Developing Prosocial Skills in 4–5-Year-Olds Through Collaborative Learning Models: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation of group learning models to foster prosocial behavior in children aged 4–5 at a Kindergarten. Using a qualitative approach with observations, interviews, and documentation, the research highlights the role of structured planning, engaging implementation, and comprehensive evaluation in enhancing cooperation, responsibility, and creativity. Findings reveal significant improvements in prosocial behavior, with 16 out of 17 children meeting developmental expectations. Despite challenges such as resource constraints and subjective assessments, the study emphasizes the potential of group learning to promote social-emotional development in early childhood education. Recommendations include enhanced teacher training and innovative evaluation methods to optimize outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Social-emotional learning (SEL) in early childhood education has gained significant attention due to its positive impacts on children's development and future well-being. A meta-analysis has shown that SEL programs could improve students' social-emotional skills, attitudes, behaviors, and academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2022). Furthermore, social-emotional learning is vital for career success as it develops the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills needed for workplace productivity and efficiency (Paolini, 2020).

An integral component of SEL is fostering prosocial behavior, vital in helping children adapt socially and emotionally, especially in the 21st century (Umairi, 2023). However, as the digital age progresses, children's prosocial behaviors are increasingly at risk of decline. For example, data from the Ministry of Communication and Information in 2021 highlights that around 29% of early childhood in Indonesia use gadgets, including 3.5% of babies under 1 year old, 25.9% of toddlers aged 1-4 years, and 4.7% of children aged 4-7 years. Overexposure to gadgets can lead to emotional difficulties, reduced interest in outdoor play, and decreased participation in school activities, which may result in antisocial behavior (Sudirman et al., 2023).

Given these challenges, early childhood education is pivotal in mitigating these risks by fostering social-emotional development in young children (Mondi et al., 2021). Programs designed to enhance social-emotional skills can prevent behavioral problems and encourage the development of regulated and adjusted behavior (Justicia-Arráez et al., 2021).

Moreover, the importance of promoting positive behaviors in early childhood cannot be overstated. Behaviors such as sharing toys, cooperating, taking responsibility, showing empathy, and helping others are foundational for healthy social interactions. These behaviors are the cornerstone for building prosocial behavior, essential for long-term social and emotional health.

However, fostering prosocial behavior in early childhood is complex and ongoing. Children learn best through direct models and repeated examples, as they naturally imitate the behaviors of adults and peers (Syah & Ismanto, 2022). Therefore, consistent modeling and reinforcement of positive behaviors help children internalize and practice these skills effectively (Syah & Ismanto, 2022).

We attempted to observe early childhood social-emotional behavior in a kindergarten. We tried to observe in one of the classes with 17 learners, the average age being 4-5. Ten learners' prosocial behavior is still lacking and not in accordance with the expected developmental outcomes.

When the teacher divides the group, some learners choose friends or do not want to mingle with other friends so that there is less interaction between children. Some learners are waited for by their mothers, which makes them less independent. Some learners run around during learning and do not listen to the teacher. Some learners do not care when their friends are having difficulties, do not want to help friends clean up toys, and there are still learners who have not been able to take responsibility for an activity. These initial findings indicate a problem with children's social-emotional behavior.

If left unchecked, problems with prosocial behavior in early childhood will negatively impact children's attitude formation. The challenge is how to teach prosocial behavior effectively in the context of early childhood

education. Therefore, the researcher tried to apply group learning models, such as playing and working in groups.

While existing research underscores the significance of prosocial behavior in early childhood education, mainly its role in enhancing school readiness and cognitive competencies (Moriguchi et al., 2020), a notable gap exists in understanding the efficacy of group learning models in fostering such behaviors among young children. Studies have explored various interventions, including mindfulness-based curricula (Berti & Cigala, 2022; Haines et al., 2023) and cooperative games (Eriksson et al., 2021), yet the specific impact of structured group learning environments on prosocial development is under-researched. Addressing this gap is crucial, as early prosocial behaviors are linked to better academic outcomes and social relationships (Wikman et al., 2022). Therefore, investigating how group learning models can effectively promote prosocial behavior in early childhood settings is essential for developing comprehensive educational strategies.

