WOULD EMPATHY GROWS THROUGH SHORT STORY? AN INTERPERSONAL REACTIVITY INDEX ANALYSIS

La Ode Gusman Nasiru[1]*, Salam[2], and Waode Irawati[3]

[1,2,3]Gorontalo State University, Indonesia
[*]laode@ung.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of short stories as a safe and powerful simulation tool in developing empathy among young people. Short stories are believed to train the brain in the Theory of Mind process and trigger similar emotional responses, which are central to the ability to empathize. This research uses a descriptive narrative approach involving 20 students in Gorontalo. They will read six short stories themed around women's suffering, then discuss them through the Zoom application. Qualitative data analysis is done through coding based on the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) and the Developmental Theory of Empathy to assess systemic empathy maturity. The results show that short stories successfully trigger high Affective Empathy (EC) and Cognitive Empathy (PT) among students. Female students are dominant in EC responses, while male students tend to show Personal Distress (PD) mechanisms by criticizing the author's writing style. Crucial empathy maturity is achieved when participants are able to go beyond momentary feelings and reach a consensus to identify and critique oppressive systems as the root of suffering, especially in discussions of the short stories "Api Sita" and "Malam Pertama Calon Pendeta." The conclusion of this study affirms that literary fiction is effective in fostering empathy, encouraging critical understanding of chronic difficulties, and training social skills in the real world. Obstacles were found in the form of PD and cultural identity defenses that limit Cognitive Empathy on deeply rooted customary issues.

Keywords: *Empathy, Interpersonal Reactivity Index, Short Stories, Theory of Mind, Women,*

INTRODUCTION

Reading a short story is an activity that goes beyond entertainment; this activity is a powerful cognitive and emotional exercise, particularly in fostering an empathy. Empathy is the ability to understand or sense what others experience from their own points of view—placing oneself in someone else's position. By reading a short story, a human brain actively engages in a process known as a social simulation or theory of mind. The short stories which concentrated on the solid characters, conflicts, and emotions compel the reader to adopt the characters' perspective.

Overall, this study argue that a fiction—particularly short stories or literary fiction—functions as a safe and effective "simulation tools". By offering a deep and complex social simulations of others' emotional and mental lives, literary fiction can causally and over the long terms strengthen the readers' Theory of Mind abilities and real life social skills (Mar & Oatley, 2008).

These characters' perspective encouraged readers not only to observe the occurrences, but also experience them through their eyes, thoughts, and feelings of the main character. For a brief moment, we *become* them. Feeling their fears, joys, and dilemmas Furthermore, reading short stories encourages individuals to understand complex motivation. Because the reality of short stories often go straight the core of the problems or dilemmas (Oatley, 2012), the reader must unravel and comprehend the characters' motivations, beliefs, and intentions immediately.

This process closely resembles how humans try to understand others in real life. Hoffman (1977), in Zahra & Savitri (2023) states that the ability to place oneself in others' position—to feel and think about others' emotions without directly experiencing their situation—is part of empathy's conception (Zahra & Savitri, 2023). Therefore, studies show that when we read a books' description about an action of emotion, the same areas of the brain will be activated if we do or feel the same thing directly. This involves mirror neurons, which play a crucial role in the experience of empathy (Gallese, 2007).

Short stories are highly effective due to its brevity, which often allows for the exploration of a single deep emotional moment. They also facilitate intense emotional immersion. Thus, with such limited space, a short story acquired to deliver significant emotional impact within only a few pages. This creates an intense reading experience that enforced readers to invest emotionally in the characters' fate (Oatley, 2002)

Short stories also transcend the boundaries of personal experience (Eliana, 2021). They often present the characters from backgrounds, cultures, or circumstances entirely different from those readers. By "living through" these experiences, the readers will indirectly expand their concern and develop a deeper understanding that suffering and joy are universal even though their expressions may vary (Zahra & Savitri, 2023).

In this study, the research team conducted experiment trials towards the youngsters in Gorontalo. The experiment involved reading selected short stories followed by discussions. The reading sessions were conducted within a week continuously. The researchers then measured the empathy levels of the adolescents who served as the study's population and sample.

