



## Application of Group Counselling With the Cognitive Reappraisal Technique to Enhance Empathy Among Students

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**Abstract:** Empathy is an essential skill in building healthy social relationships; however, in early adolescence, this ability is still developing and requires environmental support. This study aims to enhance students' empathy through group counselling using the *cognitive reappraisal* technique at MTs IS Roudhotul Qurro. The research employed a qualitative case study approach involving eight Year VII students who demonstrated tendencies of low empathy in social interactions. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analysed using the Miles and Huberman model. The intervention was implemented over five progressive sessions, ranging from trust-building to the application of reappraisal in social simulations. The findings revealed a gradual increase in empathy, both during sessions and in daily life, including greater social engagement, communication initiative, and concern for peers. Follow-up monitoring also confirmed positive behavioural changes among the students. These findings demonstrate that the *cognitive reappraisal* technique is effective in enhancing students' empathy both cognitively and affectively.

**Keywords:** Empathy, Group Counselling, Cognitive Reappraisal, Early Adolescence

**Abstrak:** Empati merupakan keterampilan penting dalam membangun hubungan sosial yang sehat, namun pada masa remaja awal, kemampuan ini masih berkembang dan memerlukan dukungan lingkungan. Penelitian ini bertujuan meningkatkan empati siswa melalui konseling kelompok dengan teknik *cognitive reappraisal* di MTs IS Roudhotul Qurro. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif studi kasus dengan delapan siswa kelas VII yang menunjukkan kecenderungan kurang empati dalam interaksi sosial. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi, lalu dianalisis menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman. Pendekatan dilakukan dalam lima sesi bertahap, dari membangun kepercayaan hingga penerapan reappraisal dalam simulasi sosial. Hasil menunjukkan peningkatan empati secara bertahap, baik dalam sesi maupun kehidupan sehari-hari, seperti keterlibatan sosial, inisiatif komunikasi, dan kepedulian terhadap teman. Monitoring lanjutan juga mengonfirmasi perubahan positif perilaku siswa. Temuan ini membuktikan bahwa teknik *cognitive reappraisal* efektif dalam meningkatkan empati siswa secara kognitif dan afektif.

**Kata Kunci:** Empati, Konseling Kelompok, Cognitive Reappraisal, Remaja Awal

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## Introduction

Early adolescence, typically experienced by seventh-grade students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) or its equivalent, represents a developmental phase characterized by notable cognitive, emotional, and social transformations. During this period, individuals begin to display more advanced and reflective thinking skills while also shaping a more consistent self-concept (Rohmiani, 2018). The need for recognition and acceptance from peer groups becomes increasingly dominant, causing adolescents to be highly responsive to the social influences around them (Hamdanah, 2022; Setiyowati et al., 2023). However, the capacity to recognize and regulate emotions, including the ability to adopt another person's point of view, remains in progress at this stage. Empathy, as a component of social competence, has not yet fully developed and is strongly shaped by environmental influences such as the quality of social relationships, interpersonal encounters, and guidance from significant adults (Andi Agusniatih, 2019; Razali, Geofakta, Hema Dayita Pohan, 2024; Rusdiana, Rani, Siti Nur Nikmatul Zaenab, 2025).

Empathy is one of the crucial aspects of social life that plays a role in building healthy and harmonious interpersonal relationships (Utami, 2024). According to Davis (1983), empathy can be defined as a person's ability to understand and feel the emotional state of others and respond appropriately. Individuals with a high level of empathy tend to exhibit prosocial behaviours such as helping, tolerance, and the ability to resolve conflicts constructively (Diswantika et al., 2022; Herawan & Hawadi, 2018). Conversely, a low level of empathy can lead to various social problems, including difficulties in establishing relationships, a tendency towards aggressive behaviour, and obstacles in developing essential social skills for community life (Apriliani et al., 2024; Zuchdi, 2023).

Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs), as an Islamic educational institution, holds responsibility not only for academic achievement but also for nurturing character and moral values grounded in Islamic principles. Within this framework, cultivating empathy becomes a vital aspect in developing noble character. Consequently, the guidance and counseling strategies applied should be consistent with Islamic teachings and tailored to the students' characteristics.

In the realm of classical Islamic thought, the value of empathy has been an integral part of moral teachings. Al-Ghazali, in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn*, explained that feeling the suffering of others as though it were one's own is a form of *akhlak mahmudah* (commendable morals) that must be cultivated in every Muslim. He advised that, "A servant is not considered to have true compassion until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself" (Al-Ghazali, 2005). From this perspective, empathy is not merely a social skill but also part of a spiritual and moral responsibility.

