



The Impact of Role-Playing on Shaping Children's Prosocial Behavior

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Abstract

This study aims to systematically review interdisciplinary literature on the role of social simulation through role play in shaping prosocial behavior in children. The method used is a systematic literature review, focusing on articles published in SINTA-indexed, Scopus, and Google Scholar journals over the last ten years. The inclusion criteria comprised empirical and literature studies discussing the relationship between role play, social simulation, and prosocial behavior in children. Findings indicate that active participation in role-playing enhances prosocial behaviors such as helping, sharing, and empathy, which are influenced by activity design, teacher support, and family involvement. The integration of role-playing into character education curricula is highly recommended for developing prosocial behaviors from an early age. This study provides theoretical contributions to developmental psychology and educational science, as well as practical recommendations for educators in designing effective learning strategies for character building.

Kata Kunci

Bermain Peran;
Pembentukan;
Perilaku Prosocial
Anak-anak

Abstrak

Studi ini bertujuan untuk melakukan tinjauan sistematis terhadap literatur interdisipliner mengenai peran simulasi sosial melalui peran dalam membentuk perilaku prosocial pada anak-anak. Metode yang digunakan adalah tinjauan literatur sistematis, dengan fokus pada artikel yang diterbitkan di jurnal yang terindeks SINTA, Scopus, dan Google Scholar selama sepuluh tahun terakhir. Kriteria inklusi mencakup studi empiris dan literatur yang membahas hubungan antara peran bermain, simulasi sosial, dan perilaku prosocial pada anak-anak. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa partisipasi aktif dalam peran bermain meningkatkan perilaku prosocial seperti membantu, berbagi, dan empati, yang dipengaruhi oleh desain aktivitas, dukungan guru, dan keterlibatan keluarga. Integrasi permainan peran dalam kurikulum pendidikan karakter sangat dianjurkan untuk mengembangkan perilaku prosocial sejak dini. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis bagi psikologi perkembangan dan ilmu pendidikan, serta rekomendasi praktis bagi pendidik dalam merancang strategi pembelajaran efektif untuk pembentukan karakter.

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INTRODUCTION

Prosocial behavior is an important aspect of children's social development that influences their ability to interact, cooperate, and build harmonious relationships within the community (Sulastrri, 2020). However, many phenomena are occurring in various educational settings today, notably a decline in prosocial behavior, such as helping, sharing, and empathizing. This is evident from the increasing number of conflicts among peers, low levels of sharing in group activities, and the emergence of individualistic attitudes that are becoming more pronounced in this era, which tends to be individualistic and competitive (Fitriyani & Rahmawati, 2021). Nonetheless, prosocial behaviors such as helping, sharing, and empathy are essential for children to adapt and be accepted in their environment (Wijayanti & Katoningsih, 2022). This situation is further exacerbated by a social environment lacking character education in both school and family settings, making the instillation of prosocial values a significant challenge.

One widely used approach to foster prosocial behavior is social simulation through role-playing methods. Role-playing provides children with the opportunity to understand various social situations, develop empathy, and learn to interact and collaborate with peers in a fun environment (Nurani, 2020). Previous studies have shown that children's active involvement in role-playing significantly improves prosocial behaviors, such as helping, sharing, and respecting differences (Fitriyani, 2021; Sulastrri, 2022). Additionally, this method can strengthen social skills and build character in children from an early age (Mayangsari et al., 2017).

Role-playing is a practical approach to developing prosocial behavior in children, such as helping, sharing, and empathy. In role-playing, children can act out various social situations, allowing them to understand other people's perspectives and learn about positive interactions. This activity not only hones social skills but also helps children internalize values such as cooperation and caring for others (Berk, 2013; Ziv & Sorongon, 2019).

According to Berk (2013), role-playing allows children to explore various social dynamics, which are important in the development of empathy and prosocial behavior. In this context, children learn to identify others' feelings and express themselves positively in social contexts. This activity helps children develop the skills necessary to interact harmoniously with others (Lillard et al., 2013).

The effectiveness of this method is greatly influenced by factors such as the contextual design of the activity, teacher support, and family involvement. Well-designed activities provide children with a more meaningful experience, while support from teachers and families reinforces the learning gained during role-playing (Ginsburg, 2007; Lillard et al., 2013). This is supported by Ginsburg (2007), who argues that role-playing provides children with opportunities to learn empathy and build positive social relationships, which are crucial for their development. Integrating role-playing methods into the character education curriculum is highly recommended to maximize the formation of prosocial behavior from an early age (Ziv & Sorongon, 2019). With appropriate support from the surrounding environment, such as teachers and parents, this method can be more effective in shaping positive character in children (Lillard et al., 2013).

