionala	Romania	78	Cross-sectional	Cognitive and emotional empathy in adolescents significantly affects their mental health through altruistic behavior. Enhancing empathy can enhance group dynamics and learning experiences, and ultimately help improve psychological adjustment and happiness among school students.	Moderate
Han & Yoo (2024)	Effect of Adolescents' Cognitive and Emotional Empathy and Altruistic Behavior on Psychological Well-Being	Korean Journal of Child Studies	Korea	282	Cross-sectional	Empathy influences social behavior and group dynamics in classrooms, thereby improving students' mental health and learning.	High
Roerig et al. (2023)	How, When and Why Abilities Go Social: Researching Children's Empathy and Prosocial Behaviors in Context	Frontiers in psychology	Netherlands	77	Theoretical review (Qualitative), mixed methods	Empathy enhances emotional health and creates a positive classroom climate. This contributes to students' academic and overall progress, and facilitates emotional literacy and supportive interactions that are important for psychological well-being in educational settings.	Moderate
Bezzina (2022)	"I feel what you are feeling": Neural Processes for Empathy and its Impact on Academic and Holistic Achievement	Malta Journal of Education	Malta	N/A	Theoretical review (Qualitative), mixed methods	Emotional empathy, developed through collaborative learning, strengthens peer relationships and helps reduce bullying, thus promoting mental health among students. Teamwork enhances emotional understanding, which is crucial for positive social interactions and overall student development.	Moderate
Van Ryzin & Roseth (2022)	The Longitudinal Relationship Between Peer Relations and Empathy and Their Joint Contribution to Reducing Bullying in Middle School: Findings from a Randomized Trial of Cooperative Learning	Journal of Prevention and Health Promotion	USA	1890	Randomized controlled trial	Empathy contributes to interpersonal relationships, academic achievement, and psychosocial adjustment of students. Enhancing empathy can enhance teamwork dynamics and overall mental health among students, particularly through positive student-teacher relationships.	High
Xiang et al. (2022)	The Influence of Student-Teacher Relationship on School-Age Children's Empathy: The Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence	Psychology research and behavior management	China	468	Cross-sectional		Moderate

Author(s) & Year	Title	Journal	Country	Sample size	Study design	Summary of results	Quality
Miklikowska et al. (2022)	With a Little Help from My Empathic Friends: The Role of Peers in the Development of Empathy in Adolescence	Developmental Psychology	Sweden	318	Longitudinal	Friendships with empathetic peers enhance the development of empathy in adolescents. Empathetic social connections can have a positive impact on learning and psychological well-being, especially in teamwork environments where cooperation and mutual understanding are essential. Empathy-based learning has a positive impact on students' empathy and classroom participation, and it has been shown that enhancing empathy in teamwork can increase mental health and collaborative skills among middle school students, although it does not have a significant effect on self-esteem.	High
You et al. (2020)	The Effects of Middle School Art Class with an Empathy-Based Learning Model	Current Psychology	Korea	37	Quasi-experimental	Empathy skills have a positive impact on satisfaction with school relationships, which can reduce academic burnout and thus enhance mental health.	Moderate
Farina et al. (2020)	High School Student Burnout: Is Empathy a Protective or Risk Factor?	Frontiers in psychology	Italy	998	Cross-sectional	Teaching empathy increases students' social adjustment and attachment to school, and fosters better interpersonal relationships and emotional awareness. This promotes mental health and effective teamwork because empathetic students are more caring, patient, and able to understand the needs of others in collaborative learning environments.	Moderate
Safara & Rafiee (2020)	The Effectiveness of Empathy Training on Social Adjustment and School Belonging in Elementary Sixth-Grade Students	Iranian Evolutionary Educational Psychology Journal	Iran	30	Quasi-experimental	Empathy enhances students' mental health by fostering positive relationships and connections during teamwork. This encourages cooperation, reduces aggression, and fosters mutual understanding, ultimately leading to improved interaction and a supportive classroom culture that is beneficial for both learning and emotional health.	Moderate
Md Hashim et al. (2019)	Promoting Empathy Using Design Thinking in Project-Based Learning and as a Classroom Culture	Asian Journal of University Education	Malaysia	N/A	Qualitative	Cooperative learning increases emotional empathy, which significantly reduces bullying. Improved cognitive and emotional empathy is associated with increased peer relationships, suggesting that empathy plays an important role in students' mental health during teamwork.	Moderate
Van Ryzin & Rose (2019)	Effects of Cooperative Learning on Peer Relations, Empathy, and Bullying in Middle School	Aggressive behavior	USA	1890	Randomized controlled trial	Empathy enhances learning and psychological well-being by fostering respect, compassion, and friendship between students during group work.	High
Muniroh (2017)	Leading Empathic Engagement Through Teamwork Interaction in Classroom	Jurnal Pendidikan Humaniora	Indonesia	N/R (all students in a class)	single-subject experimental design		Moderate

Synthesis of Findings

Of the 17 included studies, 16 (94.1%) reported a positive association between empathy and either learning outcomes or psychological well-being. No study reported a negative association; one qualitative study reported mixed findings depending on contextual factors.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of emphasizing the important role of empathy in students' learning and psychological well-being. In the initial phase of the research, 196 national and international scientific articles were reviewed. Ultimately, 17 articles that fully met the article selection criteria were included.