Similarly, Ibn Sina viewed empathy as part of the perfection of the rational soul, which is able to perceive the emotional state of others through imaginative and intellectual faculties. In his work *Kitāb al-Nafs*, he explained that a morally healthy human being is able "to feel what others feel" as part of emotional intelligence integrated with reason (Ibn Sina, 1952). Ibn Sina's perspective shows that empathy results from a harmonious integration of cognitive and affective processing, a process highly relevant to the *cognitive reappraisal* approach developed in modern psychology.

In the educational sphere, empathy is important for shaping students' character so that they can interact positively, inclusively, and responsibly in their social environment (Bhoki & Ola, 2025). A lack of empathy can affect social skills and the quality of relationships among students. Goleman (2006) emphasised that empathy is the foundation for building healthy social relationships. Moreover, empathy also plays a role in promoting prosocial behaviour and enhancing the quality of interactions within the school environment (Syamsudin & Hadi, 2025). According to Kohlberg's moral development theory, individuals who have not reached higher stages of moral development tend to be egocentric and struggle to understand others' perspectives (Hanafiah, 2024; Kuswandi, 2020). This condition can trigger conflict, reduce solidarity, and hinder students' social and emotional development, ultimately having a negative impact on their academic and social success (Pribadi et al., 2024).

At MTs IS Roudhotul Qurro, indications of low empathy among students remain apparent. Observations reveal that some students show limited concern for classmates who face academic difficulties, are unwilling to offer assistance, and tend to form exclusive groups during breaks. In collaborative tasks, certain students dominate discussions and disregard the opinions of others. Peer interactions are often marked by individualism, with little collaboration. In several instances, students appear unaware of the emotional consequences of their words and actions. These patterns are further supported by preliminary interviews with the guidance and counseling (BK) teacher, who explained that many students continue to lack sensitivity toward their peers' feelings, exhibit indifference in social contexts, and show minimal involvement in activities designed to build empathy. The BK teacher also reported cases where students experienced declining learning motivation due to a lack of empathetic support within their friendship groups. School records further indicate that approximately 20% of Year VII students demonstrate tendencies of low social interaction and are frequently involved in minor conflicts arising from their inability to understand others' emotions. This situation highlights the urgency of implementing approaches aimed at strengthening student empathy to foster a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

In other words, the serious impact of a lack of empathy cannot be ignored. Low empathy can lead to increased student conflict, lower-quality social relationships, and reduced ability to cooperate and solve problems collectively. Therefore, an appropriate approach is needed to re-cultivate students' social sensitivity from an early stage. One approach proven effective in this regard is group counselling with the *cognitive reappraisal* technique. This technique encourages students to re-evaluate how they interpret challenging social situations, guiding them to respond in a more adaptive and empathetic manner. According to the Emotion Regulation Theory proposed by Gross (2003), individuals can alter their emotional responses by changing how they interpret an event. In other words, *cognitive reappraisal* trains individuals to view an event from a different perspective, thereby enabling them to better understand others' feelings and respond with greater empathy (Imania, 2025).

In this study, the *cognitive reappraisal* technique is applied through five systematic steps referring to the theoretical framework of Gross (2002) and Ochsner and Gross (2005),

namely: The process involves five key steps: (1) identifying emotions and social situations that elicit negative reactions, (2) assessing one's initial perspective of the situation, (3) considering the viewpoints of others involved, (4) reframing or reinterpreting the situation through cognitive reappraisal, and (5) testing alternative responses while evaluating the resulting changes. These steps are applied across five sequential group counseling sessions, beginning with an introductory and trust-building phase, followed by recognizing both personal and others' emotions, learning the cognitive reappraisal technique, engaging in simulations and role-plays, and concluding with reflection and feedback. This structured sequence is intended to gradually and systematically foster the internalization of students' empathetic skills.

Theoretically, *cognitive reappraisal* is an emotion regulation strategy that focuses on altering the cognitive interpretation of an event to change its emotional impact (Bintamur, 2023). This technique does not avoid negative emotions but helps individuals manage them in a more constructive manner. For example, when faced with a hurtful comment from a peer, students are encouraged to reassess the intention behind the comment and try to interpret it as a form of concern or insecurity on the other person's part rather than as a personal attack.

Thus, implementing group counselling with the *cognitive reappraisal* technique at MTs IS Roudhotul Qurro becomes a strategic and urgent approach. The lack of concern, exclusive interactions, and dominance in group work highlight the need for efforts to develop social sensitivity. Group counselling with the *cognitive reappraisal* technique is chosen as the approach because it has been proven effective in helping students reflect upon and change their perspectives on social situations. This study is conducted to examine how this technique can be systematically applied to enhance students' empathy within the school context.