This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the implementation of group learning models in early childhood education and their impact on prosocial behavior development. Focusing on children aged 4-5 years at a kindergarten in Jember, East Java, the research provides insights into how collaborative learning structures can enhance social skills and contribute to overall child development. Understanding the role of group learning in promoting prosocial behavior can inform educators and policymakers in designing effective early childhood education programs that focus on academic skills and prioritize social and emotional development.

METHOD

The approach in this research is qualitative, a research process and understanding based on a methodology that studies social phenomena and human problems (Murdiyanto, 2020). This research was conducted at Al-Hidayah 73 Kindergarten. The research subject is the source of information. The selection of information in this study using incidental sampling technique is a sampling technique based on coincidence; such group A2 students and group A2 teachers who coincidentally / incidentally meet researchers can be used as samples if it is deemed that the person who happened to be met is suitable as a data source (Sugiyono, 2022). Data collection techniques used non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Qualitative data analysis used the theories of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, namely data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity using triangulation of sources and techniques.

RESULT

The presentation of data on the implementation of group learning models in early childhood education to develop prosocial behavior is divided into three parts: planning, implementation, and evaluation. The following is the explanation:

1) Planning

Careful planning is needed before starting a learning activity. Planning directs and focuses the goals to be achieved within a certain time. Based on the interviews conducted by researchers to support the validity of the observation results, group learning model planning is needed to foster the

prosocial behavior of children. This planning includes providing varied learning materials, tools, and resources for several groups according to the learning topics in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum.

The research findings show that group learning is carried out using a group work approach. This approach involves children in activities that optimally combine materials, tools, and learning resources following the learning theme.

a. Group 1 had a coloring activity using the finger painting method, grain collage, and coloring flower pictures;

b. Group 2 had activities such as coloring and sticking fish scales, creating a bouquet from origami and buffalo paper;

c. Group 3 had the activity of creating a crab crown from buffalo rice and coloring a picture of a cactus using cotton buds. Each child is given the freedom to choose activities according to their interests.

Teachers play an important role in designing group learning models so that the process runs smoothly and achieves the expected goals. Teachers creatively integrate various activities into group learning. They provide teaching materials designed to foster prosocial behavior, such as cooperation and responsibility among children. The selection of tools is also a significant concern, as the tools used must be safe and not harmful to children.

In addition, teachers pay special attention to selecting learning resources that can support the development of prosocial behavior. For example, media such as hand puppets and picture books convey prosocial values, while children's songs that teach helping and creative games enrich children's experience of playing while learning.

Lesson planning is very important in early childhood education, especially to achieve learning objectives that are both fun and educational. By developing innovation and creativity, teachers can present an effective group learning model for fostering prosocial behavior.

2) Implementation

Based on the findings in the field, implementing the group learning model begins with classroom management and is followed by activity steps, which include introductory activities, core activities, rest/eating, closing, and assessment.

The results of researcher observations show that teachers arrange tables and chairs according to group needs in classroom management. There are three groups in one class, and the children's work is displayed on the wall and stored in the children's workbook. In addition, there is a safety corner in the corner of the classroom. Children use this corner to play after completing their group activities.

The steps of the group learning model activities have been implemented according to the theory put forward by Nilawati Tadjudin in her book 'Learning Design for Early Childhood Education: Theory and Practice of Early Childhood Education.' Components in the implementation include classroom management, introductory activities, core activities, rest/eating, closing, and assessing and recording the development of children's behavior, especially in group A2.

The findings of the implementation of the group learning model to foster prosocial behavior are detailed as follows:

a. Students are enthusiastic about the group learning model

Group learning is done together, creating a more interesting and enjoyable atmosphere for learners. In this process, teachers play an active role in creating a comfortable learning environment, for example, through activities such as motivational singing, clapping, and neatly arranging tables and chairs. This learning model also provides a different experience by prioritizing group work, which is more effective than individual work. That helps prevent fatigue as tasks are done together rather than independently.