Empathy and learning outcomes. Eight studies explicitly reported associations between empathy and academic achievement or learning ability. Empathy was associated with increased learning ability and academic achievement (Bezzina, 2022; Makal & Çepni, 2024; Md Hashim et al., 2019; Roerig et al., 2023; Rorimpandey et al., 2025; Xiang et al., 2022; You et al., 2020), responsibility (Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2019, 2022), and positive interactions with peers at school (Miklikowska et al., 2022; Schipor et al., 2024). Several studies emphasized that empathy enhances learning by fostering mutual respect and support among students during group work (Muniroh, 2017; Rorimpandey et al., 2025).

Empathy and psychological well-being. 13 studies reported associations between empathy and psychological well-being or mental health outcomes. Empathy was associated with subjective happiness (Usán Supervía et al., 2025), psychological well-being (Han & Yoo, 2024; Md Hashim et al., 2019; Miklikowska et al., 2022; Muniroh, 2017; Roerig et al., 2023; Schipor et al., 2024; Xiang et al., 2022; You et al., 2020), school belonging and social adjustment (Safara & Rafiee, 2020), and reduced bullying and aggression (Soto-García et al., 2024; Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2019, 2022). Additionally, empathy was associated with reduced academic burnout (Farina et al., 2020).

Cognitive vs. emotional empathy. Studies that distinguished between cognitive and emotional empathy found that both dimensions contributed positively but through different mechanisms. Cognitive empathy was more strongly associated with perspective-taking and conflict resolution, while emotional empathy was more strongly associated with prosocial behavior and reduced aggression (Han & Yoo, 2024; Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2019, 2022).

Role of group dynamics. 10 studies specifically examined empathy within the context of cooperative or group-based learning. These studies consistently found that cooperative learning structures enhance empathy development, which in turn improves group dynamics and learning outcomes (Han & Yoo, 2024; Makal & Çepni, 2024; Miklikowska et al., 2022; Muniroh, 2017; Roerig et al., 2023; Rorimpandey et al., 2025; Safara & Rafiee, 2020; Schipor et al., 2024; Soto-García et al., 2024; Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2019, 2022; You et al., 2020).

Based on the findings of the reviewed studies, empathy, by strengthening mutual support; morality and character development; emotional and cognitive skills; positive interpersonal relationships; compassion and prosociality; group dynamics; collaborative learning; social skills; social adjustment; subjective well-being; and school belonging, contributes, on the one hand, to increased learning and academic achievement, and on the other hand, to the promotion of students' mental health or psychological well-being. At the same time, empathy and its development are associated with reductions in aggression, bullying, academic burnout, and maladjustment. Research evidence indicates that empathy, whether expressed by peers or teachers, yields similarly positive effects. These findings are consistent with the findings of a few relatively similar review studies (Bezzina, 2022; Makal & Çepni, 2024).

Our findings extend previous theoretical frameworks in several important ways. First, consistent with simulation theory (Preston & Hofelich, 2012), the reviewed studies suggest that cognitive empathy enables students to understand their peers' perspectives, which facilitates

cooperation and conflict resolution. Second, in line with vicarious emotional appraisal theory (Wondra & Ellsworth, 2015), emotional empathy appears to drive prosocial behavior and reduce aggression, even when emotional responses are not perfectly congruent with the other's experience.

However, our review makes a unique contribution by specifically examining empathy in the context of group-based learning. Previous reviews have typically examined empathy in general social relationships or in individual academic outcomes. Our finding that empathy facilitates each of the five components of effective group work (positive interdependence, individual and group responsibility, promotive interaction, social and group work skills, and group reflection) provides a mechanism-based explanation for why empathy enhances learning.

An important point emphasized in the present study was the role of empathy in improving students' learning within group contexts. Empathy is often assumed to be associated solely with the enhancement of social relationships. While this assumption is accurate, it is not comprehensive. A review of the findings from several selected studies in the present research indicated that empathy is also associated with increased learning and academic achievement.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that many academic difficulties do not stem from learning disorders per se, but rather arise from anxieties related to the highly competitive climate of some schools or from disrupted interpersonal relationships among students or between students and teachers or school staff. Therefore, identifying the roots of such problems by considering specific psychosocial factors, including empathy, is likely to lead to greater success in educational and therapeutic interventions.

The five components of effective group work described earlier (Guevara et al., 2023) each depend on empathic capacity. Positive interdependence requires students to recognize and value their peers' contributions- a fundamentally empathic process. Individual and group responsibility requires sensitivity to whether others are struggling or need support. Promotive interaction requires the ability to provide help in a way that is received positively, which depends on empathic accuracy. Social and group work skills -negotiation, conflict resolution, giving and receiving criticism- are impossible without perspective-taking. Group reflection requires the ability to evaluate one's own and others' performance without defensiveness or blame, again depending on empathy.

