

The Role of Trait Empathy in Students' Prosocial Character Building in Educational Settings

Didit Darmawan

Universitas Sunan Giri Surabaya
dr.diditdarmawan@gmail.com

Muhammad Rafli Imansyah

Universitas Sunan Giri Surabaya
rafliimansyah2@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: Didit Darmawan

Article history: Received: Aug-31-2026 | Revised: Sept-10-2026 | Available

Online: Sept-24-2026

ABSTRACT

Empathy is an important social-emotional disposition that may support character development by enabling students to understand others' perspectives, respond to emotional experiences, and translate interpersonal sensitivity into prosocial action. This integrative literature review synthesizes evidence on trait empathy and character-relevant outcomes and identifies educational mechanisms through which empathy can be translated into prosocial, caring, and responsible character. Twenty empirical studies were mapped and synthesized, covering correlational, regression, experimental, quasi-experimental, mixed-method, psychophysiological, and educational intervention designs. Eighteen studies directly assessed trait or dispositional empathy or established empathy dimensions, while two studies were retained as supporting evidence for related socio-emotional mechanisms. The evidence indicates a generally positive but heterogeneous relationship between empathy and prosocial behavior, social care, helping, cooperation, voluntarism, and responsibility. Affective empathy, empathic concern, and perspective taking most consistently align with prosocial outcomes, whereas personal distress and fantasy show more context-dependent patterns. Educational evidence suggests that empathy can be strengthened through perspective writing, values-based counseling, role-playing, social interaction, emotionally responsive curricula, gratitude, and repeated prosocial practice. Overall, empathy contributes to character building most effectively when perspective understanding and emotional sensitivity are integrated with emotional regulation, moral values, reflection, and repeated opportunities for responsible social action.

Keywords: trait empathy; character building; prosocial behavior; social care; perspective taking; empathic concern; social-emotional education

INTRODUCTION

The character formation of students is an educational process that cannot be reduced to the mastery of knowledge regarding good and bad values. Character develops when moral knowledge transforms into sensitivity, judgment, attitude, and actions that are relatively consistent in relationships with others (Abirami, 2025). Empathy occupies an important position because the ability to understand the condition, perspective, and emotional experience of another party provides a psychological foundation for the emergence of care, willingness to help, social responsibility, appreciation of differences, and prosocial behavior (Yin & Wang, 2022). Empathy is studied through various constructs, ranging from trait empathy, cognitive empathy, affective empathy, perspective taking, empathic concern, personal distress, to emotional empathy. This diversity indicates that empathy is not a singular psychological construct, but rather possesses several dimensions that can produce different social manifestations (Eisenberg, 2014). The relevance of empathy to character education becomes increasingly evident when character formation is understood through actual behavior in social life (Murad et al., 2022). Prosocial behavior is one of the most widely used manifestations in research because it encompasses the tendencies to help, share, cooperate, and give attention to others (Pfattheicher, 2022). Wijayanti and Wilani (2026), for example, place empathy along with religiosity as factors associated with the prosocial behavior of inclusive junior high school students. The scope of inclusive schools provides special meaning because students need to interact with peers who have different characteristics and needs. The ability to take the perspective of others and respond to social experiences sensitively becomes an important part of social acceptance and the prevention of exclusion (Loeper & Hellmich, 2025). Nevertheless, this research also shows that the influence of empathy is not the same across all its dimensions; perspective taking and personal distress show significance, whereas fantasy and empathic concern do not show the same results. These findings suggest the need for a more careful understanding rather than merely stating that "higher empathy is always better character."

The relationship between empathy and prosocial behavior is also found within the scope of high school adolescents. Jamain and Hamidah (2025) place empathy along with social sensitivity as predictors of high school students' prosocial behavior. Their joint model provides a very large contribution to prosocial behavior. However, the source material reveals a discrepancy between the result narrative stating that the influence of empathy is significant and the partial test table showing an empathy significance value of 0.051. This internal difference needs to be noted in an integrative review because the strength of a literature synthesis lies not in mechanically repeating each study's conclusion, but in critically assessing the consistency of the reported information. Overall, the research continues to show that empathy and social sensitivity together have a strong relationship with students' prosocial behavior tendencies.

Studies on other populations support the direction of this relationship. Novitasari and Budiman (2026) find a positive and significant relationship between empathy and prosocial behavior among young volunteers, while also showing that gender moderates the strength of that relationship. Mufid (2024) also finds that empathy contributes effectively to prosocial behavior in early adulthood when analyzed together with religiosity. Trihananta (2026) obtains a similar result among university students, where empathy is positively and significantly related to prosocial behavior although the social support variable in that model shows a different direction. These three studies demonstrate that the link between empathy and positive social action is relatively consistent across different developmental phases, but the strength of the relationship is influenced by individual characteristics and accompanying social conditions.