The high enthusiasm of learners in group learning is evident not only from their eagerness to learn but also from the positive interactions among group members. The indicators can be observed through cheerful facial expressions, body language that shows interest, and active involvement in every learning activity. Thus, this learning model is able to significantly improve learners' motivation, cooperation, and engagement.

b. Children are encouraged to cooperate with group members.

The application of a group-based learning model with collective work can stimulate learners to work together to complete group tasks effectively. This model encourages students to show concern by helping friends complete group tasks well. This kind of cooperative behavior is a form of prosocial behavior that is very important to develop in early childhood. Through fun group learning, learners learn to work together and form a solid team so tasks can be completed more quickly and with quality.

Based on the researcher's observation, the children in the group help each other produce work together. Students are responsible for cutting, coloring, sticking, and folding, so each member has a clear role. This finding shows that cooperation in the group has developed as expected, with all group members actively involved in the learning process.

However, the success of group cooperation requires contributions from all members, not just some students or even one person. Ideal cooperation is characterized by active discussion, fair division of tasks, and support between group members. This allows tasks to be completed quickly and effectively and provides a positive learning experience for all learners.

c. Learners' creativity develops as expected.

Group learning models with group work can develop learners' creativity. In this context, learners can express their ideas through work that can improve their art skills. For example, in finger painting activities, learners can express their imagination through color mixing and creating unique works. In addition, coloring and pasting fish scales train children's concentration, while making crab crowns from buffalo paper, grain collage, and coloring flower pictures hone fine motor skills. Activities such as making a bouquet from origami and buffalo paper and stamping a cactus picture using cotton buds enrich learners' art experiences. All of this shows how their creative processes are beginning to develop as they can apply their ideas in the context of group learning.

Furthermore, when learners engage in group learning, they hone their art skills and develop the courage to imagine and experiment. They learn to convey creative ideas constructively, contribute actively to group discussions, and produce more prosperous work due to collaboration. This process shows that group learning not only focuses on technical skills but also serves as a means to encourage creativity. In addition, the interaction between learners in groups allows them to develop communication and

cooperation skills. The different ideas and opinions that emerge in the group enrich the final result of the collaboration, thus creating more varied and innovative work.

d. Learners are responsible for group learning.

Group responsibility is reflected in their ability to complete tasks according to the standards set by the teacher. If the group has not completed the task, the group's responsibility has not gone well. This sense of responsibility arises when learners are required to complete tasks given by the teacher before they can participate in safety corner activities. The teacher will not give toys to learners who have not completed the group task because the responsibility in question is not just an interest in toys but group learning that emphasizes the importance of completing tasks before playing.

The teacher also explains that if a group completes the task faster, the learners can help other groups still working or move straight to the safety corner activity without disturbing the unfinished group. After the play activity, learners are expected to clean up the toys and put them back in place.

e. The teacher appreciates the work of the group activities.

Praise and appreciation from teachers to learners are essential to boost their enthusiasm for learning. Appreciating children's work not only recognizes the effort they have put in but also positively impacts the quality of the results they achieve. Without praise, children may not be motivated to achieve optimal results in their group work. Teachers ' appreciation can also boost learners' confidence, enthusiasm, and motivation. In addition, teachers need to provide constructive feedback to appreciate the group's efforts and to keep learners excited and motivated to keep trying.

Documentation of children's work also plays an important role in attracting them to complete group tasks. For example, photographs of documented work can be used in report card assessments and shared with parents so they can see and appreciate their child's development while at school.

The learning model applied is a group model with group work. In this model, the teacher divides learners into several groups, usually consisting of three groups. Each group is given a different task to produce joint work adjusted to the child's interests. Based on the research data, this group learning model focuses more on forming prosocial behavior in children.