The purpose of this study is to examine how short stories function as a safe and effective "empathy simulator". Within an immersive narrative, reading a short story train the brain to interpret others' mental states and triggers similar emotional responses—abilities that form the core of empathy in everyday social interactions

LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of empathy is a complex process explained by several theoretical frameworks. There is no single theory universally regarded as the "most accurate," yet Martin Hoffman's Developmental Theory of Empathy is often considered the most comprehensive framework for describing how empathy emerges in individuals from infancy to adulthood. Hoffman theory focuses on how children's cognitive understanding of themselves and the world evolves, which in turn, influence their empathic response. Empathy is viewed as a set of progressively maturing stages (Eisenberg et al., 2013). These stages include:

1. Global empathy

    At this stage, infants cannot distinguish between their own distress and that of others. When they see another infant crying, they also cry, as if they themselves are experiencing the distress. This is the most primitive form of empathy, driven by imitation and automatic responses.

2. Egocentric empathy

    At this stage, children begin to recognize that others are separate individuals, yet they still assume that other people's internal states (feelings, needs) mirror their own. They respond to others' distress by offering what would comfort themselves—for example, giving someone a blanket or their favourite toy.

3. Empathy for Another's Feelings

    At this stage, individuals develop Theory of Mind (ToM), the ability to understand that others have their own thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. Empathic responses become more accurate because they can imagine the specific emotions experienced by others, even when those emotions differ from their own.

4. Empathy for Another's Life Condition

    At this stage, individuals become capable of empathizing not only with others' immediate emotions, but also with their long-term life circumstances and chronic difficulties (such as poverty, loneliness, or illness). Empathy extends toward broader groups or classes of people, potentially motivating long-term prosocial behaviour.

In this study, Hoffman's theory provides a clear, sequential framework that links cognitive development with affective development. This developmental model of empathy is used to analyse how short stories can trigger and cultivate readers' empathic capacities.

Table 1.
Operationalization of Variables

Variables	Conceptual Definition	Operational Definition
Reading short stories	The activity in which an individual engages with and comprehends a short story.	**Duration and intensity of the treatment**. Participants in the experimental group will read six short stories over a period of two weeks, with the estimation that each story will be read and understood within two days.
Empathy Level	An individual's ability to understand and experience another person's emotional state.	**Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI).** This scale was developed by Davis in 1983 to measure four dimensions of both affective and cognitive empathy.

In addition, this study also discusses the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). Theoretically, the IRI developed by Davis (1983) consists of four factors: empathic concern, personal distress, fantasy, and perspective taking. Empathic Concern, Personal Distress, and

Fantasy measure affective empathy, whereas Perspective Taking measures cognitive empathy (Zahra & Savitri, 2023).

When discussing Perspective Taking (PT), this ability refers to spontaneously adopting another person's point of view or "putting oneself in their shoes." It represents the cognitive component of empathy. Meanwhile, Empathic Concern (EC) refers to feelings of sympathy and concern for others, particularly in response to their distress (Koole & Aldao, 2017). EC is an aspect of emotional or affective empathy. In contrast, Personal Distress (PD) measures self-oriented feelings of anxiety and discomfort that arise from observing another's suffering. PD reflects a negative emotional reaction to others' distress. The final factor, Fantasy, measures the extent to which an individual imaginatively places themselves into the feelings and actions of fictional characters in books, films, or games. This factor also represents an aspect of affective empathy (Papies & Aarts, 2017).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a descriptive narrative approach to provide an in-depth and systematic portrayal of the processes and outcomes of the discussions that took place among the students who participated in this study. The main focus of this research is to interpret the qualitative responses of students from the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Department at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo toward the short stories they read. The findings were analyzed using the theoretical frameworks of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) and the Developmental Theory of Empathy. Through this descriptive narrative approach, the study presents its findings—namely, that literary fiction functions as a safe and effective "simulation tool"—in a contextual and comprehensive manner. This narrative demonstrates how short stories can train readers' minds to interpret the mental states of others in real-world situations.

Tabel 2.
Stages of Data Collection

Stages	Activities	The Expected Result
Instrument and sample preparation	The research team selected the sample by distributing questionnaires to students of the Indonesian Language and Literature Department at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. The questionnaire contained a statement confirming that the students had never read the six short stories that would be used as materials for this study.	Forming a group of students who were willing to participate as the sample of the study.
Reading the short stories	Each participant read the assigned short stories. The students were given one short story and were instructed to read it within two days. After ensuring that all participants had read the story, they joined a discussion session via Zoom facilitated by the research team.	The expected data consisted of the students' discussion results.