Although various studies have proven the effectiveness of role-playing in shaping prosocial behavior, researchers still find shortcomings in comprehensive studies that systematically discuss how the application of social simulation through various role-playing models can shape children's prosocial behavior in formal and non-formal education, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors that influence the success of this method. Furthermore, there is limited literature linking the effectiveness of role-playing models with contemporary social dynamics and the character development needs of young children.

This study aims to systematically analyze the results of previous studies related to the influence of role-playing methods in shaping prosocial behavior in children. The study will also focus on identifying the challenges and opportunities faced in implementing role-playing methods in educational settings, both formal and non-formal. Using a systematic literature review approach, this

study is expected to provide strategic recommendations for teachers and educators in designing social simulation-based character education, thereby optimizing the process of fostering prosocial behavior in children. The findings of this study are also expected to contribute theoretically to the fields of developmental psychology and child education, as well as serve as a practical reference for strengthening character education in Indonesia.

METHOD

This research method employs an interdisciplinary systematic literature review design aimed at examining the role of social simulation through role-playing in shaping prosocial behavior in children. The primary data sources for this study are scientific journal articles indexed in SINTA, Scopus, and Google Scholar, published in the last ten years (2015–2025), and relevant to the topics of role-playing, social simulation, and prosocial behavior in children. Inclusion criteria include articles in Indonesian or English that discuss the relationship between role-playing or social simulation and prosocial behavior, whether in the form of empirical studies (quantitative/qualitative) or literature reviews, and published in nationally or internationally accredited journals. Exclusion criteria consist of non-empirical articles, opinion pieces, or those irrelevant to the research focus, as well as articles that are not available in full access.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic search using the keywords “role-playing,” “social simulation,” “prosocial behavior,” “children,” and “character education.” Articles meeting the inclusion criteria were evaluated based on their title, abstract, and full text. Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis, identifying definitions, characteristics, empirical findings, and theoretical and practical implications of each selected article. Validity and reliability were ensured through layered and independent article selection by two researchers, as well as discussions to reach a consensus on the analysis results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

This literature study analyzes role-playing and prosocial methods through scientific journal articles indexed in SINTA, along with several other relevant scientific sources related to the relationship between social simulation through role-playing and the formation of prosocial behavior in children. The study reveals that role-playing is not only a fun learning strategy but also an effective approach for developing children's social and emotional skills. It provides children with the opportunity to place themselves in diverse social situations, practice taking others' perspectives, and cultivate empathy, cooperation, and social concern.

Table 1. Literature Review Results

No	Researcher	Title	Journal	Main Conclusion
1	Fitriyani & Rahmawati (2021)	The Relationship Between Role-Playing Activities and Prosocial Behavior in Early Childhood	Early Childhood Education Journal	Role-playing increases helping, sharing, and cooperation in early childhood.
2	Sulastri (2020)	Efforts to Foster Prosocial Behavior through Role-Playing Activities in Early Childhood	Early Childhood Education Journal	Role-playing is effective in increasing empathy and prosocial attitudes in children.
3	Nurani (2020)	Improving Children's Prosocial Behavior through Macro Role-Playing Method in Kindergarten	Elementary Education and Learning Journal	Macro role-playing enhances social and prosocial skills in kindergarten children.
4	Wijayanti & Katoningsih (2022)	Problem-Based Learning in Enhancing Children's Prosocial Behavior	Obsesi: Early Childhood Education Journal	Problem-Based Learning and role play improve children's prosocial behavior.