## **Methods**

This research was conducted in April 2025 at MTs IS Roudhotul Qurro Tanjungbalai. The school was selected because it presents a social phenomenon relevant to the research focus, namely the low level of student empathy in social interactions. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. A qualitative approach with a case study design is a research method aimed at understanding a phenomenon in depth through the exploration of meanings, experiences, and perspectives of subjects in a real-life context, with a focus on a single case studied intensively and comprehensively (Septiana et al., 2024). According to Yin (2009), the stages in a case study include: (1) formulating research questions, (2) designing the case study framework, (3) preparing for data collection, (4) collecting data from multiple sources, (5) analysing data thematically or descriptively, and (6) reporting results in a detailed and contextual manner. This approach was chosen because the research aims to understand the meanings, processes, and subjective experiences encountered by students during participation in group counselling sessions using the *Cognitive Reappraisal* technique.

The subjects in this study were Year VII students who demonstrated tendencies of low empathy in social interactions, such as indifference towards peers, a lack of concern for the feelings of others, and low cooperativeness in group activities. The criteria for participant selection were based on initial observations, interviews with the Guidance and Counselling (BK) teacher, and an assessment of data reflecting students' social behaviour

in the school environment. Through the triangulation of these data, a more comprehensive profile of students requiring the approach was obtained. The number of participants in the group counselling sessions was determined according to the principle of effective group counselling proposed by Waterman & Walker (2009), namely between 6 and 8 students. This number is considered ideal as it allows each group member greater freedom to express feelings, listen to one another, and build a conducive group dynamic. With a relatively small group size, the facilitator can also more easily guide discussions and give attention to each participant's development in greater depth.

Data collection techniques refer to systematic procedures for obtaining data in accordance with the research needs (Nashrullah et al., 2023). In this study, data were collected through three main techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to examine students' social behaviour before, during, and after group counselling; interviews were conducted with the BK teacher, homeroom teacher, and students to explore changes in empathy; while documentation included process notes, student reflections, and other supporting documents.

Participant	Interview	Observation	Documentation
Students	✓	✓	✓
BK Teacher	✓	-	✓
Homeroom Teacher	✓	-	-

**Table 1. informants and data collecting**

Data analysis referred to the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification through triangulation, discussions with supervisors, and cross-source verification (Suyitno, 2018). This process was carried out to address how the *Cognitive Reappraisal* technique in group counselling can enhance students' empathy.

The results of the data analysis will be systematically directed to answer the research questions by linking each stage of Miles and Huberman's (1994) model with the study objectives. Data reduction will focus on identifying recurring patterns of student behaviour related to empathy, while data display will organize these findings into themes that illustrate the influence of the Cognitive Reappraisal technique during group counselling. The process of drawing and verifying conclusions will then highlight how changes in students' emotional awareness, social interactions, and sensitivity to peers provide evidence of improved empathetic abilities. In this way, the analytic process not only describes the observed changes but also explicitly demonstrates how the application of the Cognitive Reappraisal technique addresses the central research question regarding its effectiveness in enhancing students' empathy

## **Results And Discussion**

### **Results**

Based on the results of the initial assessment conducted through the observation of student behaviour and in-depth interviews with the Guidance and Counselling (BK) teacher, it was found that there were several students exhibiting low levels of empathy. This indication was evident from several behaviours observed in daily interactions, such as a lack of concern for the feelings of peers, insensitivity towards others' emotional

situations, and a tendency to be indifferent to social conflicts occurring within the school environment.

In an interview conducted on Wednesday, 21 May 2025 at 12.00 WIB, the BK teacher at MTs IS Roudhotul Qurro, Mrs Salwa, stated, "There are several students who seem to have difficulty understanding the feelings of their peers. For example, when a friend is feeling sad or facing a problem, they tend to be indifferent and show no empathy. Even in conflict situations, they appear unconcerned and sometimes even exacerbate the situation." Furthermore, Mrs Salwa added, "Some of them seem to find it difficult to put themselves in someone else's position. So if there is a problem, they are less able to respond emotionally like other children in general."

These preliminary findings prompted the researcher to identify eight students who displayed indicators of low empathy as research subjects. Selection was conducted purposively, considering specific characteristics that aligned with the focus of the approach, such as a tendency to ignore the feelings of peers, limited ability to understand others' perspectives, and records from the BK teacher regarding their social behaviour at school. These eight students were selected because they were considered to require special guidance to develop empathy skills. They subsequently became participants in group counselling activities designed using the *cognitive reappraisal* technique to help them manage emotions and enhance social sensitivity.