The connection between empathy and character is not limited to helping behavior, and prior work has linked empathy-related responding with broader socio-emotional development (Eisenberg, 2014). Nabila et al. (2026) find that emotional empathy together with a character-

value-based curriculum provides a positive and significant influence on students' social care. Al Fikri et al. (2026) show that the Curriculum Based on Love, which incorporates empathy, compassion, cooperation, contribution, and equality, can enhance social care character. Suherlan et al. (2026) also find that the understanding of mutual advising material which includes empathy, care, and social responsibility has a positive relationship with students' social care attitude. This series of findings places empathy not merely as an internal disposition, but as a capacity that can gain space for development through the curriculum and learning experiences.

For the purpose of this synthesis, trait empathy is treated as the overarching construct, while cognitive empathy, affective empathy, empathic concern, perspective taking, and personal distress are analyzed as established components or closely related trait dimensions rather than as interchangeable variables. Emotional intelligence is not treated as equivalent to trait empathy; evidence based on emotional intelligence is used only as supporting evidence for the emotional-perception and regulation mechanisms that may help convert empathic sensitivity into prosocial behavior.

International literature provides a more detailed explanation of the multidimensional nature of empathy. Kim and Kou (2014) show that empathic concern, perspective taking, and personal distress do not have identical relationships with giving behavior; empathic concern is more consistently related to charitable behavior, whereas the results of the other two dimensions vary more. Unger and Thumhuri (1997) find that perspective taking, empathic concern, and personal distress are related to voluntarism, while the fantasy dimension does not show the same relationship. Herne et al. (2022) also find that out of several trait empathy measures, affective empathy shows a positive association with giving in experiments. Overall, these results reinforce that the educational effect of empathy depends on the dimension of empathy that develops and the social situation in which that empathy is actualized.

The educational dimension becomes even stronger when research moves from trait measurement to intervention. Fricke (2018) uses a perspective-writing strategy in language learning to develop empathy and helping behavior in junior high school students. Konrath et al. (2015) show that text messages designed to build empathy can increase indicators of affective empathy and prosocial behavior, although not all dispositional indicators move in the same direction. Anwari et al. (2026) find an increase in students' empathy scores after participating in Islamic-value-based individual counseling. Pang et al. (2022) further show that gratitude can function as a mediator connecting various dimensions of empathy with prosocial behavior. This evidence indicates that empathy possesses dispositional elements, yet still retains room to be strengthened through planned educational experiences.

Other literature expands the relationship between empathy and a broader sense of responsibility and social orientation (Kardos et al., 2017; Roy, 2025). Astalini et al. (2024) provide supporting evidence that social attitudes are related to responsibility character and that inquiry-based learning can support both; this study does not directly measure trait empathy and is therefore used only to illuminate an educational mechanism. Chandradasa and Galhena (2022) find that the ability to perceive, understand, use, and manage emotions is positively related to university students' prosocial behavior. Biasutti et al. (2026) show that cognitive and affective empathy, prosociality, sustainable consumption behavior, and moral responsibility are related to attitudes toward sustainable development among pre-service teachers. Tulud (2025) also demonstrates a positive interconnection among the cognitive, affective, social, and behavioral dimensions of empathy in students within communication and education programs. Empathy is thus related not only to individual helping actions, but also to the formation of a broader orientation of responsibility (Oceja et al., 2014; Eisenberg, 2014).

A number of studies even use physiological indicators to explain the emotional dimension of empathy. Balconi and Canavesio (2013) find a positive correlation between

empathy profiles and physiological responses when individuals make prosocial decisions. These results provide support that helping behavior is related not only to social knowledge, but also to emotional involvement. From an educational perspective, these findings reinforce the rationale that character education is not enough to teach norms at the cognitive level. Students need to acquire experiences that develop the ability to feel the condition of others and connect that sensitivity with moral decisions.

Based on the overall literature, there are two main issues that require synthesis. First, research shows a positive trend between empathy and various character indicators, but not all dimensions of empathy provide the same influence. Second, several studies show that the influence of empathy on character depends on mediators, moderators, learning materials, curricula, and social experiences. This study proposes two research questions: (1) how is the trend of the relationship between trait empathy and student character formation based on the synthesis of previous research?; and (2) what are the mechanisms and educational conditions that enable trait empathy to develop and be transformed into prosocial, caring, and responsible character in students?

