IDEAS

Journal on Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

Volume 14, Number 2, December 2026
pp. 8941 - 8950

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Issued by English study program of UIN Palopo

Internalizing Empathy Through Audiobook-Based Poetry Listening Instruction Among Indonesian Language Education Students

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Article Info

Received: 2026-10-02
Revised: 2026-10-11
Accepted: 2026-10-18

Keywords:
empathy;
poetry listening;
audio media;
literary learning;
higher education

DOI:
10.24256/ideas. v14i2.12780

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Abstract

This study examines how poetry listening instruction using YouTube-based audio media provides opportunities for empathetic engagement among 40 Indonesian Language Education students. Using a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected through classroom observation, written reflections, and interviews with eight students. The data were qualitatively analyzed by identifying and comparing students' responses across four analytical dimensions: comprehension, cognitive empathy, affective empathy, and reflective empathy. The findings indicated a response pattern moving from understanding the emotional situations represented in the poem toward perspective-taking, emotional engagement, and, for some students, personal reflection. Affective-empathy-related responses were evident when students oriented their emotional reactions toward the experiences of the figures in the poem, whereas reflective empathy varied in depth across students. Intonation, pauses, tempo, and vocal expression supported students' recognition of emotional nuances; however, emotional engagement alone was not treated as evidence of empathy. Rather than demonstrating that audio media directly internalized empathy, the findings suggest that expressive poetry listening, when combined with interpretation and reflection, can provide opportunities for perspective-taking and empathy-related reflection. The study highlights a pedagogical pathway linking literary comprehension, auditory experience, emotional engagement, perspective-taking, and reflection.

1. Introduction

Literature learning in higher education is not solely intended to develop students' ability to understand literary works; it also plays an important role in fostering sensitivity, character, and social awareness. Through literary texts, students are exposed to diverse human experiences, perspectives, and emotional situations that allow them to reflect on

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

issues related to humanity and interpersonal relationships. Poetry, in particular, has been recognized as a pedagogical medium that can encourage reflection, emotional understanding, and empathy (Joshi et al., 2022). Empathy, understood as the ability to understand and engage with the emotional experiences of others, is therefore an important competence to be cultivated in higher education.

Among various literary genres, poetry has distinctive potential for facilitating emotional engagement. Through condensed language, imagery, rhythm, and carefully selected diction, poetry represents inner experiences, emotional conflicts, and reflections on human life. Recent studies have shown that poetry-based learning can support moral reasoning, emotional self-cultivation, critical reflection, and the understanding of others' experiences (Guttesen & Kristjánsson, 2022; Creely et al., 2022). Poetry learning may therefore extend beyond textual interpretation toward the development of emotional sensitivity and perspective-taking.

One way of engaging with poetry is through listening. Listening is not simply the reception of spoken language; it involves understanding, interpreting, and constructing meaning from auditory input. In higher education, digitally supported listening activities have become increasingly relevant because students require learning media that are accessible, engaging, and appropriate to contemporary learning environments (Septyanti et al., 2023). Social-media-assisted listening materials have also been identified as useful for supporting undergraduate students' listening needs and comprehension (Ismail & Nawir, 2023).

The development of digital technology has created further opportunities to enrich literary listening experiences. Audio-based and audiovisual media allow students to encounter expressive performances involving intonation, rhythm, pauses, emphasis, and vocal interpretation. Previous studies indicate that digital and audiovisual media can support listening comprehension and create more engaging listening experiences for students (Kartika et al., 2023; Fadhilah, 2023). In the present study, poetry was presented through a YouTube-based audio poetry reading, allowing students to experience the poem primarily through auditory performance.

The pedagogical potential of poetry extends beyond linguistic comprehension. Recent research has emphasized that poetry can function as a medium for cultivating empathy, ethical reflection, and engagement with perspectives different from one's own. Joshi et al. (2022), for example, highlighted the potential of poetry to foster empathy through reflection and understanding, while Guttesen and Kristjánsson (2022) demonstrated how poetry teaching can support ethical and emotional self-cultivation. More recent classroom-based work has also suggested that poetry can encourage students to engage intellectually and affectively with diverse human experiences (Akun et al., 2023).

However, previous research has largely examined poetry as a tool for character education, empathy development, literary interpretation, or listening comprehension as separate areas. Less attention has been given to how poetry listening through digital audio media may facilitate the internalization of empathy among university students. In particular, the relationship between auditory literary experience, perspective-taking, emotional engagement, and reflective empathy remains insufficiently explored.