Subsequently, the eight students participated in a series of five group counselling sessions systematically designed using the *cognitive reappraisal* technique. Each session had a different thematic focus and objective, ranging from building trust and openness to recognising and managing emotions through cognitive reinterpretation. The implementation process of these sessions was documented through observation sheets that recorded participation, emotional engagement, conceptual understanding, and the development of empathetic attitudes among students throughout the intervention.

**Table 1. Observation results for Session I: Introduction & Building Trust**

Observed Aspects	Student Name							
	AKH	AP	AFA	NS	MAP	SM	VAF	ZA
Students actively participate in ice breaking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Students understand the purpose of group counseling	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Students are involved in developing group rules.	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-
Students are able to express experiences of empathy	-	-	-	✓	✓	-	✓	-
Students demonstrate openness in reflection	-	-	-	-	-	✓	✓	-
Interactions between members begin to show trust.	✓	-	✓	✓	-	-	-	-

The first group counselling session focused on introducing members to one another and building a safe and trusting environment. In this session, the five steps of *cognitive reappraisal* were subtly introduced through group interaction processes. Participants were invited to identify emotions during the ice-breaking activity and to evaluate their initial perspectives on group dynamics. Some students were also encouraged to view situations from other members' perspectives when formulating group rules and sharing experiences.

Although not yet fully open, the initial reappraisal process began to occur when students tried to interpret the activities positively, and by the end of the session, they reflected on their feelings and assessed changes in their responses to the group atmosphere. This session thus served as the emotional foundation for the subsequent application of the technique.

In this session, group counselling was focused on member introductions and efforts to build a safe and trusting environment. The observations in Table 1 show that most students (7 out of 8) appeared actively engaged in the ice-breaking activity, indicating that an initial light and enjoyable approach could stimulate their involvement. All students demonstrated an understanding of the purpose of the counselling, reflecting their initial readiness to proceed with the process. However, participation in formulating group rules was still limited; only four students actively contributed. This suggests that, although there was initial understanding, not all students felt confident enough to express their opinions in an open forum.

The students' ability to share experiences of empathy and openness in reflection also varied. Only a small number dared to share personal experiences and demonstrated emotional reflection on the situations discussed. This is understandable given that the first session represents the *forming* stage in group dynamics according to Tuckman (1965) in (Laksono, 2025), where members are still finding their position and do not yet feel fully comfortable with each other. The partial success of some students in beginning to open up indicates that a foundation for subsequent counselling processes had been established, albeit unevenly.

Theoretically, empathy according to Carl Rogers (1957) in (Faruk, 2025) is the ability to "perceive the world of another as if it were our own." However, for empathy to emerge, a psychologically safe condition is required. Therefore, building trust through initial activities such as ice-breaking and formulating shared rules becomes crucial in group counselling.

**Table 2. Observation results for Session II: Recognising One's Own and Others' Emotions**

Observed Aspects	Student Name							
	AKH	AP	AFA	NS	MAP	SM	VAF	ZA
Students are active in ice breaking expressions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Students are able to mention emotions they have experienced	✓	-	✓		✓	✓	-	-
Students can associate events with specific emotions.	-	-	✓	✓	-	✓	-	✓
Students show empathy when guessing their friends' expressions.	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Students demonstrate openness in reflection	-	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
There has been progress in openness in expressing emotions.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-

This second session aimed to develop emotional awareness as a prerequisite for *cognitive reappraisal*. The five steps were again applied in the activity flow: students were asked to identify emotions they had previously experienced, then to evaluate their responses to the events that triggered those emotions. In group discussions and

expression-guessing activities, they were encouraged to understand others' perspectives, particularly when interpreting and responding to their peers' expressions. From there, students began to reframe the meanings of the feelings that emerged and relate them to personal experiences. The process concluded with a reflection on changes in their understanding and feelings after gaining a deeper awareness of emotions, thereby naturally and progressively incorporating the five reappraisal steps.

This session focused on recognising one's own and others' emotions as a fundamental step in developing empathy. Observation results show that almost all students actively participated in the expression-based ice-breaking activity, designed to stimulate emotional awareness through facial expressions and body movements. Nevertheless, only some students were able to name and link emotions to specific experiences, indicating that *emotional awareness* skills were not yet evenly developed. This aligns with the findings of Diananda (2019), who states that early adolescents tend to struggle in identifying and managing emotions due to limited emotional vocabulary and minimal reflective experience.