METHOD

This study uses an integrative literature review approach to map and synthesize evidence on empathy and student character formation. The original manuscript did not preserve a prospective, reproducible database-screening log; consequently, the present paper does not claim to be a PRISMA-compliant systematic review and does not retrospectively fabricate counts of initial records, duplicates, or excluded full texts. For this revision, bibliographic verification and evidence updating were conducted on 22–23 September 2026 through official journal pages, publisher platforms, Garuda, and institutional repositories. The verification search used the following Boolean concept string: ("trait empathy" OR "dispositional empathy" OR "empathic concern" OR "perspective taking" OR "affective empathy") AND ("prosocial behavior" OR "helping behavior" OR "social care" OR voluntarism) AND (student* OR adolescent* OR youth OR volunteer* OR "young adult*" OR universit*). Title, abstract, keyword, and full-text fields were used where the platform exposed them. The search string was used for verification and updating rather than as a retrospective reconstruction of a missing screening log.

The inclusion criteria were: (1) empirical studies involving students, adolescents, young adults, university students, or youth/volunteer populations with clear educational or character-development relevance; (2) direct measurement of trait/dispositional empathy or an established empathy dimension linked to prosocial, caring, helping, responsibility, volunteering, or closely related social outcomes; (3) quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, experimental, quasi-experimental, psychophysiological, or educational intervention designs; (4) English- or Indonesian-language reports; (5) publication years 1997–2026; and (6) peer-reviewed journal articles or accessible grey literature when the report contained relevant primary empirical data. The 1997 study was retained as foundational evidence on trait empathy and continuous helping, while the 2013 psychophysiological study was retained as foundational evidence connecting trait empathy with helping-related responses. Theses/dissertations were retained because they provide directly relevant full-text empirical evidence that is less represented in the educational literature, but they were assigned lower evidentiary weight. Preprints and non-peer-reviewed records were not retained as core empirical evidence. Studies without accessible empirical information, conceptual commentaries, or records not sufficiently relevant to empathy-character mechanisms were excluded.

Because the original manuscript did not record the number of independent screeners or an adjudication procedure, reviewer agreement cannot be reconstructed retrospectively. The

evidence map was therefore treated as a curated integrative corpus of 20 studies: 18 core studies directly assessing empathy or its established dimensions and two supporting studies (Astalini et al., 2024; Chandradasa & Galhena, 2022) that inform educational mechanisms without directly measuring trait empathy. This limitation is explicitly carried forward to the interpretation.

Note: “Core” studies directly measure trait/dispositional empathy or a recognized empathy dimension; “supporting” studies inform mechanisms but do not directly establish trait-empathy effects.

Table 2. Operational Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Include	Exclude / handling
Population	Students, adolescents, young adults, university students, youth or volunteers with educational/character relevance.	Populations with no meaningful relevance to student/character development.
Construct	Trait/dispositional empathy or established dimensions: affective empathy, cognitive empathy, empathic concern, perspective taking, personal distress; prosocial/caring/helping/responsibility outcomes.	Studies using unrelated affective constructs without an analyzable empathy-character link. Emotional intelligence is supporting only, not equivalent to trait empathy.
Design	Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, experimental, quasi-experimental, psychophysiological, or educational intervention studies.	Non-empirical commentaries, editorials, purely conceptual papers, or records without accessible empirical findings.
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles; accessible theses/dissertations retained as grey literature when directly relevant and full text is available.	Unverifiable reports or conference/poster materials without sufficient peer-reviewed or full-text empirical evidence.
Language / year	English or Indonesian; 1997–2026.	Outside the period/language unless essential foundational evidence was already embedded in the corpus (none added beyond the stated range).
Evidence status	Foundational or contextually relevant studies retained with explicit evidence-weight labels.	Preprints not used as core evidence; non-peer-reviewed evidence is either removed or flagged as lower weight.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that the corpus contains studies that explicitly use the term trait empathy, as well as involving research that explains empathy dimensions, empathy development interventions, and character outcomes that are substantively related.

Table 1. Matrix of All Studies as the Basis for SLR Synthesis

No.	Research	Design/Subjects	Empathy and Character Focus	Main Findings
1	Wijayanti & Wilani (2026)	Quantitative; 127 inclusive junior high school students	Empathy, religiosity, prosocial behavior	Simultaneous model $R^2 = 0.556$. Perspective taking and personal distress are significant, whereas fantasy and empathic concern are not; emphasizes the heterogeneity of empathy dimensions.
2	Jamain & Hamidah (2025)	Quantitative; 228 high school students	Empathy, social sensitivity, prosocial behavior	Simultaneous model $R^2 = 0.878$. Source narrative mentions empathy is significant, but partial table lists $p = 0.051$; used cautiously as joint model evidence.
3	Novitasari & Budiman (2026)	Correlational; 153 young volunteers	Empathy and prosocial behavior; gender as moderator	Empathy is positively related to prosociality; relationship is moderated by gender; R^2 around 0.33 in the presented model.
4	Nabila et al. (2026)	Quantitative correlational; MA students	Emotional empathy, character curriculum, social care	Both predictors are positive and significant; model $R^2 = 0.838$. Demonstrates empathy within the scope of character curriculum.