This study addresses this gap by integrating three dimensions: poetry listening instruction, YouTube-based audio poetry reading, and empathy internalization. Rather than treating audio merely as a medium for delivering literary texts, this study examines how auditory features and reflective learning activities contribute to students' understanding of emotional experiences, perspective-taking, affective engagement, and reflection.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine how poetry listening instruction using YouTube-based audio media is implemented among Indonesian Language Education students, how empathy is internalized through the listening experience, and how students respond to the use of audio media in poetry learning. The study is expected to contribute to the development of more humanistic, reflective, and digitally supported approaches to literature learning in higher education.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to provide an in-depth description of poetry listening instruction using audio media and the process through which empathy was internalized among students. A qualitative descriptive design is appropriate when a study seeks to remain close to participants' experiences and provide a comprehensive account of a phenomenon without imposing highly abstract interpretation (Villamin et al., 2025). The qualitative approach was selected because the present study focused on students' experiences, responses, and interactions during the learning process.

The study involved 40 Indonesian Language Education students. The learning activity used a YouTube-based audio reading of Sapardi Djoko Damono's poem *Pertemuan* as the primary listening material.

The research was conducted in several stages. The first stage involved preparation, including a review of relevant literature on literary learning, listening skills, the use of audio media in instruction, and empathy in education. A needs analysis was also conducted to identify the conditions of poetry listening instruction and the potential use of audio media in the learning process.

The second stage involved designing the poetry listening activity. The instructional design was developed to enable students to listen to poetry through expressive audio delivery involving intonation, rhythm, and appropriate interpretation. The activity was intended to help students not only understand the poem cognitively but also engage with the emotional experiences represented in the poem.

The third stage was the implementation of the learning activity. Students participated in poetry listening, discussion of the poem's meaning, and reflection on their listening experience. During this process, observations were conducted to identify students' responses, engagement, and indications of empathy emerging throughout the activity.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Using multiple qualitative data sources can provide complementary perspectives and support triangulation across observations, interviews, and documents (Klingebiel et al., 2024). Observation was used to examine the learning process and students' interactions during the poetry listening activity. Interviews were conducted to explore students' experiences of using audio media and their interpretations of the values represented in the poem.

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

Documentation was used to complement the data through learning records, audio materials, and students' written reflections.

The data were analyzed qualitatively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. These procedures allow qualitative data to be organized, condensed, displayed, and interpreted systematically in order to identify meaningful patterns (Monaro et al., 2022). The analysis focused on identifying recurring patterns in the learning process and describing how empathy emerged and developed during the poetry listening activity.

3. Result

Implementation of Poetry Listening Instruction

The study involved 40 Indonesian Language Education students who participated in a poetry listening activity using a YouTube-based audio reading of Sapardi Djoko Damono's *Pertemuan*. Students listened to the poem while attending to its content, atmosphere, intonation, pauses, and vocal expression. Observation showed that students were generally attentive during the activity and were able to recognize differences in the emotional atmosphere conveyed through the reading.

After listening, students identified the emotional experiences represented by the female and male figures in the poem, responded to the feelings conveyed, connected the poem with everyday experiences, and completed written empathy reflections. The learning process can therefore be summarized as listening, understanding, emotional engagement, connecting, and reflecting.

Empathy Internalization

Analysis of students' written reflections revealed four interconnected stages of empathy development: comprehension, cognitive empathy, affective empathy, and reflective empathy.

Table 1. Patterns of Empathy Internalization

Dimension	Main Indicators	Findings
Comprehension	Understanding the situation and meaning of the poem	Students generally recognized the contrasting emotional experiences of the female and male figures
Cognitive empathy	Understanding others' emotions and perspectives	Students attempted to explain the emotional conditions and motivations of the figures
Affective empathy	Emotional involvement with others' experiences	This was the most prominent pattern; students reported feeling sadness, longing, and emotional tension
Reflective empathy	Connecting the poem with personal or social experiences	Students showed varying levels of reflection; some developed deeper personal and social interpretations

Affective empathy emerged as the strongest pattern. Students did not merely recognize emotions in the poem but also reported emotional involvement with the experiences represented.

Reflective empathy showed greater variation. Some students connected the poem with personal experiences and reconsidered how they understood others, whereas others remained primarily at the levels of comprehension and emotional engagement.

Interview Findings

Eight students, coded M1–M8, were used to represent different patterns of response in the interview data. The coding revealed themes related to cognitive empathy, affective empathy, reflective empathy, perspective change, and the role of audio media.

Table 2. Coding of Student Interviews

Code	Focus of Response	Initial Coding	Theme
M1	Understanding the woman's sadness	Understanding emotional condition	Cognitive empathy
M2	Feeling sadness while listening	Emotional engagement	Affective empathy
M3	Relating the poem to personal experience	Personal connection	Reflective empathy
M4	Viewing the male figure from another perspective	Perspective-taking	Cognitive empathy
M5	Experiencing emotion through intonation	Emotional resonance	Affective empathy
M6	Becoming more careful in judging others	Perspective change	Empathy internalization
M7	Recognizing the role of voice in understanding mood	Intonation and pauses	Role of audio media
M8	Comparing silent reading and listening	Auditory experience	Response to audio media

The interview findings indicate that students were able to understand the emotional conditions of the figures, emotionally engage with the poem, relate its experiences to real-life situations, and reconsider their perspectives toward others.

