



The Effectiveness of Role-Playing Techniques Through Group Counseling in Enhancing Students' Empathy

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of applying role-playing techniques through group counseling services to enhance empathy among eighth-grade students in Class VIII A at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang during the 2025/2026 school year. This study is a quantitative study with a one-group pre-test and post-test design. The study population consisted of 28 students in Class VIII A, with a sample size of 6 students. The data collection tool used was an empathy questionnaire. The data were analyzed using a paired t-test. The results showed a significance value (2-tailed) of $0.000 < 0.05$, so the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted. Based on these results, it can be concluded that the role-playing technique through group counseling services is effective in enhancing empathy among eighth-grade students at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang during the 2025/2026 academic year.

Keywords: Effectiveness; role-playing; group counseling; empathy; students

Abstrak: Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui efektifitas penerapan teknik role playing melalui layanan bimbingan kelompok untuk meningkatkan empati siswa kelas VIII A di UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang tahun pelajaran 2025/2026. Penelitian ini merupakan jenis penelitian kuantitatif dengan desain one group pre-test and post-test. Populasi penelitian ini berjumlah 28 siswa kelas VIII A dengan sampel penelitian berjumlah 6 orang. Alat pengumpul data yang digunakan berupa angket empati. Penelitian ini dianalisis menggunakan uji beda berpasangan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan nilai sign (2-tailed) sebesar $0,000 < 0,05$ sehingga H_0 ditolak dan H_a diterima. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian dapat disimpulkan bahwa teknik role playing melalui layanan bimbingan kelompok efektif untuk meningkatkan empati siswa kelas VIII UPTD SMPN Kupang tahun pelajaran 2025/2026.

Kata kunci: Efektifitas; role playing; bimbingan kelompok; empati; siswa

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Introduction

Junior high school (SMP) is a level of formal education attended by students after completing elementary school (SD). Students at the junior high school level are generally in the early stages of adolescence, with an age range of approximately 12–15 years (Wendari et al., 2016).

Junior high school students are adolescents who are entering a developmental stage and, therefore, need to accomplish various developmental tasks, one of which is establishing positive relationships with peers (Ismatuddiyanah et al., 2023).

In the current era of globalization and digitalization, advances in technology and information have significantly influenced patterns of behavior and social interaction among junior high school students. Along with these developments, concerns have emerged regarding the declining ability of students to demonstrate empathy. Empathy, defined as the ability to understand and experience the feelings of others, plays an important role in establishing healthy and harmonious social relationships (Rosyida, 2020).

Students frequently engage in various forms of social interaction in their daily lives. Therefore, the ability to understand the feelings and perspectives of others is essential for creating harmonious and healthy relationships. One of the fundamental aspects that contributes to building effective relationships with others is empathy (Amelia et al., 2025).

Asih & Pratiwi (2010) state that empathy is an individual's ability to understand or comprehend the emotions and feelings of others and to imagine oneself in another person's position.

Empathy is highly important for students because it demonstrates their ability to interact effectively and adapt to the school environment. Students are individuals who are still undergoing a developmental process and require knowledge and guidance so that their potential can develop optimally and their personality can be appropriately formed (Ramli, 2015).

Empathy refers to an individual's ability to deeply understand and experience the feelings of others. Individuals with high levels of empathy may demonstrate behaviors such as concern, compassion, and willingness to help others who are experiencing difficulties or suffering, as well as feelings of anxiety and sympathy toward others. A high level of empathy encourages individuals to show greater concern for others. Conversely, individuals with low levels of empathy may experience difficulties in interacting with their peers (Mulinda, 2020).

According to Yulianti (2019), the development of empathy is grounded in reflective

awareness of one's own emotions, the emotions of others, and intentions, which constitute key characteristics of empathic experiences. Empathy needs to be continuously cultivated in students to assist them in developing attitudes of concern for others. Individuals with high levels of empathy tend to assist or help people who are experiencing difficulties, whereas individuals with low levels of empathy may avoid those who are facing difficulties and may even respond aggressively by insulting or hitting victims who express their distress. The inability to empathize prevents individuals from seeing situations from another person's perspective, recognizing others' feelings, and appropriately adjusting their responses of (Salsabillah et al., 2025). Guidance and counseling teachers play an important role in helping students achieve optimal personal development and develop empathic characteristics. One form of guidance and counseling service that can be employed by guidance and counseling teachers to foster students' empathy is group guidance (Rismi, 2021).