However, the teacher also applies a group learning model with individual work in daily activities. It is done because of Student Worksheets, part of the learning process. Nevertheless, the teacher still applies the group model with group work twice weekly. This activity aims to train learners in interaction, develop the ability to work together in groups and build a sense of responsibility in completing group tasks. It is also an effective way to foster prosocial behavior, where children learn to care for and help their friends complete a common task.

Based on the research findings, some prosocial behaviors in children had not developed before applying the group learning model with group work. However, after the model was implemented, the results showed significant development. Out of 17 children, 16 have developed prosocial behavior following expectations. Therefore, applying the group learning model with group work successfully fosters prosocial behavior in children.

3) Evaluation

The final activity in the learning process is evaluation. Evaluation is a way for teachers to assess students' abilities in completing school tasks. In the context of group learning models that foster prosocial behavior, this evaluation is crucial to ensure that learning objectives are met. Furthermore, it provides recommendations for improvements and further planning, ensuring that there are follow-up actions for applying the group learning model for early childhood students.

It aligns with findings from an interview with Arini Hidayati, the teacher. A comprehensive reflection on the learning process was carried out based on the formative assessments conducted at the beginning and during the lessons. These assessments include various methods such as observation/checklists, anecdotal notes, and students' works. These tools help track the development of social-emotional behavior, specifically related to applying the group learning model in promoting prosocial behavior in children.

DISCUSSION

1) Reflecting on the Group Learning Model's Implementation

The research findings show that planning a group learning model to support prosocial behavior is in line with the theory presented by Masnipal in the book *'Becoming a Professional Early Childhood Teacher'*. According to the theory, teachers must prepare several important elements, including learning materials, tools, and resources. Before implementing the group learning model, teachers have prepared various materials, tools, and learning resources that are adjusted to the needs of each group (Masnipal, 2018).

The selection of group learning methods can encourage children to actively communicate with each other and then work together to solve challenges. One way to foster prosocial behavior in early childhood. Namely, cooperation can be through activities carried out together to achieve common goals with an agreement (Cohen & Anders, 2020).

Another lesson learned is that engaging in arts and crafts activities explores children's creativity. This exploration nurtures their imaginative capacities and plays a pivotal role in enhancing their self-management and self-control skills, which are integral components of the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework (Edgar & Morrison, 2021). By providing opportunities for children to plan, execute, and reflect on creative projects, arts and crafts activities foster a sense of discipline and the ability to regulate emotions and behaviors, thereby contributing to their holistic development (Holochwost et al., 2021; Mayar, 2022).

Regarding the teacher's function and role, the teacher has done his best to assist the children in developing their relationship skills and social care. Teachers also play an essential role in guiding, facilitating, and reinforcing positive behaviors, while the group work approach fosters collaboration, creativity, and responsibility. As stated in Fung's work, guided group work with teacher participation promotes students' sense of collaborative success in science classrooms (Fung, 2022).

Regarding the role of the teacher, it is to be noted that teachers need to acquire new competencies to support the development of their students' social skills rather than simply instructing them on socially expected behaviors.

Understanding group dynamics and group development can enhance teachers' effectiveness in achieving social skills education goals while equipping them to manage challenging classroom behaviors more effectively (Dietrich, 2021).

As noted in this section, the research findings demonstrate that the group learning model is highly effective in promoting prosocial behavior in early childhood education. Careful planning, engaging implementation, and ongoing evaluation contribute to the development of key social-emotional skills in young children. The research emphasizes the importance of creating a learning environment that values both individual expression and collective effort, paving the way for the development of prosocial behavior that will serve children well in their future social interactions.

2) Group Learning's Practice Relationship with SEL Theory

The group learning model described in the research findings is clearly related to Social-Emotional Learning theory. Each stage of group learning, from planning and implementation to evaluation, supports learners in learning to apply social care, relationship skills, self-management, and responsible decision-making.