No	Researcher	Title	Journal	Main Conclusion
5	Mayangsari et al. (2017)	Analysis of Role-Playing Method in the Development of Prosocial Behavior in 5-6 Year-Old Children at Kutacane State Kindergarten	Early Childhood Education Indonesian Journal (ECEIJ)	Role-playing improves turn-taking, respecting, and adhering to group rules.
6	Nursiana (2019)	Prosocial Behavior Stimulation Program: A Case Study at 'Aisiyyah Solokuro Kindergarten	Early Childhood Education Journal	The success of role-playing is influenced by family and environmental support.
7	Himmah & Rahmanawati (2018)	Prosocial Behavior of Early Childhood at the Role-Play Center of Al-Furqon Kindergarten, Jember	Early Childhood Journal	The role-play area builds prosocial behavior in kindergarten children.
8	Fitriyani (2021)	Implementing Role-Playing Method to Develop Children's Prosocial Attitudes	Ceria Journal	Implementing role-play encourages prosocial attitudes like helping and cooperation.
9	Sari, D. P. (2021)	The Effectiveness of Role-Playing in Enhancing Early Childhood Prosocial Behavior	Early Childhood Education Journal	Role-playing effectively enhances early childhood prosocial behavior.
10	Sulastri (2022)	Developing Prosocial Behavior through Role-Playing Activities in Kindergarten	Early Childhood Education Journal	Role-playing in kindergarten is effective in developing prosocial behavior.
11	Yuliani (2020)	Analysis of Children's Prosocial Behavior Development Using Role-Playing Method	Early Childhood Education Journal	Role-playing develops prosocial behaviors such as sharing and empathy.
12	Fitriyani, S. (2022)	Implementing Role-Playing Method to Develop Children's Prosocial Attitudes	Ceria Journal	Role-playing builds positive prosocial attitudes in children.
13	Sari, N. P. (2021)	The Development of Early Childhood Prosocial Behavior through Role-Playing	Journal of Child Education	Role-playing contributes to the development of prosocial behavior in young children.
14	Sari, R. N. (2021)	Prosocial Behavior in 5-6 Year-Old Children at Muslimat NU Kindergarten	Early Childhood Education Journal	The application of role-playing in kindergarten can form prosocial behavior.
15	Fitriani, D. (2021)	The Influence of Role-Playing Method on Children's Prosocial Behavior	Early Childhood Education Journal	There is a significant influence of role-playing methods on children's prosocial behavior.
16	Rahmawati, F. (2022)	Improving Children's Prosocial Behavior through Macro Role-Playing Method	Early Childhood Education Journal	Macro role-playing is effective in enhancing children's prosocial behavior.
17	Yuliana & Arifin (2021)	Social Simulation as a Media for Empathy Character Development in Children	Character Education Journal	Social simulation/role-playing fosters empathy in children.
18	Fatimah et al. (2019)	The Impact of Role-Playing Model on Children's Prosocial Behavior	Creative Education Journal	The role-playing model effectively shapes elementary school students' prosocial behavior.
19	Hidayati & Suryani (2023)	Integration of Reflective Role-Playing Method in Character Education Curriculum	Educational Innovation Journal	Integration of reflective role-playing strengthens children's prosocial behavior.
20	Zahra & Sari (2018)	Role-Playing through Folktales as a Media for Teaching Prosocial Behavior	Early Childhood Education Journal	Role-playing based on folktales effectively instills prosocial values in children.
21	Padilla-Walker & Carlo (2014)	Prosocial Behavior: Past, Present, and Future	Handbook of Child Psychology and Developmental Science	Active participation in role play strengthens motivation to help, share, and respect differences.

No	Researcher	Title	Journal	Main Conclusion
22	Wentzel (2015)	Prosocial Behavior and Schooling	International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences	The school environment and facilitated interactions via role play effectively nurture prosocial behavior in students.
23	Torrance & Myers (1958)	Creative Learning and Teaching	Dodd, Mead & Company	Creative learning like role play enhances initiative, empathy, and cooperation in children.
24	Carlo & Randall (2002)	The Development of a Measure of Prosocial Behaviors for Late Adolescents	Journal of Youth and Adolescence	Adolescent prosocial behavior is closely related to experiences and practicing inclusive social situations.
25	Eisenberg, Spinrad & Knafo-Noam (2015)	Prosocial Development	Handbook of Child Psychology and Developmental Science	Social experiences, including role play, are crucial in developing empathy and self-control in children.
26	Griese, Buhs & Lester (2016)	Peer Victimization and Prosocial Behavior in Middle Childhood	Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology	Peer contexts and positive interventions like role play reduce aggression and increase prosocial behavior.

The results of the analysis indicate that consistent role-playing has a positive impact on the development of prosocial behavior in children across various formal and informal educational contexts. Children who actively participate in role-playing activities show significant improvements in helping, sharing, cooperating, and empathizing with their peers (Fitriyani & Rahmawati, 2021; Sulastrri, 2020; Zahra & Sari, 2018). Activities such as macro role-playing, sociodrama, social conflict simulation, and folk tale-based role-playing games have been proven to strengthen children's social and emotional skills by reinforcing their understanding of social norms and values (Nurani, 2020; Wijayanti & Katoningsih, 2022; Fatimah et al., 2019).

Furthermore, research by Mayangsari et al. (2017) and Sulastrri (2022) confirms that the implementation of role-playing in educational settings, such as early childhood education and elementary schools, directly improves prosocial behavior indicators. These indicators include the ability to wait for one's turn, respect others' opinions, understand group rules, and enhance assertive communication skills. The effectiveness of this method is proven not only in public and private schools but also in non-formal contexts that involve active parental and community participation (Nursiana, 2019; Ramadhani & Lestari, 2021).

Uniquely, the integration of role-playing activities into the character education curriculum presents a highly effective strategy for shaping children's foundational prosocial values, such as tolerance, responsibility, and solidarity. A study by Hidayati and Suryani (2023) shows that when role-playing activities are designed in a structured and contextually relevant manner, aligned with children's daily lives, their impact is stronger in building long-lasting social skills. Additionally, role-playing combined with reflective approaches and experiential learning has proven effective in enhancing children's moral awareness and ethical behavior from an early age (Suwandi & Marlina, 2022).

