Original Article

Prosocial Behaviour Development among Preschool Children: Effect of Peer Socialisation

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ABSTRACT

This study applied a systematic literature review to explore the influence of peer socialisation on prosocial behaviour among preschool children. Using Manual content analysis, 57 studies were identified; variables covered peer socialisation and prosocial behaviour. The study revealed that the majority of research focused on the role of parental and siblings' socialisation in the home context and teachers' socialisation in the school context and their influence on prosocial behaviours among young children. However, few studies focused on the influence of peer socialisation on children's prosocial behaviour in preschools. The main analyses were revealed to be regression and multilevel. Few studies linked attachment theory with socialisation and prosocial behaviour. This is the first study to explore the influence of peer socialisation on prosocial behaviour among preschool children in Tanzania. Since prosocial behaviour is a foundation of positive emotional development and individual well-being, this study recommends that preschool curriculum should consider peer socialisation as an important aspect in promoting prosocial behaviour. Teachers in preschools should be advised to design frameworks that can guide peer socialisation among children in a bid to enhance sustainable and prospective prosocial behaviour, which has a great influence on positive emotional development, positive social interaction, and cognitive development among young children in preschool contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Prosociality refers to a form of positive behaviour that aims at benefiting other people (Tintori et al., 2021); broad positive social behaviour that intends to benefit another person (Eisenberg et al., 2006; Salerni & Caprin, 2022). Prosocial behaviour is highly valued in almost all cultures since it is crucial in developing and maintaining harmonious relationships among people (Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2014). Prosocial behaviour development should be observed in the trajectory of child development from early stages. Up to the age of five years, children are at a developmental stage in all aspects, including behaviour. During their development, children learn behaviour in their homes from parents through direct teaching and siblings' socialisation through playing. When children are ready to start preschool, they are in transition from home to preschool, where they meet new people, especially teachers and peers, who are important in their behaviour development trajectory. Denham and Basset (2019) comment that during early childhood, especially when children join preschools, contexts outside the family become important. In preschools, children largely spend most of their time interacting and playing with peers. During the interaction, children are more likely to learn almost all behaviours: harmonious behaviours such as sharing, helping, and comforting, or disharmonious behaviours such as fighting. These behaviours are, however, normal and common during child development. For example, at the age of 2 or 3 to 5 years, children may fight and push each other; some tend to be superior, and some feel inferior; all these are considered normal behaviour for children. Almost all behaviours are appropriate at the age of 3 to 5 years as children would like to experiment with everything they come across, and the behaviour at this stage is considered developmentally appropriate. For example, when children fight, the fighting can be considered a pleasure to some children and children are not regarded as aggressive or difficult. Children sometimes tend to help and comfort others, a behaviour which is acceptable. All these behaviours are part of development;

according to literature, prosocial behaviour development is not natural or automatic but rather modelled, encouraged, talked about and/ or nurtured (Brownell, 2016). For example, a child who is well nurtured and comes across as a good model is more likely to display prosocial behaviour. We expect children in preschool to develop prosocial behaviour where peers have great influence. Children's relationships, which are embedded in peer socialisation in preschools, form the most important foundation for their prosocial behaviour.

Prosocial Behaviour among Preschools

According to Wentzel (2015), prosocial behaviour is related positively to social acceptance in the community, including approval among peers and perspective-taking. Wentzel (2015) further argues that behaviour is considered prosocial when a relationship is characterised by sharing, helping, and cooperating since these behaviours are mostly socially acceptable (see also Shavega, Brugman, & van Tuijl, 2014). These behaviours are approved by teachers and peers during playtime in preschools. Studies from different cultures insist that children should be oriented on caring, helping, sharing, behaving friendly, and forming friendships, which have been considered a source of prosocial behaviour (Eivers et al., 2012; Salerni & Caprin, 2022; Yuliato et al., 2019). Indicators of prosocial development in children include playing nicely with other children, sharing, taking turns during playing, speaking kindly to other children and deliberately comforting (Brownell, 2016; Olson & Spelke, 2018; Salerni & Caprin, 2022).