Positive progress was observed in empathy when students were tasked with guessing their peers' expressions. Most students began to show the ability to read others' emotions and provide appropriate empathetic responses. Such interactions reflect the emergence of *perspective-taking*—the ability to understand others' viewpoints—as the cognitive component of empathy as explained by Fuatah (2021). Furthermore, increased openness in reflection was observed, with several students beginning to share feelings and experiences more personally. This indicates the emergence of a safe space within the group dynamic. According to Putri (2021), a psychologically safe group atmosphere is a key requirement for enabling students to express emotions and build empathetic relationships. Overall, this session served as an important transitional phase in the approach. Progress in emotional openness and the ability to recognise emotions is a prerequisite for the *cognitive reappraisal* technique to be applied effectively in subsequent sessions. This is reinforced by Safaria (2021) in his book, which asserts that the success of the cognitive reinterpretation technique is highly dependent on the extent to which individuals can identify and understand both their own emotional dynamics and those of others.

**Table 3.** Observation Session III: Understanding *Cognitive Reappraisal*

Student Name	Active Participation	Understanding the Concept	Able to Apply Reappraisal
AKH	✓	✓	✓
AP	✓	✓	✓
AFA	✓	✓	✓
NS	-	-	✓
MAP	✓	✓	-
SM	✓	✓	✓
VAF	✓	✓	✓
ZA	✓	✓	-

Then, in the third session, the concept of *cognitive reappraisal* is explicitly introduced. However, its application remains comprehensive. Starting with identifying



social situations that trigger negative emotions, students are trained to evaluate how they perceive the situation, both individually and in group discussions. They are then invited to consider alternative perspectives, both from peers and from case simulations. Next, students try to reframe their thinking about their own experiences, and at the end of the session, they test new, more positive responses and evaluate the emotional changes that have occurred. While the focus is on conceptual understanding, this session still integrates all five steps of the technique thoroughly.

*cognitive reappraisal* was explicitly introduced to the counseling participants. Based on observations, the majority of students demonstrated active participation throughout the session. Seven of the eight students (except NS) were actively involved in discussions and group activities related to the introduction of *cognitive reinterpretation*. This finding indicates that the group atmosphere established in the previous session began to have a positive impact on student engagement.

Understanding of the concept of *cognitive reappraisal* appeared quite good. Seven students were able to explain simply that a situation can be viewed from various perspectives and that negative emotions can be managed by changing their thinking. This indicates that students have begun to grasp the essence of reappraisal, namely the process of reinterpreting emotional stimuli. Gross (2003) stated that *cognitive reappraisal* is one of the most adaptive and effective emotion regulation strategies, especially in the context of social relationships. Support from the counselor, who facilitated conceptual learning with concrete examples, also played a crucial role in facilitating student understanding.

Although conceptual understanding was fairly uniform, the ability to apply reappraisal techniques in real-world contexts varied. Some students, such as AKH, AP, AFA, SM, and VAF, were able to provide examples of personal situations that they successfully reinterpreted positively. However, students like MAP and ZA had not demonstrated concrete application, despite understanding the concept. Meanwhile, student NS demonstrated reappraisal skills, although they were less active and appeared to lack conceptual understanding. This aligns with Oktrifianty's (2021) explanation, which states that cognitive understanding and practical application in emotional regulation do not always go hand in hand, as they are influenced by students' experiences, reflective capacity, and emotional readiness. Therefore, this session serves as a crucial point for bridging theory and practice in the process of developing empathy through cognitive reinterpretation.

**Table 4.** Observation Session IV: Applying *Cognitive Reappraisal* Through Simulation and Roleplay

Observed Aspects	Student Name							
	AKH	AP	AFA	NS	MAP	SM	VAF	ZA
Students understand the roles in simulation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Students are able to express the character's emotions clearly	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	-
Students use reappraisal techniques in dialogue	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Responses between students were positive	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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and supportive.

Student reflections	show	growing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
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understanding

In this session, *cognitive reappraisal techniques* are applied more concretely through simulations. Each student is given an emotional conflict situation to identify their emotions, then asked to evaluate the character's initial reaction and understand the perspective of the other character in the situation. Through role-playing, they reshape their thinking and response to the conflict using the reappraisal techniques they have learned. The entire process then concludes with a reflection to evaluate the changes in emotional responses and empathetic attitudes that emerge. Supportive interactions between members strengthen the process of internalizing the strategies in a natural and applicable way.

Based on observations in Table 4, most students understood their roles in the given scenarios and showed enthusiasm in playing characters representing emotional conflicts. Students' ability to express the characters' emotions also began to emerge, although the level of expressiveness and clarity of their emotions varied. Melinda et al., (2025) Social simulations such as roleplay can be an effective means of improving emotional regulation skills and strengthening students' understanding of the dynamics of feelings in interpersonal relationships.