Overall, the findings of this literature review reinforce the research showing that role-playing is not merely a playful activity but also an educational tool capable of bridging cognitive and affective development in children. Therefore, this strategy deserves to be integrated into the design of learning programs aimed at strengthening character and social education for children from early childhood through elementary school age.

Discussion

This finding reinforces Bandura's social learning theory, which states that children learn behavior through observation, imitation, and direct experience in their social environment (Bandura, 1977). Role-

playing provides a space for children to explore various social roles, understand the consequences of actions, and internalize prosocial values through real experiences (Fitriyani, 2021; Sulastri, 2022). This activity also aligns with Kohlberg's moral development theory and Vygotsky's constructivism theory, both of which emphasize the importance of social interaction in building children's moral and social understanding.

The success of role-playing in fostering prosocial behavior is inseparable from the design of activities that are contextual and relevant to children's daily lives. Research shows that role-playing scenarios that are close to children's experiences, such as simulating helping friends, sharing toys, or resolving simple conflicts, are even more effective in building empathy and social skills (Nurani, 2020; Wijayanti & Katoningsih, 2022).

In addition, teacher guidance and family involvement are crucial factors in ensuring the sustainability of prosocial behavior formed through role-playing (Nursiana, 2019). However, the effectiveness of this method can also be influenced by several external factors, such as school environment support, facility limitations, and teacher readiness in designing and facilitating role-playing activities (Utomo et al., 2020).

In formal schools, results are more consistent due to curriculum support and teacher training, while outside of school, success is highly influenced by family and community involvement (Mayangsari et al., 2017; Sulastri, 2022). Therefore, integrating role-playing methods into the character education curriculum and providing training for teachers and parents is highly recommended to foster optimal prosocial behavior in children.

In addition to its primary benefits for prosocial behavior, role-playing has also been proven to enhance communication skills, social problem-solving abilities, and children's self-confidence (Fitriyani & Rahmawati, 2021; Sulastri, 2020). This indicates that role-playing is not only an effective learning strategy but also a comprehensive tool for character development and social competence.

Eisenberg, Spinrad, and Knafo-Noam (2015) also emphasize that interactive social experiences, such as role-playing, play a crucial role in developing empathy, self-control, and sensitivity to others' needs. In a review study by Padilla-Walker and Carlo (2014), active involvement in role play increases the acquisition of emotional experiences that strengthen children's motivation to help, share, and cooperate.

In addition to strengthening empathy, role play also provides opportunities for children to understand the social dynamics in their environment and practice the ability to take the perspective of others (Carlo & Randall, 2002). Griese, Buhs, and Lester (2016) also found that role-playing activities supported by a conducive classroom environment strengthen prosocial behavior and reduce aggressive tendencies in middle childhood. The roles of teachers and the environment are crucial, as support and reflection from educators during role-playing sessions are identified as key factors in the successful development of prosocial behavior in children (Wentzel, 2015).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of role-playing methods can be enhanced through integration with character education curricula, enabling children not only to understand prosocial values cognitively but also to internalize and apply them in daily life (Eisenberg et al., 2015; Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2014). Thus, various international studies confirm that this strategy is not only suitable for use across cultures but is also relatively universal as a means of strengthening character education and children's social-emotional development.

The limitations of this study lie in the variation in research designs and cultural contexts across the articles analyzed, which necessitates cautious generalization of the findings. Further research is recommended to explore more innovative role-playing models and incorporate additional supporting variables, such as the role of technology and interdisciplinary collaboration in character education.

CONCLUSION

Social simulation through role-playing plays a significant role in shaping prosocial behavior in children. Children's active involvement in various forms of role-playing, both in formal and non-formal educational settings, can consistently improve their ability to help, share, cooperate, and build empathy towards others. These findings align with social learning theory, constructivism, and moral development theories, all of which emphasize the importance of direct social experiences in the internalization of prosocial values. The effectiveness of this method is also influenced by the contextual design of activities, teacher support, and the involvement of family and the surrounding environment.

Therefore, the integration of role-playing into the character education curriculum is highly recommended as a strategy to optimally foster prosocial behavior in children from an early age. This study provides theoretical contributions to the development of developmental psychology and education, as well as practical recommendations for teachers and educators in designing social simulation-based learning.

However, the limitations of this study lie in the variation in research designs and cultural contexts, which necessitate further research with more innovative models and the inclusion of additional supporting variables, such as the use of technology and interdisciplinary collaboration. It is hoped that the findings of this study can serve as a foundation for developing more effective and relevant character education strategies tailored to the developmental needs of children today.

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