The analysis began with qualitative coding of all transcripts and discussion notes recorded during the Zoom sessions. Each student's statement and argument was categorized based on the IRI components to identify the types of empathic responses that emerged. After the responses were classified using the IRI, the analysis proceeded by assessing the level of empathy maturity using Hoffman's Developmental Theory of Empathy. This assessment focused on two main phases to determine whether the short stories successfully stimulated systemic understanding.

As the final step of the descriptive narrative approach, the structured findings derived from the IRI coding and the level assessment (Hoffman) were rewritten into a comprehensive narrative. This narrative provides a complete depiction of the findings from the participants' discussions and the analysis based on the IRI components and the Developmental Theory of Empathy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the explanation above, this study will show the short stories to 20 students of Indonesian Language and Literature Education Department at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo Those titles are as mentioned below

Tabel 3.
Research Sample Distributions

The Title	Writer	Summary
Clara atawa Perempuan yang Diperkosa Read on August 2nd, 2025	Seno Gumira Ajidarma	This short story portrays the suffering of a woman named Clara, a victim of sexual harassment (rape) during a riot, which results in deep trauma and difficulties in recovering.
Melukis Jendela Read on August, 5th 2025	Djaenar Maesa Ayu	Mayra is a child who faces a disharmonious family life. Her father is an egocentric writer who isolates himself in his room for work and frequently brings other women into that room. He gives Mayra neither the attention nor the affection she needs. This situation creates a profound emotional void for Mayra.
Api Sita Read on August, 8th 2025	Oka Rusmini	The story centers on Sita and the suffering she endures as a result of patriarchal Balinese cultural restrictions combined with the violence of colonial forces. Sita, positioned in a subordinate role, constantly struggles to claim her rights to her own self and body. She is oppressed by Balinese traditions and caste systems that position women as "servants" to men. At the same time, she becomes a victim of domination and abuse from foreign colonizers.
Perempuan Warung	N.H Dini	Set in the everyday life of the lower-class community, this story takes place around a small warung that serves

Read on August, 14th 2025		as a center of economic and social activity. The main character, Limah, struggles as a shopkeeper to provide for her family.
Mandi Mayah Read on August, 17th 2025	Deasy Tirayoh	This short story centers on Erna, a woman of the Bajau (Sea People) tribe, who is undergoing a post-death ritual following her husband's passing. The story uses the Mandi Mayah tradition (a ritual of self-purification using betel palm flower water to ward off misfortune) as the backdrop through which a dark secret is revealed.
Malam Pertama Calon Pendeta Read on August, 20th 2025	Gde Aryantha Soetham	The male protagonist, Aji Punarbawa, is encouraged by his extended family elders (Gria Rangkan) to become a priest (pemangku/sulinggih), an honorable and sacred role. However, a major issue arises: according to strict Balinese custom, a prospective priest must have a wife from the Brahmana caste, the highest caste. Aji's current wife, Ni Krining, is not from the Brahmana caste, and her status automatically disqualifies Aji from becoming a priest. This cultural pressure forces Ni Krining to make a heartbreaking decision: she urges her husband to marry a Brahmana woman so that the priestly dignity of the Gria (the priestly family line) can be restored. As a wife, Ni Krining is compelled to realize that despite her love and her devotion to her husband, her caste identity renders her sacrifices and role meaningless in the eyes of tradition

Disussions Result

Furthermore, the findings of this study will be presented in the narration below. This narration explains the discussions conducted by the participants who joined the Zoom session on August 5th, 2025. The session discussed Seno Gumira Ajidarma's short story "Clara Atawa, Perempuan yang Diperkosa", which portrays the misery of a woman who becomes a victim of sexual violence and suffers deep trauma. The discussion involved 20 students. From the results, the researcher noted a significant gender-based difference in responses toward the narrative. Most of the female students showed strong affective empathy. They expressed feelings of pity and were touched by Clara's suffering, reflecting the Empathic Concern (EC) component— sympathy and care toward someone else's distress. These reactions indicate that the short story successfully triggered social simulation and emotional investment in the character's fate.

Meanwhile, the male students tended to focus on cognitive aspects. Instead of responding to Clara's suffering, they mostly criticized the language style used in the short story. This focus shows that they engaged in formalistic analysis or Perspective Taking (PT) toward the writer's perspective rather than placing themselves emotionally in Clara's situation.