The use of reappraisal techniques in dialogue between students showed quite encouraging results. Some students were able to insert alternative perspectives when acting as characters, for example by showing understanding, suspending judgment, or seeking rationale behind other characters' actions. This indicates that the reinterpretation strategy is beginning to be internalized in practice. Similarly, Amburika (2023) also stated that *cognitive reappraisal* not only impacts the management of negative emotions but can also strengthen social relationships by fostering empathy and reducing impulsive reactions to conflict. In this context, students' ability to understand other characters' feelings and adjust their verbal responses reflects progress in the cognitive and affective aspects of empathy. Interactions between students in the simulation were positive and supportive. They respected each other's roles and provided constructive feedback. Reflections after the simulation showed that some students had begun to understand the meaning of reappraisal not only as theory, but as a strategy that can be applied in real life. This reinforces the findings (Maisaroh et al., 2024) that hands-on, experiential activities, such as *roleplay*, can enhance students' emotional awareness and empathic skills because they are applicable and contextual. Thus, this session serves as an important bridge between cognitive learning and the expected attitude changes in group counseling.

**Table 5.** Observation of Session V; Reinforcement and Evaluation of Cognitive Reappraisal

Observed Aspects	Student Name							
	AKH	AP	AFA	NS	MAP	SM	VAF	ZA
Students are able to reflect on personal experiences	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of reappraisal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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Students are active in group discussions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Students show empathy when listening to friends	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Students make realistic personal plans or expectations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The final session serves as reinforcement, where the five steps of the technique are reapplied in a structured manner. Students re-identify the emotions they experienced during the counseling process and then evaluate the development of their perspectives on personal issues they have faced. In discussion and reflection, students explore new perspectives, reframe the meaning of the experience, and convey the changes in their responses, including personal plans for dealing with similar situations in the future. Thus, this session not only evaluates the results but also confirms that *cognitive reappraisal* has become an embedded skill in emotional regulation and a foundation for developing empathy. This session served as an evaluation and reinforcement session, where students were invited to reflect on their experiences during the group counseling process. Based on the results presented in Table 5, almost all students (7 out of 8) were able to reflect openly on their personal experiences, indicating an increase in emotional openness and self-awareness.

### Discussion

The findings from the group counseling sessions highlight both the strengths and limitations of students' engagement in the cognitive reappraisal process. Although only one student (SM) did not demonstrate sufficient depth of reflection, the overall participation indicates that the reflection activity played a meaningful role in facilitating personal understanding and growth. As Saputri (2023) emphasizes, reflection on lived experiences is an essential component of group counseling, as it enables students to construct personal meaning and foster emotional development. Furthermore, the students' ability to articulate how thoughts can influence emotions and reactions suggests that they have internalized the basic principles of cognitive reappraisal, providing a solid foundation for discussing its effectiveness in enhancing empathy.

Only one student (SM) did not demonstrate sufficient depth of reflection, but still participated in the discussion. This reflection activity is important because, according to (Saputri, 2023), reflection on experiences is a crucial part of group counseling to encourage personal meaning and emotional growth. All students demonstrated an understanding of the concept of *cognitive reappraisal*, as evident in their explanations of how thinking can influence feelings and reactions to certain situations.



**Figure 1.** Documentation of group counseling activities using *cognitive reappraisal techniques* (a) Session I: Introduction & Building Trust (b) Session IV: Implementing Cognitive Reappraisal Through Simulation and Roleplay (c) Session V: Reinforcement and Evaluation of Cognitive Reappraisal

A series of five group counseling sessions using *cognitive reappraisal techniques* demonstrated a continuous and progressive relationship in developing students' empathy. The first session laid the initial foundation for building trust and a sense of safety within the group, which proved crucial in creating a conducive psychological environment. This initial success provided the foundation for students to begin recognizing and expressing emotions. The second session strengthened their emotional awareness. The third session served as a bridge between understanding the concept of cognitive reinterpretation and its implementation in a social context. The fourth and fifth sessions demonstrated a significant shift from theoretical understanding to concrete empathic practice, both through social simulations and in-depth personal reflection.

The development of empathy among counseling participants in this study aligns with the four dimensions of empathy proposed by Davis (1983): *perspective taking* , *empathic concern* , *personal distress* , and *fantasy* . Each group counseling session contributes specifically to the development of each of these dimensions. The second session, which focuses on recognizing the emotions of oneself and others, becomes the starting point for the growth of *personal distress* and *empathic concern* , as students begin to recognize their own emotional discomfort while simultaneously developing a concern for the feelings of others. Furthermore, the third and fourth sessions play a crucial role in honing *perspective taking* , where students are trained to understand situations from various perspectives through cognitive reinterpretation and social simulation techniques. *The fantasy dimension* begins to develop when students engage imaginatively in *role-play activities* that reflect complex social conflicts, thereby expanding their imagination in understanding the emotional experiences of others. The integration of these four aspects enriches the overall process of internalizing empathy, making *Cognitive Reappraisal -based group counseling* a

holistic approach, combining cognitive and affective processing in a unified and progressive process.