Prayitno & Amti (2013: 309) explain that "group guidance is a guidance service provided in a group setting by utilizing group dynamics to achieve the objectives of guidance and counseling services."

According to Putri (2019), the benefit of group guidance is to foster positive attitudes toward oneself and the surrounding environment in relation to matters discussed within the group.

The objectives of group guidance include acquiring information for broader purposes, developing personal potential, and discussing general problems or topics broadly and in depth in ways that are beneficial to group members (Wasono, 2019). To support the achievement of these objectives, appropriate techniques are required that can effectively engage participants in active participation. One technique frequently used in group guidance is the *role-playing* technique (Rosa, 2025).

Through *role-playing* activities, students not only learn to recognize the emotions of others but also learn to express empathy both verbally and nonverbally in social interactions. In addition, group guidance provides a setting for implementing the *role-playing* technique, allowing group members to engage in discussion, reflection, and peer feedback. These processes can strengthen students' understanding and internalization of the importance of empathy in everyday life.

The *role-playing* technique involves bringing roles that exist in the real world into a role-play performance within a group, which is subsequently used as material for reflection by group members. Activities conducted during group guidance and supported by the *role-playing* technique can serve as

a real-life laboratory for group members to develop and improve their empathy (Zainuddin et al., 2024).

Group guidance services using the *role-playing* technique have been demonstrated to be effective in improving students' empathy. This is supported by research conducted by Puspita (2020), which demonstrated that group guidance services through the role-playing technique were effective in enhancing students' empathic abilities. This finding is also consistent with the results of a study by Zainuddin et al. (2024), which revealed that group guidance using the *role-playing* technique was effective in improving students' empathy.

Based on observations conducted by the researcher at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang over a period of one week, several students were found to experience problems related to empathy. These behaviors included blaming others, showing little concern for their peers, making fun of friends, and being unwilling to share with others.

Based on interviews with the guidance and counseling teacher, information was obtained indicating that several students exhibited symptoms related to empathic behavior. These included difficulties in understanding the feelings and circumstances experienced by their peers, difficulties in placing themselves in other people's situations, limited sensitivity to their peers' emotional conditions, and a lack of attention and support when their peers encountered difficulties.

Based on the description above, the research problem is formulated as follows: Is the implementation of the *role-playing* technique through group guidance services effective in improving the empathy of Grade VIII students at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang during the 2025/2026 academic year? Based on the research problem formulated above, the objective of this study is to determine the effectiveness of implementing the *role-playing* technique through group guidance services in improving the empathy of Grade VIII students at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang during the 2025/2026 academic year.

Method

Research Design and Setting

This study employed a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design. The study was conducted at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang from December 2025 to June 2026. Students completed a pretest, received role-playing treatment through group guidance services, and then completed a posttest to measure changes in empathy.

Participants, Sample, or Data Sources

The population consisted of 28 Grade VIII A students at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang in the 2025/2026

academic year. The sample was selected using purposive sampling and consisted of students identified as having low empathy based on the pretest results.

Instruments and Measures

Data were collected using a closed-ended empathy questionnaire developed by Molle. The questionnaire consisted of 41 items covering understanding others, taking another person's perspective, sensitivity to others' feelings, and giving attention. The instrument was tested for validity and reliability, with a reliability coefficient of 0.953. A Likert scale with four response options always, often, sometimes, and never was used for scoring.

Procedure and Research Ethics

The procedure consisted of three main stages: administering the pretest, providing role-playing treatment through group guidance services, and administering the posttest. The treatment was implemented using a guideline developed by the researcher based on the stages of group guidance and role-playing.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a paired-samples t-test to examine differences between students' empathy scores before and after the treatment. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26 for Windows.

Results and Discussion

Results

Pretest Results

The pretest data on empathy for students in Class VIIIA at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Pretest Results Data

No.	Name	Total Score	Notes
1	Agnes B. M. Riberu	116	Moderate
2	Aprianto L. Inabui	81	Low
3	Arjun I. Benukafa	76	Low
4	Boy Ndolu	78	Low
5	Christine A. T. Fanggidae	73	Low
6	Calista R. Y. Kaborang	97	Moderate
7	Cornelis O. E. Alpha	111	Moderate
8	Daniel L. Y. Loin	103	Moderate
9	Devista L. Joostenz	135	High
10	Deselan R. Nawa	142	High
11	Devan T. Seko	136	High
12	Fricka M. Latupapua	134	High
13	Fransiska Faah	151	High
14	Javin Boak	123	Moderate