Students' Responses to YouTube-Based Audio Poetry Reading

Students' responses to the audio medium could be grouped into cognitive, affective, and reflective dimensions.

Table 3. Students' Responses to the Audio Medium

Response Dimension	Main Response
Cognitive	Audio delivery helped students understand the content and emotional atmosphere of the poem
Affective	Intonation, pauses, and vocal expression strengthened emotional engagement
Reflective	The listening experience encouraged students to connect the poem with personal and social experiences

These findings indicate that the YouTube-based audio poetry reading functioned not merely as a medium for delivering the text but as a facilitator of students' interpretive and emotional engagement.

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

Synthesis of Findings

The overall findings reveal a gradual process of empathy internalization:

YouTube-based audio poetry reading → understanding the poem → perspective-taking → emotional engagement → connection with life experiences → reflection → perspective change.

This pattern suggests that empathy internalization developed progressively rather than occurring as an immediate response. Affective empathy appeared most prominently, while reflective empathy showed greater variation in depth across students.

4. Discussion

The findings suggest that poetry listening through YouTube-based audio media can create a reflective literary learning experience in which students move beyond textual comprehension toward emotional engagement, perspective-taking, and personal reflection. In this study, listening to Sapardi Djoko Damono's *Pertemuan* directed students' attention not only to the semantic content of the poem but also to its emotional atmosphere, vocal expression, and the contrasting experiences represented by the female and male figures. This interpretation is consistent with recent studies suggesting that poetry can provide opportunities for learners to engage with human experiences, emotions, and perspectives beyond literal textual meaning (Joshi et al., 2022; Smith, 2023).

However, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that empathy developed progressively over time. Because the study did not employ longitudinal measurement, what can be identified more defensibly is a pattern or sequence of responses associated with empathy-related processes. Students' responses moved from understanding the emotional situations represented in the poem toward perspective-taking, emotional engagement, and, in some cases, deeper reflection. Contemporary empathy research distinguishes cognitive empathy, which involves understanding or taking another person's perspective, from affective empathy, which involves responding emotionally to another person's experience (Fink & de Rosnay, 2023; Samuels & Onuoha-Jackson, 2023). The present findings therefore indicate opportunities for students to engage with these processes rather than definitive evidence that empathy was internalized.

Cognitive empathy was reflected in students' attempts to understand the emotional conditions and possible motivations of the figures in the poem. Students did not merely identify sadness or emotional distance; they also attempted to interpret why such emotions or behaviors might occur. This perspective-taking process is important because it shifts attention from judging a character's actions toward considering the experiences that may underlie those actions. Perspective-taking has been identified as an important process in empathetic understanding because it encourages individuals to consider situations from another person's point of view (Stavroulia & Lanitis, 2023). In literary learning, this process may be further supported through discussion, writing, and reflection (Smith, 2023).

The affective responses identified in this study also require careful interpretation. Students frequently reported emotional involvement with the poem, particularly in relation to images associated with sadness, longing, distance, rain, and reunion. However, emotional involvement alone should not be treated as equivalent to empathy. Feeling sadness in response to a literary text may indicate affective engagement, but empathy

requires a clearer orientation toward understanding or responding to another person's emotional experience. Therefore, the affective responses found in this study are better interpreted as providing a possible basis for empathetic engagement rather than as direct evidence of empathy internalization. Poetry has been described as a pedagogical medium that can support emotional exploration and reflection, but such engagement does not automatically result in empathic understanding (Joshi et al., 2022).

The role of the audio medium was particularly visible in students' responses to intonation, pauses, tempo, and vocal expression. These auditory features appeared to help students recognize shifts in mood and emotional emphasis. Recent research on oral literary reading shows that voiced reading can draw greater attention to prosodic and emotive features of literary texts (Kristiansen et al., 2024). Prosody, including intonation, timing, pitch, and vocal intensity, also contributes to listeners' interpretation of emotional meaning in spoken language (Sáez, 2025). More specifically, recent evidence on poetry recitation indicates that prosodic features can influence listeners' emotional judgments (Li et al., 2026). Nevertheless, the present findings do not support the conclusion that audio itself produced empathy. Rather, expressive audio appears to have functioned as one component within a broader instructional design.

This distinction is important because the observed responses may have been shaped not only by the audio medium but also by the sequence of instructional activities surrounding it. The learning design included listening, interpretation, discussion, and written reflection. Therefore, the pedagogical mechanism may be better represented as:

listening → understanding → perspective-taking → emotional engagement → reflection

rather than as a direct effect of YouTube-based audio on empathy. The audio may have supported attention to emotional nuance, while discussion and reflection provided opportunities for students to interpret those emotions, consider other perspectives, and connect the literary experience with their own lives.