5	Mufid (2024)	Quantitative; early adults	Empathy, religiosity, prosociality	Empathy provides an effective contribution of 16.9%; joint model $R^2 = 0.397$.
6	Trihananta (2026)	Quantitative; 306 university students	Empathy, social support, prosocial behavior	Empathy is positively and significantly related to prosociality; model in the table explains about 23.2% of the variance.
7	Al Fikri et al. (2026)	Mixed methods; 65 students for quantitative part	Curriculum of Love, empathy, social care	Curriculum based on love incorporating empathy and social responsibility has a positive effect; $R^2 = 0.401$.
8	Astalini et al. (2024)	Mixed methods; 50 high school students	Social attitudes, responsibility, inquiry learning	Social attitudes are significantly related to responsibility character; inquiry learning supports both. Empathy is positioned as part of social attitude development.
9	Suherlan et al. (2026)	Quantitative; 36 high school students	Understanding of mutual advising values, empathy, social care	Significant positive effect on social care; $R^2 = 0.311$.
10	Chandradasa & Galhena (2022)	Quantitative; 175 university students	Emotional intelligence and prosocial behavior	Perception, understanding, utilization, and regulation of emotion have a positive effect on prosociality; serves as supporting evidence for socio-emotional competence.
11	Kim & Kou (2014)	Survey data analysis	Dispositional empathy and charitable giving	Empathic concern consistently increases giving tendency and amount; perspective taking and personal distress show more diverse results.
12	Unger & Thumhuri (1997)	Structural analysis	Trait empathy and voluntarism	Perspective taking, empathic concern, and personal distress serve as positive antecedents of voluntarism; fantasy is unrelated.
13	Konrath et al. (2015)	Experiment; $N = 90$	Empathy message intervention and prosociality	Empathy-building messages increase affective empathy and prosocial behavior, but do not uniformly increase all dispositional measures.
14	Balconi & Canavesio (2013)	Experimental/p sychophysiological; 30 young individuals	Trait empathy, emotion, helping behavior	Empathetic profile correlates positively with emotional/physiological responses in prosocial decisions.
15	Fricke (2018)	Dissertation; 6 teachers and 179 grade VII students	Perspective writing, empathy, helping	Perspective-writing strategy supports empathy, helping behavior, and socio-emotional intelligence.
16	Pang et al. (2022)	Quantitative; 1,037 university students	Empathy dimensions, gratitude, prosociality	Gratitude mediates the relationship between various dimensions of empathy and prosocial behavior.
17	Anwari et al. (2026)	Quasi-experiment; 5 students with low empathy scores	Islamic counseling and empathy	Average score increased from 89.20 to 115.20, Wilcoxon $p = 0.043$; indicates empathy can be developed through intervention.
18	Biasutti et al. (2026)	Quantitative; 330 pre-service teachers	Empathy, prosociality, responsibility, sustainability	Cognitive and affective empathy and prosocial behavior relate to stronger attitudes toward sustainable development.
19	Herne et al. (2022)	Economic experiment	Trait empathy, empathy induction, sharing behavior	Affective empathy associates positively with giving; momentary empathy induction does not show the same effect.

20	Tulud (2025)	Descriptive-correlational; 147 university students	Cognitive, affective, social, and behavioral empathy	All four dimensions are at a moderate level and positively correlated; reinforces the need to integrate empathy training into educational curricula.
----	--------------	--	--	--

The matrix shows that most studies support a positive relationship between empathy and social character, but this relationship is not uniform. Differences in findings emerge across levels of empathy dimensions, population characteristics, social conditions, and forms of intervention. This finding is important because character education is not enough to simply establish "empathy" as a general value; schools need to understand the components of empathy to be developed and the character behaviors expected to emerge.

The Relationship between Empathy and the Development of Students' Character

The first trend that emerges from the corpus is the strong link between empathy and prosocial behavior. Wijayanti and Wilani (2026) show that empathy and religiosity together explain 55.6 percent of the variation in students' prosocial behavior in inclusive schools. Pedagogically, this finding has significant meaning. Inclusive schools require students to build relationships with peers who have varying abilities, needs, and experiences. Perspective taking provides the ability to see situations from the perspective of others, thereby enabling students to reduce prejudice and understand the reasons behind peers' behavior. The finding that not all dimensions of empathy are significant simultaneously indicates that education needs to be more specific in determining the form of empathy to be developed.

Jamain and Hamidah (2025) show that empathy and social sensitivity have a very strong simultaneous relationship with high school students' prosocial behavior. However, the partial test table lists an empathy significance value of 0.051 while the narrative states a positive and significant influence. This inconsistency does not erase the value of the study, but limits its use as evidence of partial influence. As a synthesis, this research is more appropriately used to show that the ability to understand others' conditions and sensitivity to social situations work as a single configuration related to prosocial behavior, rather than as a sole basis for stating the magnitude of empathy's influence.