15	Junior A. Doko	104	Moderate
16	Jhio A. Gadjaja	101	Moderate
17	Kadek Lalitha	80	Low
18	Martin M. Mesimnasi	115	Moderate
19	Meki Asbanu	104	Moderate
20	Raisha A. F. Manggi	135	High
21	Roy S. Kain	119	Moderate
22	Ryo A. P. D. Alpha	94	Moderate
23	Selfie N. Laitera	81	Low
24	Stefe O. Puay	108	Moderate
25	Gilbert G. A. Ludji	129	High
26	Jadrel J. Djawe	86	Moderate
27	Triztan A. Ndolu	139	High
28	Vicky Tang	135	High

Based on the criteria guidelines, of the 28 respondents, 6 fell into the low category, 13 into the moderate category, and 9 into the high category. The data from these 6 respondents in the low category were used as the study sample (Table 2)

Table 2. Research Respondents' Score Data

No.	Name	Score	Category
1.	ALI	81	Low
2.	AIB	76	Low
3.	BN	78	Low
4.	CATF	73	Low
5.	KL	80	Low
6.	SNL	81	Low

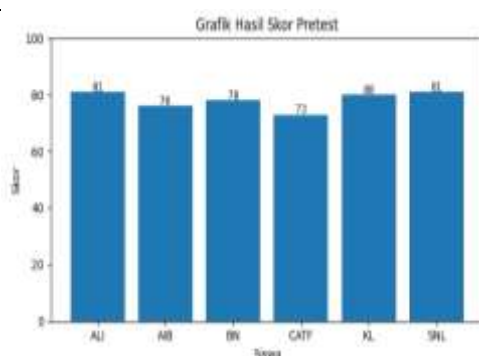


Figure 1. Pretest Scores

Posttest Results

The posttest results for the empathy levels of the students in Class VIIIA at SMPN 16 Kupang are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Posttest Results Data

No.	Student Name	Score	Notes
1.	ALI	148	High
2.	AIB	143	High
3.	BN	144	High
4.	CATF	147	High

5.	KL	143	High
6.	SNL	146	High

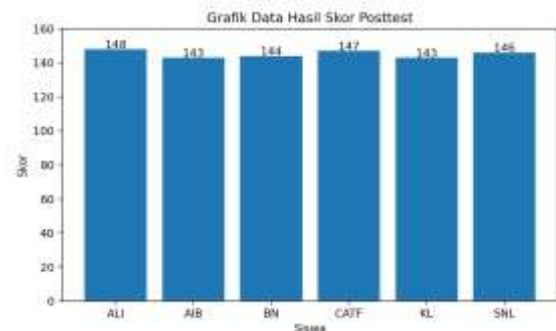


Figure 2. Posttest Scores

Differences Between the Pretest and Posttest

Furthermore, Table 4 shows the differences in students' empathy levels based on the pretest and posttest results.

Table 4. Differences in Pretest and Posttest Scores

NO	Nama	Score Results Pretest	Score Results Posttest	Difference
1.	ALI	81	148	55
2.	AIB	76	143	48
3.	BN	78	144	54
4.	CATF	73	147	54
5.	KL	80	143	62
6.	SNL	81	146	47
TOTAL		469	871	402

Based on the table above, there is a significant difference between the *pretest* and *posttest* results. Before receiving the intervention, the students were in the low category. However, after the *role-playing* technique was implemented through group counseling sessions, the students showed a dramatic improvement, moving from the low category to the high category. For further clarification, see Figure 3.

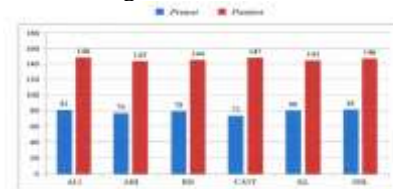


Figure 3. Differences Between the Pretest and Posttest

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing in this study used the Paired-Samples t-test because the data were found to be normally distributed. This test aimed to determine the effectiveness of applying *role-playing* techniques through group counseling services to enhance empathy among eighth-grade students at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang during the 2025/2026 school year. The results of the hypothesis test (Paired Samples Test) are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of the Hypothesis Test

Paired Samples Test						
Paired Differences						
pretest	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Sig. (2-tailed)
posttest				Lower	Upper	
	66.833	3.764	1.537	70.783	62.883	43.495
						5
						0.000

Singgih (2016) stated that the basis for decision-making in the paired sample t-test is determined by the significance value (Sig.). The SPSS output results are as follows:

- If the Sig. (2-tailed) value is < 0.05 , then H_0 is rejected and H_a is accepted.
- Conversely, if the Sig. (2-tailed) value is > 0.05 , then H_0 is accepted and H_a is rejected.