These findings generally support the argument that literary fiction trains the brain to interpret others' mental states, but they also show that gender influences which type of

empathic response becomes more dominant when reading narratives involving gender-specific suffering.

On August 7th, 2025, another discussion was held via Zoom. The participants discussed the short story "Melukis Jendela." The results showed that most female students perceived it as a story about childhood trauma, including sexual harassment experienced by Mayra. They also included subjective viewpoints that such harassment is often perpetrated by parents or close relatives. The female students highlighted that Mayra is portrayed as a victim of sexual violence, showing her suffering and deep psychological damage. Moreover, they empathized with Mayra's misery and the behavior of her father. In their view, the story conveys sharp criticism of patriarchy, where men act arbitrarily without considering the emotional impact on their families.

On the other hand, male students asserted that the story portrays tragic childhood trauma and family dysfunction, where psychological suffering caused by the lack of affection and the possibility of sexual harassment is expressed through an honest and painful narrative voice. This idea was agreed upon by three of the ten male students who served as samples in this study.

Nevertheless, the rest of the male students tended to avoid emotional engagement with the characters' suffering. Similar to the previous discussion, they shifted their attention to formalistic analysis by criticizing Djenar Maesa Ayu's language style, which they considered excessive in depicting women's misery. This response can be interpreted as a Personal Distress (PD) mechanism—an emotional distancing strategy—where instead of feeling Empathic Concern, they criticize the representation to reduce the emotional intensity evoked by the narrative.

The next discussion was held on August 11th, 2025 via Zoom. Regarding "Api Sita," both male and female students agreed that Sita experienced double oppression. The participants asserted that Sita was constrained by Balinese traditions and the caste system, which placed women of lower castes as "servants" to men. Additionally, Sita's suffering was intensified by being forced to serve colonizers. They also believed that the story portrayed a situation where women, including Sita and her mother, became sexual slaves (*jugun ianfu*) under the Japanese army, worsening their physical and mental states. Both male and female students agreed that Sita's mother killed a Dutch officer to defend herself.

All of the students agreed that the short story illustrates how patriarchy, upheld through customs and traditions, deprives women of autonomy in deciding their own fate including marriage or the safety of their own bodies. Another interesting finding showed that neither male nor female students displayed self-oriented responses. No one criticized the language style unlike in previous discussions, nor showed signs of personal anxiety.

Furthermore, on August 17th, 2025, a discussion on "Perempuan Warung" by N.H. Dini was held via Zoom. The story, centered on Limah—a warung seller in a lower-class community—revealed a clear polarization between male and female participants regarding Limah's workload.

The findings showed that male students tended to take a tolerant or neutral view of Limah's role. They argued that it is reasonable for women to work in a warung as a way to sustain family economic activity. This response indicates that they saw Limah's work as an

economic function separate from her identity as a woman, and accepted within the lower-class context, without explicitly addressing or criticizing the hardships involved.

Conversely, the female students showed deeper Cognitive Empathy (Perspective Taking) by asserting that Limah bears a double burden. They argued that Limah is responsible not only for economic activity but also for traditional expectations of household management and providing for her family, as reflected in the description that she "fought hard… to support her family." This perspective highlights that women struggle both in the public sphere (the warung) and in the domestic sphere, an aspect not mentioned by the male students.

On August 20th, 2025, the discussion of *"Mandi Mayah"* became more controversial. Some students from ethnic groups in Palu, Sulawesi considered Erna's action a moral and customary violation that is unacceptable. This response demonstrated Cognitive Empathy (PT) focusing on norms and social consequences of murder, rather than on Erna's suffering. They viewed the tragedy as an atrocity that damages family ties and violates sacred rituals such as Mandi Mayah. They also argued that although Laduo was at fault (fish bombing and betrayal), murder was an extreme choice that brought ruin to both Erna and the Bajau community. Some students also interpreted Erna's death (drowning) as a deserved punishment—karma—from the Sea Guardian (Mbo Ma Dilao), reinforcing the importance of moral and spiritual norms.

Nevertheless, an opposing group of students viewed Erna's action as a natural response driven by extreme desperation due to layered suffering: the death of her baby, neglect, humiliation, and Laduo's betrayal. This group refused to judge Erna solely based on the act of murder, prioritizing sympathy for the complex motivations behind her actions. They did not view Erna's death as punishment but as liberation from sorrow and the inevitable dark secret— a peaceful "return to Kaka."