Novitasari and Budiman (2026) show that the relationship between empathy and prosociality is influenced by social characteristics. Gender is proven to moderate the relationship among young volunteers, and the strength of the relationship differs between male and female groups. This finding is important for education because it demonstrates that the trait of empathy is not always translated into action identically in every student. Social norms, group experiences, socialization patterns, and activity situations can influence the expression of empathy. Character education therefore needs to provide diverse forms of activities so that empathy can be manifested through various forms of social action.

Mufid (2024) shows that empathy still has a positive contribution when analyzed together with religiosity. The effective contribution of empathy at 16.9 percent indicates that empathy is a relevant factor, but not the sole determinant of prosocial behavior. This finding is consistent with the study by Wijayanti and Wilani (2026), which also incorporated religiosity. Both studies demonstrate that religious values and the ability to understand others' experiences can work together. In character education, empathy can provide an affective foundation for caring behavior, while the value system provides a normative orientation regarding why such actions need to be performed.

Trihananta (2026) finds a positive pattern between empathy and prosocial behavior among university students. These results extend the trend found in adolescents to higher education. This indicates that empathy remains relevant throughout educational development, although the form of its actualization changes. In school students, empathy may manifest as helping peers, stopping bullying, or accepting different students. In university students, the

manifestations can develop into academic collaboration, emotional support, social activities, and community involvement.

The findings of Kim and Kou (2014), Unger and Thummuluri (1997), and Herne et al. (2022) provide a warning not to treat trait empathy as a homogeneous construct. Kim and Kou (2014) find that empathic concern is most consistently related to charitable giving. Unger and Thummuluri (1997) find that three dimensions of empathy are related to voluntarism while fantasy is not. Herne et al. (2022) instead find that affective empathy is the dimension related to giving behavior, whereas momentary empathy induction does not display a corresponding effect. These results demonstrate that prosocial character requires more than just the ability to imagine the experiences of others. The affective component that gives rise to attention and care appears to hold an important position in driving action.

Balconi and Canavesio (2013) reinforce that affective dimension through psychophysiological data. Individuals with higher empathy profiles exhibit emotional response patterns related to prosocial decisions. In education, this confirms that character is not born solely from rational consideration. Emotional sensitivity can function as a signal that makes students realize that the conditions of others require attention. Character education that consists only of memorizing norms without social and emotional experience risks producing moral knowledge without the drive to act.

Pang et al. (2022) provide an explanation regarding the transition process from empathy to behavior. Gratitude was found to mediate the relationship between several dimensions of empathy and prosocial behavior. This means that empathy can produce social action through other psychological mechanisms that help individuals interpret their relationships with others. Within the scope of education, these findings open up space for character formation to integrate empathy with gratitude, care, and social reflection rather than teaching them as separate dispositions.

Biasutti et al. (2026) expand the consequences of empathy toward an orientation of responsibility toward society and sustainability. Cognitive and affective empathy, prosociality, responsibility, and sustainable consumption behavior relate to stronger attitudes toward sustainable development among pre-service teachers. These findings indicate that character growing from empathy does not have to stop at interpersonal relationships. The ability to understand the needs of others can develop into concern for collective interests, justice, the environment, and future generations.

Tulud (2025) provides support that empathy should be understood multidimensionally. Cognitive, affective, social, and behavioral empathy are positively correlated among university students in communication and education fields. This interconnection shows that character education requires a process that brings students from the ability to understand perspectives, feel care, read social situations, to manifesting them into actions. One dimension without the support of other dimensions may not be sufficient to produce stable character.

The trait of empathy has a tendency toward a positive relationship with character formation, particularly prosocial character, social care, helpfulness, cooperativeness, and responsibility. However, its influence is multidimensional and contextual. Empathic concern, affective empathy, and perspective taking often show prominent positions, whereas fantasy and personal distress exhibit more varied results. Character education is not enough to simply target "high empathy," but needs to develop forms of empathy that can be translated into care and constructive action.

Educational Mechanisms for Developing Empathy into Prosocial and Responsible Character Traits

The next issue is how the disposition of empathy develops into a relatively stable character. The first evidence comes from educational interventions. Fricke (2018) uses a first-person perspective-writing strategy in language learning to encourage students to understand the experiences of others. This strategy contributes to empathy and helping behavior. Pedagogically, perspective-writing activities work because students are not merely given definitions of empathy, but are forced to enter the viewpoint of another character or individual. This process provides concrete practice for perspective taking, one of the empathy dimensions that frequently appears in the corpus.