Referring to the aforementioned decision-making criteria, the Sig. (2-tailed) value was $0.000 < 0.05$, indicating that H_0 was rejected and H_a was accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that the role-playing technique through group guidance services was effective in improving the empathy of Class VIII A students at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang in the 2025/2026 Academic Year.

In addition to comparing the significance value (Sig.) with the probability level of 0.05, another method that can be used to test the hypothesis in the paired sample t-test is by comparing the calculated t-value with the t-table value.

The decision-making criteria are as follows:

- If the calculated t-value $>$ the t-table value, then H_0 is rejected and H_a is accepted.
- Conversely, if the calculated t-value $<$ the t-table value, then H_0 is accepted and H_a is rejected.

Based on the "Paired Samples Test" output table above, the calculated t-value was negative, namely -43.495 . The negative calculated t-value occurred because the mean score of the pretest was lower than the mean score of the posttest. In this context, the negative calculated t-value can be interpreted as a positive difference. Therefore, the calculated t-value is considered to be 43.495.

The next step is to determine the t-table value, which is obtained based on the df (degree of freedom) and the significance level ($\alpha/2$). Based on the output above, the df value was 5, while $0.05/2 = 0.025$. These values were used as the basis for determining the t-table value, which was 2.57058. The t-table distribution data are presented in Appendix 12.

Based on the t-table distribution, the t-table value was 2.57058. In accordance with the aforementioned decision-making criteria, it can be concluded that H_0 was rejected and H_a was accepted. This indicates that there was a difference between the mean pretest and posttest scores. Therefore, the implementation of the role-playing technique

through group guidance services was effective in improving the empathy of Class VIII A students at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang in the 2025/2026 Academic Year.

Discussion

The results of the study showed that the level of empathy among Class VIII A students at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang before the treatment was still categorized as low. Based on the pre-test results of 28 respondents, 6 respondents had empathy levels in the low category and were therefore selected as research subjects. Subsequently, the researcher provided a treatment in the form of the role-playing technique through group guidance services to improve students' empathy. After the treatment was administered, the post-test results showed a significant improvement, with all respondents changing from the low category to the high category. The difference between the pre-test and post-test scores reached 402 points.

Based on the results of statistical data analysis using the Paired Sample T-Test, as presented in Table 4.5, the significance value or Sig. (2-tailed) was 0.000. This probability value was considerably lower than the predetermined significance level, namely $0.000 < 0.05$. The statistical test results clearly indicated that H_0 was rejected and H_a was accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that there was a significant difference between the mean pre-test and post-test empathy scores of Class VIII A students at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang in the 2025/2026 Academic Year after receiving the treatment in the form of group guidance services using the role-playing technique.

The findings of this study are consistent with the research conducted by Zainuddin et al. (2024), which found that the use of the role-playing technique through group guidance services was effective in improving students' empathy. In their study, the role-playing technique through group guidance services served as an effective means of helping students develop their empathy. Through structured role-playing activities, students learned to understand the perspectives and feelings of others, enabling their empathic abilities to develop optimally in various social situations.

These findings are also in line with the study conducted by Rosa et al., (2025), which stated that group guidance services using the role-playing technique were effective in improving students' empathy. Through role playing, students were not only encouraged to understand others' feelings cognitively but also to experience emotionally the situations faced by their peers. Direct experience in assuming another person's role made it easier for students to place themselves in others' positions, thereby supporting the optimal development of their

empathic abilities. Therefore, the role-playing technique is recommended for implementation in group guidance services to improve students' empathy.

Group guidance services are one of the services that can help improve students' empathy. This is consistent with the theory proposed by Rismi (2021), which explains that through group guidance services, students can learn to understand the feelings and perspectives of other group members, thereby enabling empathy to develop optimally.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the data collection, processing, and interpretation presented, the researcher concludes that the implementation of the role-playing technique through group guidance services was effective in improving the empathy of Class VIII A students at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang in the 2025/2026 Academic Year.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions (Optional)

The author was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data collection, data curation, formal analysis, writing of the original draft, and review and editing of the manuscript.

Generative AI Disclosure

The author declares that generative AI tools were used as an AI-assisted tool in the preparation of this manuscript. The author remains fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of the article.

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