Although the present study did not directly examine the role of empathy in school settings through a field-based design, it sought, by conducting a comprehensive systematic review of studies in this area, to emphasize the salient role of empathy in the school environment. Highlighting and reiterating the role of empathy may, on the one hand, encourage future researchers to undertake more extensive empirical studies and, on the other hand, draw the attention of school counselors and child and adolescent psychologists to techniques such as role reversal that possess an empathic nature. The expansion of empathy in schools can reduce unhealthy forms of competition and replace anxiety with creativity.

Specific practical recommendations arising from this review include:

- *Integrate empathy training into existing curricula.* Rather than treating empathy as an add-on, schools should embed empathy-promoting activities into regular academic instruction, particularly in group work and project-based learning.
- *Train teachers in empathy facilitation.* Teachers need professional development to model empathic behavior, structure cooperative learning activities, and respond to conflicts in ways that build rather than erode empathy.
- *Use structured cooperative learning methods.* The RCTs included in this review (Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2019, 2022) provide strong evidence that structured cooperative learning (e.g., Student Teams-Achievement Divisions, STAD) effectively increases both empathy and academic outcomes.

- *Address competitive school climates.* Schools with excessively competitive climates may inadvertently suppress empathy. Interventions should target school-wide norms and policies that prioritize collaboration over competition.
- *Monitor both cognitive and emotional empathy.* Interventions should aim to develop both dimensions of empathy, as they contribute through different mechanisms to learning and well-being.

Nonetheless, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the protocol was not prospectively registered, which increases the risk of reporting bias. Second, considerable heterogeneity in study designs, outcome measures, and analytic approaches precluded meta-analysis. Third, the inclusion of two review papers (Makal & Çepni, 2024; Bezzina, 2022) alongside primary empirical studies is methodologically problematic; these papers should ideally have been excluded or treated separately. Fourth, several included studies had small sample sizes (e.g., $n=30$, $n=45$) or did not report sample sizes at all, limiting statistical power and generalizability. Fifth, the majority of studies used cross-sectional designs, which cannot establish causality or temporal ordering. Sixth, publication bias is possible, as studies with null findings are less likely to be published. Seventh, the search was limited to English and Persian languages, potentially missing relevant studies in other languages. Eighth, grey literature (e.g., dissertations, conference proceedings, preprints) was not searched, increasing the risk of publication bias.

Based on the limitations identified in this review, the following recommendations for future research are offered:

- *Longitudinal studies.* Cross-sectional designs dominate the literature, but causality cannot be inferred from such studies. Future research should employ longitudinal designs with at least three time points to examine bidirectional effects between empathy, learning, and well-being.
- *Standardized measurement.* The field would benefit from consensus on core empathy measures.
- *Active control groups.* Intervention studies should include active control groups (e.g., alternative social-emotional learning programs) rather than no-treatment or waitlist controls to rule out nonspecific effects.
- *Diverse samples.* Most studies were conducted in Western or East Asian contexts. Research in other regions is needed to examine cultural variations in empathy-development links.
- *Implementation science.* Future research should examine not only whether empathy interventions work but also how they work, for whom, and under what conditions. Moderator analyses (e.g., by age, gender, socioeconomic status, school climate) would be valuable.
- *Cost-effectiveness studies.* Schools have limited resources; evidence on the cost-effectiveness of empathy interventions compared to other approaches (e.g., anti-bullying programs, mental health first aid) would inform policy decisions.
- *Meta-analysis.* As the evidence base grows, a meta-analysis pooling effect sizes across sufficiently homogeneous studies would provide more precise estimates of the empathy-learning and empathy_well-being associations.

The present study systematically reviewed 17 studies examining the role of empathy in students' learning and psychological well-being within group-based classroom contexts. The evidence consistently indicates that empathy is associated with better academic outcomes and greater psychological well-being, as well as reduced bullying and maladjustment. These associations appear to operate through both individual-level mechanisms (e.g., subjective happiness, reduced burnout) and group-level mechanisms (e.g., positive interdependence, promotive interaction). The necessity of designing psychoeducational packages focused on empathy in schools becomes more and more evident.

While the existing evidence is promising, significant methodological limitations - particularly the predominance of cross-sectional designs, heterogeneity in measurement, and

lack of prospective registration- temper confidence in causal claims. Future research should prioritize rigorous longitudinal and experimental designs, standardized measures, and diverse samples. For now, educators and school psychologists can reasonably conclude that fostering empathy in schools is likely to benefit both academic and mental health outcomes, and that structured cooperative learning methods offer an evidence-based approach to achieving these dual goals.

Declarations

Author Contributions

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

No funds have been received.

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The authors confirm that all data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this article.

Ethical considerations

This article is a review study based exclusively on previously published literature and does not involve any human participants, animals, or identifiable personal data. Therefore, ethical approval and informed consent were not required. The authors adhered to the principles of academic integrity, transparency, and responsible reporting throughout the review process.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this research.

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