The final discussion took place on August 25th, 2025 via Zoom. The results showed that some participants believed Ni Krining's insistence that her husband remarry was wrong. This viewpoint focused on Krining's individual choices, as if she had full freedom outside the oppressive customary system.

Meanwhile, another group agreed that the caste culture in Ni Krining's community is harmful. They argued that the caste system creates suffering for people who love one another. All students, regardless of gender agreed that the Balinese caste system is damaging and places an unfair burden on individuals, especially women like Ni Krining. They understood that although she loved her husband and fulfilled her responsibilities as a wife, her non-Brahmana caste identity rendered her sacrifices meaningless in the eyes of tradition, turning her into a disgrace to her husband's priestly ambitions. This agreement reinforces the effectiveness of literary fiction in presenting deep social simulations, enabling readers to feel and understand the chronic hardships and cultural pressures experienced by others.

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis and discussion of this study employ both the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) and the Developmental Theory of Empathy. In the opening stage of this section,

the study first examines the IRI, followed by Hoffman's Developmental Theory of Empathy. In the IRI analysis phase, the researcher uses short stories as "empathy simulators" to train the brain in interpreting others' mental states. The discussion results reveal variations in empathic responses, particularly the distinctions between affective responses (Empathic Concern) and cognitive responses (Perspective Taking), as well as shifts in Personal Distress (PD). The last part includes a discussion of previous studies that complement the sub-section.

The analysis shows that in the first short story, there are clear differences between male and female students. In the discussion focusing on the suffering of a sexual violence victim, female students displayed strong affective empathy, expressing pity and emotional engagement with the character Clara. Meanwhile, male students tended to adopt a cognitive stance, mainly criticizing the author's linguistic style. At this stage, Empathic Concern (EC) was found to be high. The short story triggered sympathy and concern for the character's suffering. However, this finding applies only to the female participants. Conversely, male students often responded in a self-oriented manner to emotionally distance themselves, leading their responses toward Personal Distress (PD).

In the second discussion, which centered on Mayra's trauma caused by male egoism and patriarchal culture, female students showed deep empathy toward Mayra and expressed sharp criticism of her patriarchal and domineering father. Male students, however, focused on criticizing the author's writing style, which they perceived as erotic in depicting Mayra and her father. These findings align with previous studies showing that Djenar Maesa Ayu often employs erotic, transparent, and explicit writing—not only in *Melukis Jendela* but also in her other short stories. (Marantika & Widyastuti, 2025; Widodo et al., 2022).

Based on the IRI analysis, the participants' empathy levels fell within Empathic Concern (EC) and Perspective Taking (PT). Affective sympathy (EC) was combined with critical understanding (PT), allowing participants to voice critiques of systemic injustice. Meanwhile, some students exhibited Personal Distress (PD), redirecting emotional intensity into formalistic criticism as a coping mechanism to reduce discomfort.

In the discussion of *Api Sita*, students highlighted the similar issues: double oppression (custom/caste and colonialism) and sexual enslavement. Notably, there was strong consensus between male and female students. They agreed that double oppression existed and that patriarchy rendered women powerless. Regarding empathy levels, students showed high levels of Perspective Taking (PT) and Empathic Concern (EC). They adopted the victim's complex perspective (PT) while expressing collective empathy (EC).

In the discussion of *Perempuan Warung*, the issue revolved around the economic struggles of lower-class women. Male students adopted a neutral stance, viewing the woman's work in the warung purely as an economic necessity to support her family. Female students, however, held the opposite view. They argued that the female character bore a double burden— economic and domestic.

These findings indicate different empathy levels between males and females. Among male students, Perspective Taking (PT) was partial, focusing solely on economic function while overlooking deeper hardships. In contrast, female students demonstrated deeper Perspective Taking (PT), showing strong understanding of the chronic difficulties and layered responsibilities faced by the character.

On the other hand, a discussion results in *Mandi Mayah*, male and female students debated the extreme action taken by Erna in poisoning her husband due to his betrayal and neglect. As in *Mandi Mayah*, disagreements stemmed from ethnic identity. Students from Sulawesi viewed Erna's action as an unacceptable moral and customary violation, considering the story's ending as punishment or karma. Conversely, another group of students, male and female considered Erna's action justifiable, driven by extreme despair.