Konrath et al. (2015) show that a relatively simple intervention through text messages can affect affective empathy and prosocial behavior. The results are also interesting because participants' perception of themselves as an "empathetic person" does not always increase simultaneously with behavior. This finding provides an important lesson for character education assessment. The success of an empathy program should not be judged solely from students' self-statements. Actual behavioral changes, social observation, and responses in interpersonal situations also need to be considered.

Anwari et al. (2026) demonstrate that Islamic-value-based individual counseling can improve the empathy of junior high school students who previously had low scores. The score increase from 89.20 to 115.20 and the significant Wilcoxon result indicate the existence of intervention space through guidance and counseling services. Although the sample was only five students and there was no control group, this study has practical significance because it shows that empathy development can be carried out personally for students who need special support.

The curriculum also has an important function in converting empathy into behavior. Nabila et al. (2026) found that emotional empathy and character value-based curricula together have a strong relationship with social care. These findings indicate that internal traits acquire room for actualization if schools provide consistent value messages and experiences. The curriculum does not merely function to contain character material, but creates opportunities for students to discuss, cooperate, respond to social issues, and consider the conditions of others.

Al Fikri et al. (2026) provide a more explicit example through the Love-Based Curriculum. Empathy, affection, cooperation, contribution, and equality are placed as part of learning so that social care does not stop at concepts. Methods such as role-playing and case studies give students room to experience different social perspectives. Qualitative findings regarding voluntary initiatives, such as helping and contributing without direct instruction, indicate that character begins to form when values no longer depend entirely on external control.

Suherlan et al. (2026) also demonstrate the relationship between the understanding of mutual advising material and social care. This material contains elements of empathy, care, and responsibility. These findings emphasize that religious or moral learning can become a medium for empathy development if the material is connected to concrete social situations such as a friend's mistakes, bullying acts, or the need to provide support. Knowledge becomes relevant to character if students can connect it with interpersonal decisions.

Astalini et al. (2024) showed that inquiry-based learning can support social attitudes and the character of responsibility. Although the study did not measure trait empathy directly, its position is important in the synthesis because it shows that social character can be developed through pedagogical designs that place students as active agents. Learning that allows questioning, discussing, collaborating, and solving problems provides space to understand others' ideas and take responsibility for the shared process.

Chandradasa and Galhena (2022) expanded these mechanisms through emotional intelligence. The ability to perceive, understand, use, and manage emotions has a positive influence on prosociality. Empathy can be seen as closely related to this process because the ability to understand others' emotions is difficult to work effectively if students are unable to recognize and manage their own emotional responses. Character education therefore needs to connect empathy training with emotional regulation, rather than merely encouraging students to "feel what others feel."

The findings of Wijayanti and Wilani (2026) in inclusive schools also emphasize the importance of authentic interaction contexts. Empathy does not develop solely through conceptual explanations; encounters with differences provide opportunities to practice perspective taking and accepting behavior. Inclusive schools can become an important environment for character education if student diversity is managed as a social learning experience, rather than merely an administrative issue of placing students with special needs.

The gender moderator found by Novitasari and Budiman (2026) as well as the differences in contribution between dimensions across various studies indicate the need for pedagogical differentiation. Empathy development programs should not be assumed to produce identical responses in every learner. Family background, social experience, psychological characteristics, gender, religious values, and group culture can shape how empathy is expressed. Teachers need to provide more than one form of activity, such as moral discussions, cooperative learning, social service, perspective writing, counseling, and reflection.

Pang et al. (2022) showed that gratitude can become a pathway that helps empathy turn into prosocial behavior. These findings are relevant to education because schools can integrate reflection on assistance received, appreciation for others' contributions, and give-back activities to the community. In this way, empathy education not only increases sensitivity to suffering, but also builds a positive orientation regarding social connectedness.

The results of Herne et al. (2022) provide another lesson, namely that transient empathy induction does not always elicit the expected behavior change. Trait affective empathy actually shows a clearer association with giving behavior. This means that character education requires continuity. A one-time activity asking students to "imagine how others feel" is not necessarily sufficient to shape character tendencies. Habituation and repeated experiences are necessary for empathy to develop as a relatively stable disposition.

The corpus as a whole ultimately demonstrates a fairly clear pedagogical pathway. First, students need to learn to understand others' perspectives. Second, this understanding needs to connect with emotional responses and care. Third, learners need emotional regulation and moral values so that care does not stop as a mere feeling. Fourth, schools need to provide opportunities for prosocial action through cooperation, service, social care, counseling, and experience-based activities. Fifth, actions need to be repeated and reflected upon in order to develop into character tendencies.