In line with the development of these four aspects of empathy, the overall improvement in outcomes is also reflected in students' active engagement, ability to recognize and regulate emotions, and more developed empathic responses. Each session builds complementary skills ranging from openness, emotional recognition, conceptual understanding, to the application of techniques in realistic social situations. This indicates that the group counseling process using *cognitive reappraisal techniques* is not only effective in improving cognitive aspects such as understanding and reinterpretation, but also encourages students' affective growth, namely sensitivity to others. This finding aligns with research by Pratiwi (2025) which shows that the use of *cognitive reappraisal techniques* in group counseling can improve emotional regulation abilities and form more stable empathic attitudes. Thus, the fifth session is evidence that the approach taken during the five sessions has a positive impact, both cognitively and affectively, in increasing students' empathy.

The increased empathy that occurs during the counseling process not only demonstrates the psychological success of the method but also reflects noble moral and spiritual values. In the context of Islamic education, empathy is a highly emphasized component of praiseworthy morals ( *al-akhlāq al-mahmūdah* ). Islamic teachings place empathy as the foundation for building healthy and compassionate social relationships. This value is crucial to internalize, especially in educational settings that aim to shape students who are not only intellectually intelligent but also emotionally and spiritually mature.

The Qur'an explicitly commands Muslims to help one another in good deeds and to be considerate of the conditions of others. This is stated in QS. Al-Mā'idah [5]: 2:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَجْلُوا شَعَائِرَ اللَّهِ وَلَا الشُّهُرَ الْحَرَامَ وَلَا الْقُلُوبَ وَلَا أَمِينَ الْبَيْتِ الْحَرَامَ يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرِضْوَانًا وَإِذَا حَلَلْتُمْ فَاصْطَادُوا وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ أَن صَدُّوكُمْ عَنِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ أَن تَعْتَدُوا وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَىٰ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

Meaning: "O you who have believed, do not violate the rites of Allah or [the sanctity of] the sacred month or [neglect the marking of] the sacrificial animals and garlanding [them] or [violate the safety of] those coming to the Sacred House seeking bounty from their Lord and [His] approval. But when you come out of ihram, then [you may] hunt. And do not let the hatred of a people for having obstructed you from al-Masjid al-Haram lead you to transgress. And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty."

This verse emphasizes that healthy social interactions must be based on mutual assistance and concern for the needs of others. In the context of developing empathy, this attitude is reflected in students' ability to respond appropriately and compassionately to others' emotional states. Likewise, in the hadith, the Prophet ﷺ said:

قَالَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فِي تَوَادُّهِمْ، وَتَرَاحُمِهِمْ، وَتَعَاطُفِهِمْ، مَثَلُ الْجَسَدِ، إِذَا اشْتَكَى مِنْهُ عُضْوٌ، نَدَّاعَىٰ لَهُ سَائِرُ الْجَسَدِ، بِالسَّهْرِ وَالْحُمَّى

Meaning: "The parable of believers in their mutual love, affection, and empathy is like one body. If one part of the body is sick, the whole body will suffer from fever and sleeplessness." (Narrated by Bukhari no. 6011 and Muslim no. 2586)

This hadith describes empathy as part of ideal social morality in Islam, namely the ability to feel and understand another's suffering as if it were one's own. This aligns with the goal of implementing *Cognitive Reappraisal* in group counseling, namely to develop more adaptive emotional responses through a deeper understanding of others' perspectives.

To explore students' understanding of the group counseling process they participated in, researchers collected data through impression and message sheets and open-ended interviews. The results revealed a variety of meaningful experiences during the five *Cognitive Reappraisal -based group counseling sessions*. The majority of students reported that these activities helped them better understand themselves and others, and changed the way they viewed and responded to social situations around them.

student, SM, said that he became more sensitive and open to others' feelings after participating in this activity. He stated, *"At first, I was confused when a friend was sad or angry, afraid of responding incorrectly. But after participating in this counseling, I learned the importance of listening and understanding before reacting. I also became more confident in expressing my feelings."* This experience shows that students are beginning to develop empathy in everyday social situations.

Another student, AP, revealed that group counseling taught her to see situations from a broader perspective. She said, *"Usually, when I have problems with friends, I immediately become suspicious, thinking they don't like me. But after learning to rethink things, I realized maybe they just have their own problems. Now I'm calmer and less easily angered."* Through this process, AP experienced a shift in thinking, becoming more reflective and open to the emotional states of others.