The role of reflection is especially important in explaining the variation found among students. Some students were able to move beyond emotional response and relate the poem to personal or social experiences, whereas others remained primarily at the levels of comprehension and emotional engagement. This variation suggests that affective engagement may be easier to evoke than deeper reflective transformation. Reflective empathy appears to require additional cognitive and interpretive work, including reconsidering assumptions, connecting literary situations with lived experiences, and reflecting on one's own attitudes toward others. Literary empathy is more likely to be supported when engagement with texts is accompanied by structured opportunities for discussion, writing, interpretation, and reflection (Smith, 2023).

The findings also highlight the possible role of the lecturer in shaping students' responses. Questions, interpretive prompts, classroom discussion, and reflection tasks may have influenced the ways students understood the emotional experiences represented in the poem. Therefore, the learning outcomes should not be attributed solely to the media. Teacher mediation may have been an important part of the instructional process, particularly in guiding students from initial emotional reactions toward perspective-taking and reflective interpretation.

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

Another issue that needs to be considered is the use of self-reported emotional responses. Students may express empathy-related responses because they perceive such responses as socially or academically expected in a literature-learning context. This possibility of social desirability means that self-reported feelings should be interpreted cautiously. For this reason, the use of multiple data sources, observation, interviews, and written reflections, was important for comparing students' reported responses with other forms of evidence. Even so, triangulation does not eliminate this limitation entirely.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that expressive poetry listening may be most useful when combined with structured post-listening activities. Guided perspective-taking questions, reflective journals, peer discussion, alternative interpretations of characters, personal-response writing, and follow-up activities that connect literary situations with real-life relationships may help students move beyond emotional reaction toward deeper reflection. In this sense, the instructional design surrounding the audio may be more important than the audio medium itself.

The contribution of this study therefore lies not in demonstrating that listening to one poem results in the internalization of empathy, but in identifying a pedagogical pathway toward empathetic engagement. The sequence of comprehension, perspective-taking, emotional engagement, and reflection provides a useful framework for understanding how literature learning can create opportunities for students to engage with experiences and perspectives different from their own.

At the same time, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study involved only one poem and one instructional context, which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized. The interview analysis involved a relatively small subsample of participants, and part of the evidence relied on students' self-reported responses. The study also did not include longitudinal data, making it impossible to determine whether the identified response patterns reflected lasting change over time. In addition, the qualitative design does not allow causal conclusions regarding the effect of YouTube-based audio on empathy. Future studies could therefore involve multiple literary texts, larger and more diverse participant groups, repeated instructional sessions, and longitudinal designs to examine whether empathy-related responses are sustained or transformed over time.

Overall, the findings suggest that YouTube-based audio poetry reading, when integrated with interpretation, discussion, and reflective activities, can provide opportunities for students to engage in processes associated with empathy. Its pedagogical value lies not in the medium alone, but in the interaction between expressive listening, guided interpretation, perspective-taking, emotional engagement, and reflection. This provides a basis for designing literature learning that integrates linguistic, aesthetic, emotional, and reflective dimensions while avoiding overly strong claims about empathy internalization.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that poetry listening instruction using YouTube-based audio media can facilitate the internalization of empathy among Indonesian Language Education students. The findings show that empathy developed progressively through comprehension, cognitive empathy, affective empathy, and reflective empathy. Students first interpreted the emotional situations represented in the poem, then engaged in

perspective-taking, experienced emotional involvement, and, in some cases, connected the literary experience with their own lives and perspectives.

Affective empathy emerged as the most prominent dimension, while reflective empathy showed greater variation among students. The use of intonation, pauses, tempo, and vocal expression in the audio reading supported students in recognizing emotional nuances and engaging more deeply with the poem. These findings indicate that the pedagogical value of audio-based poetry learning lies not merely in the use of digital media, but in its integration with interpretation and reflective activities.

Overall, the study suggests that poetry listening can be developed as a more humanistic and reflective form of literature learning in higher education. By combining literary comprehension, emotional engagement, perspective-taking, and reflection, this approach provides opportunities for students to understand and respond to human experiences from different perspectives.

6. Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Rector of Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, the Institute for Research and Community Service of Universitas Negeri Gorontalo (UNG), and the Faculty of Letters and Culture, particularly the Department of Indonesian Language and Literature, for their support in the implementation of this activity under Contract No. 989/UN47.DI/PT.01.03/2026 and Decree No. 847/UN47/HK.02/2026. The authors would also like to thank the third-semester students of the Department of Indonesian Language and Literature for their cooperation and active participation throughout the activity.

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ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

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