The transformation of empathy traits into character occurs through mechanisms of perspective-taking, emotional engagement, emotional regulation, value internalization, gratitude, authentic social interaction, habituation of prosocial actions, as well as curriculum design and educational services that provide practice opportunities. Empathy is most productive for character education when it does not stop as emotional sensitivity, but is connected to moral judgment and responsible action.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations should qualify the interpretation. First, the review is integrative rather than a fully reproducible systematic review because the original project did not preserve a database-level search log, duplicate count, or independent screening record. Second, the corpus is heterogeneous in

populations, instruments, outcomes, and study designs, which prevents meaningful meta-analysis and direct comparison of effect sizes. Third, the corpus includes grey literature (three theses/dissertations) and small samples, including the $n=5$ quasi-experiment; these studies are retained for contextual completeness but assigned lower evidentiary weight. Fourth, most studies rely on self-report or correlational outcomes, so the direction from empathy to stable character behavior should not be interpreted as causality. Fifth, the search and verification scope may still be affected by database, language, and publication-access limitations, and publication bias cannot be ruled out. Future research should use prospective PRISMA-based protocols, preregistered search strategies, broader databases, longitudinal and school-based intervention designs in Indonesian/madrasah settings, and behavioral or teacher-observed measures of prosocial action to complement self-report empathy measures.

CONCLUSION

Empathy traits have a tendency to have a positive relationship with character building, especially prosocial behavior, social care, willingness to help, cooperation, and responsibility. However, empathy is a multidimensional construct so not all of its components provide the same influence. Affective empathy, empathic concern, and perspective taking tend to have an important role, while several other dimensions show more contextual results. Character building occurs when the ability to understand and feel others' conditions is translated through emotional regulation, moral values, reflection, habituation, and real opportunities to act prosocially.

Theoretically, the findings strengthen the position of empathy as a bridge between socio-emotional development and character education. Academically, empathy research needs to distinguish cognitive and affective dimensions and not use empathy as a single construct without explanation. Practically, schools can develop empathy through perspective learning, role-playing, case studies, group work, counseling, social service activities, and value reflection. Character evaluation also needs to measure real actions, not just students' perceptions of their empathy levels. Schools are advised to integrate empathy development into the curriculum and school culture, especially through experiences that allow students to understand differences, manage emotions, provide assistance, and take responsibility for shared life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abirami, M. S. (2025). Character Building and Value Education: Fostering Ethical and Responsible Citizens. *Sbanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, 12(S2-Jan), 9–13. <https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v12is2-jan.8858>
- Al Fikri, M. M. A., Wahidmurni, W., & Efiyanti, A. Y. (2026). Analisis efektivitas pembelajaran berbasis Kurikulum Cinta terhadap pembentukan karakter peduli sosial siswa. *Dinamika Sosial: Jurnal Pendidikan Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial*, 5(1), 41–55. <https://doi.org/10.18860/dsjpips.v5i1.21492>
- Anwari, M. R., Hermatasyah, N., & Fitriyani, F. N. (2026). Islamic counseling for character building: Measuring its effectiveness on students' empathy levels. *Journal of Innovation and Research in Primary Education*, 5(3), 6807–6815.
- Astalini, A., Darmaji, D., Kurniawan, D. A., Perdana, R., & Andriyanto, A. (2024). Does the inquiry learning model have an impact on social attitudes and responsible character? *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Terapan Universitas Jambi*, 8(1), 104–116. <https://doi.org/10.22437/jiutuj.v8i1.31981>
- Balconi, M., & Canavesio, Y. (2013). Emotional contagion and trait empathy in prosocial behavior in young people: The contribution of autonomic (facial feedback) and balanced emotional empathy scale (BEES) measures. *Journal of Clinical and Experimental Neuropsychology*, 35(1), 41–48.