Meanwhile, AKH expressed that he felt more accepted and less alone in facing his feelings and social challenges after participating in group counseling. He said, *"I used to be quiet and afraid to talk, but now I'm more open because I feel heard. I also understand that my friends also have problems and we can help each other."* This statement reflects an increase in empathy and social connectedness among group members. Overall, students viewed this activity as an experience that helped them build trust, the courage to open up, and the ability to understand and respond to others more thoughtfully. The *Cognitive Reappraisal technique*, applied in a supportive group setting, allowed students to reflect on how they viewed social events, allowing empathy to develop gradually and naturally.

In addition to conducting five group counseling sessions and student reflections, researchers also conducted follow-up monitoring to understand the sustainability of student behavioral changes in daily life. This process involved collaboration with guidance and counseling (BK) teachers, homeroom teachers, and parents, as a form of support from the broader social environment. The BK teachers and homeroom teachers provided information through interviews regarding student dynamics after participating in group counseling activities.

The guidance counselor reported that several students have shown significant changes in their social interactions. He stated, *"Students who were previously passive and rarely seen in social interactions are now starting to appear more active. For example, they've started joining group work without being asked, joining in small talk during breaks, and some have even started joking around in class, within reasonable limits, of course."*

The homeroom teacher echoed this sentiment. She said, *"I see them becoming more sociable now. Some kids who used to tend to be more withdrawn now join their friends in the cafeteria. Some even dare to initiate small talk, something I rarely saw before."*

Furthermore, the guidance counselor added that pro-social behavior is also beginning to be seen in academic contexts. He said, *"There is one student who previously lacked self-confidence and never helped his friends, now he is seen offering help when his friends have difficulty understanding the lesson. This is a small thing, but quite significant in terms of their empathy development."* The findings from this monitoring show that changes in student behavior not only appear during counseling sessions, but also begin to be apparent in their daily social lives. Students' initiatives to start conversations, build more open relationships, and show care and concern for their peers are a reflection that the values of empathy instilled in the counseling process are slowly starting to stick and are manifested in their real interactions in the school environment.

### **Conclusion**

Group counseling using the Cognitive Reappraisal approach has proven effective in increasing empathy in students who previously demonstrated low social sensitivity. Five counseling sessions designed in stages and continuously demonstrate progressive development in shaping students' empathy, both from the cognitive and affective aspects. The first session provides a foundation for building a sense of security and trust, which paves the way for students to recognize and express emotions in the second session. The third and fourth sessions strengthen perspective-taking and fantasy skills through the application of cognitive reinterpretation and social simulation, while the fifth session strengthens reflection and integration of empathy in real contexts. Each session contributes to aspects of empathy measured by perspective-taking, empathic concern, personal distress, and fantasy simultaneously and directed. Through five counseling sessions held in a supportive atmosphere, students were given the opportunity to reflect on how they think and respond to social events. The Cognitive Reappraisal technique encouraged students to view situations from a broader perspective and learn to restrain impulsive responses by considering the feelings and conditions of others first. These changes were evident in students' statements of feeling more sensitive, more open, and better able to build healthy social relationships. Furthermore, post-activity monitoring results indicated that these changes not only occurred during the counseling sessions but also began to be internalized in the students' daily lives. The guidance counselor and homeroom teacher observed increased student initiative in interacting, communicating, and demonstrating prosocial behavior within the school environment. Even in academic settings, students demonstrated greater courage to show concern and provide assistance to their peers.

This study contributes to the field of educational psychology and guidance and counseling by demonstrating the relevance of Cognitive Reappraisal as a practical technique for fostering empathy in adolescents. The findings provide empirical support for the integration of structured group counseling sessions into school programs as a

means to strengthen students' character formation in line with both cognitive development and social-emotional learning. Moreover, the study highlights the role of guidance counselors and teachers in creating a supportive atmosphere that allows students to internalize empathy not only as an abstract concept but also as a lived practice in daily interactions. This research, therefore, extends the discourse on socio-emotional interventions by positioning Cognitive Reappraisal as an effective tool for character education in Islamic school contexts

Despite its promising findings, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a single institution with a relatively small number of participants, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the duration of the intervention was relatively short, focusing only on five sessions, so long-term sustainability of the observed behavioral changes was not fully assessed. The evaluation also relied heavily on observations, interviews, and self-reports, which may be influenced by subjective bias. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples, extend the duration of counseling interventions, and employ mixed-method or longitudinal designs to provide a deeper understanding of the lasting impact of Cognitive Reappraisal on students' empathetic development.

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