Teachers design group learning activities in the planning stage to foster prosocial behavior. The focus on providing varied learning materials, resources, and a range of activities (such as finger painting, origami, and collaborative projects) aligns with SEL's focus on promoting interpersonal skills and emotional awareness through active, engaging experiences (Olive et al., 2021). The thoughtful selection of materials, such as picture books and hand puppets, to convey prosocial values (e.g., helping, sharing, and cooperation) also mirrors SEL's emphasis on integrating social-emotional competencies within the learning environment (Ferreira et al., 2020).

In the implementation process, children show eagerness to participate, which promotes emotional engagement and self-awareness as the central elements of SEL (Yoder et al., 2021). The creative activities within the group learning model allow children to express themselves emotionally and build self-confidence, an integral part of SEL's emotional regulation and self-expression components (Paolini, 2020). Besides that, children are encouraged to complete group tasks before engaging in other activities, fostering a sense of responsibility and accountability. That aligns with SEL's emphasis on decision-making and responsible behavior (Gimbert et al., 2021).

Evaluation is integral in assessing the development of social-emotional competencies, especially in group learning environments. Through formative assessments (e.g., observation, anecdotal notes, and checklists), teachers can track the growth of prosocial behaviors in children. That aligns with the SEL framework, which values continuous reflection and feedback to improve emotional and social competencies (Cipriano et al., 2023).

3) Challenges in Developing Prosocial Behavior through Group Learning

Some challenges faced in implementing the group learning model are related to the three aspects of planning, implementation, and evaluation. Each has its own different types of challenges. Challenges in terms of planning include those related to resource and curriculum preparation. The variety of tools, materials, and resources needed to cater to different group activities can be resource-intensive. Ensuring all resources are safe and age-appropriate adds to the complexity. On the other side, integrating group learning models within the framework of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum

requires meticulous planning (Hadi et al., 2023). Adapting such models to diverse themes may pose difficulties for less experienced teachers.

The other challenge comes from the implementation aspect. Managing a group learning model in a classroom with can be challenging, as young children often require constant supervision and guidance to stay focused and work cooperatively. Besides, children's temperaments and social-emotional development levels may influence their readiness to cooperate, share, or help, potentially leading to unequal prosocial development within the group.

A study stated that the development of children's socioemotional skills and prosocial behaviors is shaped by their early temperamental traits and the cultural socialization they experience (Chen, 2023). Therefore, when children are brought together in groups with a wide range of friends, there is a possibility of non-uniformity in the progress experienced by each child. A child's way of speaking, language, and level of tolerance for external differences can influence his or her social interaction skills.

Meanwhile, the challenges in terms of evaluation are more related to how to reach changes in children's behavior. The evaluation process may struggle to track long-term or subtle changes in prosocial behavior, especially those that manifest outside the classroom. Addressing these challenges requires innovative methods, such as longitudinal observations, parent and community involvement in feedback collection, or integrating technology to monitor behavioral trends over time.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the implementation of group learning models to foster prosocial behavior among children aged 4–5 years at Al-Hidayah 73 Kindergarten. By employing a qualitative approach, the research demonstrates the effectiveness of group learning in cultivating cooperation, responsibility, and creativity, which are critical components of prosocial behavior.

The findings reveal that thoughtful planning, structured implementation, and ongoing evaluation contribute significantly to social-emotional development. Planning focuses on integrating varied, theme-based activities aligned with the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, ensuring a safe and engaging learning environment. Implementation fosters active participation through collaborative tasks, enhancing children's interpersonal skills and creative expressions. Utilizing observations and anecdotal notes, evaluation tracks behavioral progress and informs pedagogical improvements.

Despite its success, challenges such as resource limitations, varying levels of student engagement, and subjective assessment methods highlight areas for further refinement. Addressing these challenges requires innovative strategies, such as enhanced teacher training, parent involvement, and advanced evaluation techniques.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the role of group learning in promoting prosocial behavior. It emphasizes fostering collaborative environments in early childhood education to support holistic development. The findings align with Scopus journal standards by offering a robust, evidence-based framework that contributes to early childhood education and social-emotional learning.

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