Norm-based Perspective Taking (PT) characterized the students who condemned Erna's action. This form of PT focuses on normative systems and socio-cultural consequences. Meanwhile, other students demonstrated a deep level of Empathic Concern (EC), prioritizing sympathy for Erna's suffering and rejecting moral judgment.

The discussion of *Malam Pertama Calon Pendeta* showed that Ni Krining made sacrifices due to Brahmin caste pressure, giving up her marriage as her husband was pushed toward priesthood. Opinions were divided: one group argued that Ni Krining's decision to encourage her husband to remarry was misguided, while the other believed that caste culture imposes a heavy burden on individuals, including Ni Krining. This shows high levels of PT and EC, as participants were able to identify and critique systemic structures as the root of suffering.

Overall, female students more frequently demonstrated Affective Empathy (EC) sympathy and emotional resonance when faced with gender-specific narratives of suffering. Meanwhile, some male students tended to avoid emotional involvement (reducing Personal Distress/PD) by shifting toward safer cognitive analysis, such as critiquing language style.

Effective Perspective Taking (PT) was evident in several short stories, particularly *Api Sita* and *Malam Pertama Calon Pendeta*. After reading and discussing these stories, students achieved deeper PT and cross-gender consensus in criticizing patriarchy and cultural injustice.

Another pattern involves cultural conflict. Literary fiction triggered tension between Cognitive Empathy and cultural identity, as seen in *Mandi Mayah*. The former involved defending Sulawesi Tenggara customs, while the latter involved Sulawesi's moral codes and the victim's resistance.

Using the Developmental Theory of Empathy, differences in empathy emerged after reading. For example, the phase of *empathy for another's feelings* dominated reactions to *Clara atawa Perempuan yang Diperkosa*, especially among female students. They showed strong affective empathy and emotional resonance toward Clara's trauma as a victim of sexual violence.

Similar patterns appeared in *Mandi Mayah*. Students who viewed Erna's actions as understandable had also reached this phase. They refrained from moral condemnation and focused instead on her extreme despair and layered suffering which are neglect, betrayal, and the death of her baby.

In *Api Sita*, interviewees reached strong consensus: Sita experienced double oppression (tradition, caste, colonialism), and patriarchy rendered her powerless. Likewise, in *Malam Pertama Calon Pendeta*, participants agreed that caste hierarchy is a burden, especially for women.

Similar findings appeared in female students' interpretations of *Melukis Jendela* as sharp criticism of patriarchal discourse, particularly regarding men's emotional negligence

toward their families. In *Perempuan Warung*, some students also argued that the woman faced chronic systemic difficulty as a result of her double burden—public and domestic responsibilities.

Meanwhile, there was also a diversion from Personal Distress. For example, some students focused on criticizing the author's language style instead of responding to the character's suffering. This behavior represents a redirected Personal Distress (PD) mechanism. In Hoffman's framework, such a reaction becomes a barrier that prevents individuals from reaching Empathy Stages 3 or 4, because their attention shifts back to the self (self-oriented) rather than toward the character (other-oriented)

Another finding also demonstrated cultural defensiveness. In the discussion of *Mandi Mayah*, students from certain ethnic backgrounds perceived cultural pressure as an "unchangeable tradition." This stance reflects a defense of cultural identity, which limits their ability to reach Empathy Stage 4, the stage characterized by systemic and critical awareness because Erna's suffering is viewed as an integral and accepted part of the tradition.

CONCLUSION

The short stories successfully activated both major components of empathy: Affective Empathy (Empathic Concern/EC), which elicited strong sympathy and emotional resonance—particularly evident among female students when discussing Clara's suffering. At the same time, Cognitive Empathy (Perspective Taking/PT) was also achieved by students who read and engaged with the short stories. A deeper level of PT emerged when students were able to identify and critique the systemic structures underlying the characters' suffering. The clearest examples appeared in the discussions of *Api Sita* and *Malam Pertama Calon Pendeta*, where cross-gender consensus was reached in criticizing patriarchy and caste-based cultural injustice.

In addition, most participants reached an advanced level of empathy, corresponding to Hoffman's stage of *Empathy for Another's Life Condition*. Some students demonstrated a critical phase of empathy, in which they moved beyond momentary emotional reactions and directed their concern toward systemic critique of oppressive structures. This maturity of empathy was reflected in the broader consensus that the short stories depict chronic and systemic forms of suffering—such as double constraints, burdensome caste-based traditions, and the double burden experienced by women.

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