Prosocial behaviour has been acknowledged to help children get along with peers complying with parents' and teachers' instructions in schools, which has been reported to be associated with helping behaviour and school adjustment (Chung-Hall & Chen, 2009; Hastings, Utendele & Sullivan, 2007). Children who display prosocial behaviour are more likely to encounter fewer problems and highly positive relationships with other children in schools. Children understand societal norms and expectations through

interacting with others, which is considered part of socialisation**.**

Impact of Context of Peer Socialization and Prosocial Behaviour

According to Osei (2021), the development of prosocial behaviour in children is influenced by contextual factors. This is supported by Behavioural learning and social development theorists who argue that children grow in different contexts, such as homes and schools, where family, teachers and peers have an influence on the development of behaviour in various ways. Parents, siblings, peers, and teachers form immediate developmental agents where a child can learn to be prosocial or anti-social. The socialising agent has a great influence on children's behaviour, either positively or negatively. Catalano and Hawkins (1996) argue that prosocial behaviour is more likely to occur when immediate socialising agents hold prosocial values. For example, children who are connected to friends who practice prosocial actions on a regular basis are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviour. Such children are expected to develop prosocial beliefs and values through associating with people who have prosocial characteristics and tendencies that guide children towards a prosocial trajectory. Such children will not be attracted by anti-social behaviour in the future (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996)

Peer Socialisation

Socialisation refers to how we learn the norms and beliefs of our society or groups. Most human behaviours are learned through socialisation. Prosocial behaviours are learned through different means, e.g., through imitating from parents, siblings, people around the child, direct teaching, and relationships. In schools, teachers socialise children through direct teaching about school rules and scaffolding, which helps children to learn acceptable behaviour in the school context. According to Denham and Basset (2019), peer socialisation is considered a building block of prosocial behaviour during early childhood. Children learn to be prosocial as a function of successful socialisation (Salerni & Caprin, 2022),

which is strengthened by cues that elicit sharing and helping behaviours. Bateman and Church (2008) comment that children's prosocial behaviours are reinforced by peers.

According to Brownell (2016), parents and teachers play a crucial role in socialising young children, which forms a foundation for the development of prosocial behaviour. Siblings also have been reported to influence others' behaviours positively or negatively (Kuehn, 2021). As children move from home to school contexts, socialising agents also change, where teachers and peers become more important and influential. In pre-primary schools, teachers are responsible for making sure that children follow school rules and directions. Teachers are also responsible for teaching acceptable behaviours to preschool children, and they play parenting roles, which help children to behave in an acceptable way in schools. All kinds of relationships and interactions between a teacher and a child are part of socialisation. In addition, in most cases, preschool children spend long hours with peers in schools, in classes and during playtime. Klarin (2015) argues that peer interaction contributes to the development of prosocial behaviour among preschool children. Hartup (2011) insists that positive adjustment among preschool children is a result of children's experience in interactions with peers. However, the influence of peer socialisation on prosocial behaviour in preschools is not clear. Salerni and Caprin (2022) also observed that the developmental trajectory of prosocial behaviour in children as a result of peer socialisation is not clear.

Traditionally, Tanzanian cultures expose some children's characteristics to social responsibilities, such as obedience in a collectivist society. These values are also reflected in the socialisation process and peer process (Li, 2011). In a collectivist culture, contrary to an individualistic culture, a child with high self-expression is regarded as disobedient, in contrast to a shy and socially reserved child who is regarded to have positive behaviour: this is also common in collectivist cultures like China (see also Liu, et al.,

2014). Regardless of the prosocial standards based on cultural aspects, this study, however, aims to explore the influence of peer socialisation on children's prosocial behaviour development among preschoolers.

The systematic review was guided by the following research questions: First, what evidence in the literature identifies features of peer socialisation and key features of prosocial behaviours in preschools? Second, what evidence in the literature reports the influence of peer socialisation on prosocial behaviour in preschools?

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a systematic literature review to explore the influence of peer socialisation on prosocial behaviour in preschools. For systematic review, the following steps were considered (as recommended by EPPI centred, 2007) and were employed systematically: We developed criteria for specifying studies that were to be included in the review. Relevant studies were identified. Studies were screened; each piece of literature was screened against inclusion criteria. This helped to avoid bias and allowed a consistent rule about studies that used to answer questions in a transparent way.

The study systematically assessed the influence of peer socialisation variables (playing together, being accepted in a group, joining a group on the variables of prosocial behaviour (talking kindly to other children, sharing, helping). A researcher examined peer socialisation and prosocial behaviour, focusing on the occurrence of variables within articles and in data analysis.

To analyse the influence of independent variables on dependent variables, a researcher considered only articles with the terms of peer socialisation and prosocial behaviour in the preschool context. However, studies that portrayed peer socialisation and prosocial behaviour in lower primary schools were considered for review. The majority of the articles were found in Google Scholar, which generated a total of 21,000 articles. Other articles were generated from the Taylor and Francis, Online Wiley and Emerald, which generated a total of 9,558. Thereafter, only the first four pages of the articles were considered, which generated a title for all databases, Refer to Table 1. After screening, we were left with 37 articles that depicted the influence of peer socialisation on prosocial behaviour among preschool children.