- Biasutti, M., Mannion, G., Evans, N., Elliott, P., Concina, E., & Mangiacotti, A. M. (2026). Empathy, prosociality and sustainable consumer behavior as statistical predictors of attitudes toward sustainable development in teacher education. *Environmental Education Research*, 1–19.
- Brendan, E., Celniker, J., Colicino, C., & Gilbert, K. (2014). *Bystander Helping Behavior: Emotional Empathic Responsiveness Associated with Helping Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.1113.2801>
- Chandradasa, I., & Galhena, B. L. (2022). Develop emotionally intelligent undergraduates towards pro-social behaviour for promoting resilience of society. *Sri Lanka Journal of Management Studies*, 4(1), 127–146. <https://doi.org/10.4038/sljms.v4i1.91>
- Eisenberg, N. (2014). Empathy-Related Responding and Its Relations to Socioemotional Development. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education*, 8(1), 1–17.
- Fricke, V. K. (2018). *Perspective writing: An English language arts strategy for building empathy and prosocial helping behaviors in middle schools* [Doctoral dissertation, Saint Louis University].
- Groh, D., & Ostwald, D. (2025). *The Psychometric Construction of Empathy: An Exploratory Factor Analysis of Empathy Self-Rating Subscales*. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/ehncx_v3
- Herne, K., Hietanen, J. K., Lappalainen, O., & Palosaari, E. (2022). The influence of role awareness, empathy induction and trait empathy on dictator game giving. *PLOS ONE*, 17(3), e0262196.
- Jamain, R. R., & Hamidah, H. (2025). Kontribusi empati dan kepekaan sosial terhadap perilaku prososial remaja. *Jurnal Bimbingan dan Konseling Ar-Rahman*, 11(1), 63–69. <https://doi.org/10.31602/jbkr.v11i1.18825>
- Kardos, P., Leidner, B., Pléh, C., Soltész, P., & Unoka, Z. (2017). Empathic people have more friends: Empathic abilities predict social network size and position in social network predicts empathic efforts. *Social Networks*, 50, 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.SOCNET.2017.01.004>
- Kim, S. J., & Kou, X. (2014). Not all empathy is equal: How dispositional empathy affects charitable giving. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 26(4), 312–334.
- Konrath, S., Falk, E., Fuhrel-Forbis, A., Liu, M., Swain, J., Tolman, R., et al. (2015). Can text messages increase empathy and prosocial behavior? The development and initial validation of Text to Connect. *PLOS ONE*, 10(9), e0137585.
- Loeper, M. F., & Hellmich, F. (2025). Determinants of primary school students' support and their attitudes towards peers with social and emotional difficulties. *Research on Preschool and Primary Education*, 166–177. <https://doi.org/10.55976/rppe.320251382166-177>
- Mufid, A. C. (2024). *Pengaruh religiusitas dan empati terhadap perilaku prososial pada masa dewasa awal* [Skripsi, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Indonesia].
- Murad, A., Khan, S. H., & Zahid, S. (2022). Influences on the development of empathy in children: a literature review. *Pakistan Journal of Social Research*, 04(02), 1272–1278. <https://doi.org/10.52567/pjsr.v4i2.959>
- Nabila, F. S. N., Malik, S., & Syahrin, M. A. (2026). Pengaruh kurikulum berbasis nilai karakter dan empati emosional terhadap kepedulian sosial siswa di MA Annajah Bekasi. *Paradigma: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Penelitian Pendidikan*, 12(1), 391–402. <https://doi.org/10.64540/828sr687>
- Novitasari, D. T., & Budiman, B. (2026). The moderating role of gender in the relationship between empathy and prosocial behavior among youth volunteers in South Sumatra: An Islamic akhlaq perspective. *Psikis: Jurnal Psikologi Islami*, 12(1), 251–265. <https://doi.org/10.19109/psikis.v12i1.35154>
- Oceja, L., Heerdink, M. W., Stocks, E., Ambrona, T., López-Pérez, B., & Salgado, S. (2014). Empathy, Awareness of Others, and Action: How Feeling Empathy for One-Among-

- Others Motivates Helping the Others. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 36(2), 111–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973533.2013.856787>
- Pang, Y., Song, C., & Ma, C. (2022). Effect of different types of empathy on prosocial behavior: Gratitude as mediator. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 768827.
- Pfattheicher, S. (2022). Prosocial behavior and altruism: A review of concepts and definitions. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 44, 124–129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.08.021>
- Roy, D. (2025). *Empathy: An Overview of the Concept*. 19–41. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-4033-4_2
- Suherlan, E., Hamid, E. A., & Muslim, E. (2026). Pengaruh pemahaman materi saling menasehati terhadap sikap peduli sosial pada peserta didik kelas XI-6 di SMAN 3 Sumedang. *Ulu-muddin: Journal of Islamic Study*, 2(1), 30–38. <https://doi.org/10.62824/ngf6aq06>
- Trihananta, M. Y. (2026). *Hubungan dukungan sosial dan empati dengan perilaku prososial pada mahasiswa Fakultas Psikologi Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang* [Skripsi, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang].
- Tulud, D. M. (2025). Empathy quotient among students in language communication and education programs. *Journal of Nusantara Studies (JONUS)*, 10(2), 494–511.
- Unger, L. S., & Thumhuri, L. K. (1997). Trait empathy and continuous helping: The case of voluntarism. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 12(3), 787.
- Wijayanti, N. S. T. P. L., & Wilani, N. M. A. (2026). Peran empati dan religiusitas terhadap perilaku prososial siswa Sekolah Menengah Pertama (SMP) inklusi. *Jurnal Psikologi Integratif*, 14(1), 34–57. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpsi.v14i1.3647>
- Yin, Y., & Wang, Y. (2022). Is empathy associated with more prosocial behaviour? A meta-analysis. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 26(1), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12537>