The researcher picked articles published in the English language from journals, books and papers from reputable publishers that focused on the preschool context. Dissertations, theses, and book chapters were excluded from the analysis. The literature review was conducted from January to October 2023. Occurrences of titles were identified in articles and titles; thereafter, variables were classified into themes, and analysis were carried out.

Table 1: Article Search

Source of database	Initial search for articles	First four pages	Final article selected
Google Scholar	21,000	490	11
Wiley Online	4,429	89	10
Francis & Taylor	428	54	06
Sage	234	45	07
Emerald	38	07	03
Total	26,129	685	37

Source: Literature review

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the influence of peer socialisation on prosocial behaviour among preschool children. Research title analysis was explored to indicate whether variables were featured in the title or in the content.

Research Title Analysis

Based on the current study, about 32 (56%) studies used the term prosocial behaviour in their title. These articles specify indicators or variables of prosocial behaviours common in preschools, such as helping, sharing, and comforting. Findings further demonstrate that only 4(7%) studies used the term peer socialisation in preschools in their titles. According to analysis, about 10(18%) texts used the term "child friendship", which was considered more relative to peer socialisation. Moreover, the analysis indicated that most of the studies on the influence of peer socialisation or interaction on prosocial behaviour in preschool were more featured in the text and not in the title. Prosocial behaviour is more featured in the titles and in the texts compared to peer socialisation.

Analysis indicated that studies that specify the influence of peer socialisation on prosocial behaviour in preschools in the titles are few and not straightforward. These findings are in line with those of Salerni and Caprin (2022), who report that specific titles on the influence of peer socialisation on prosocial behaviour development in preschools are not clear. However, issues of the influence of peer interaction and peer friendships on prosocial behaviours in preschools are well featured in the text. In this study, peer friendship and peer interactions are used in the same way as peer socialisation. During analysis, key features on prosocial behaviour, peer socialisation and evidence on the influence of peer socialisation on prosocial behaviour in preschools were considered. Titles with child friendship and peer interaction were considered and related to peer socialisation. The analysis revealed that only a few pieces of literature addressed theories guiding this study. *Table 2* presents title analysis from empirical evidence.

Table 2: Research title analysis

Variable(s)	Authors	n (%)
Prosocial behaviours in preschools	(Al-Than and Semmar, 2017; Artson and Artson, 2017; Barry and Wntzel, 2006; Betman and Church, 2008; Bronwel, 2006; Chung-hall and Chen, 2010; Conte et al., 2018; Crozier and Tincani, 2007; Eisenberg et al., 1984 Fujisawa et al., 2008; Gun, 2010; Hasting et al., 2007; Hasting et al., 2010; Hu and Feng, 2021; Iannotti, 1985; Inseneberg et al., 2006; Kuhen, 2021; Malti and Dys, 2018; Mares, 2017; McComas, 2005; Misch and Dunham, 2021; Obsuth et al., 2015; Osei, 2021; Over, 2018; Pepe, 2018; Salerni and Caprin, 2022; Taylor et al., 2018; Tinton et al., 2021; Traverso et al., 2020; Wentzel, 2015; Wettstein et al., 2013; Xiao et al. 2022)	32(57)
Studies with peer socialisation in preschools in the titles	(Burdelski, 2010; Denham and Baset, 2019; Wettstein et al., 2013)	03(5.5)
Titles with child friendship	(Eivers et al., 2012; Hartup, 2011; Lin et al., 2005; McComas et al., 2005; Olson and Spelke, 2008; Osei, 2012; Over, 2018; Tan et al., 2021; Tintori et al., 2021; Yulianto et al., 2019)	10(18)
The theory guiding prosocial behaviour in the titles	(Catalano and Hawkins, 1996; Hartup et al., 2011; Traverso et al., 2020)	03(5.5)
Studies with peer socialisation/interaction and prosocial behaviours in preschools	(Brownell, 2016; Coolahan et al., 2000; Klarin, 2015; Misch and Duhham, 2021; Dunsmore and Karn, 2010; Salerni and Caprin, 2022; Wettstein et al. 2013; Xiao et al., 2022)	08(14)

Variables of Peer Socialization in Preschools as Identified in the Literature

This study aimed to address variables of peer socialisation that are common in preschools. Variables of peer socialisation in preschools were identified in a few pieces of literature, as most of the literature on peer socialisation is commonly featured in adolescents. The main variables commonly reported in the literature were play, peer acceptance and speaking nicely to other children. Few literatures discussed peer socialisation, but the commonly reported feature is play (see also Brownell, 2016; Kuehn, 2022). Socialisation is well featured in literature; however, peer socialisation is inadequately discussed for preschool children.

Variables of Prosocial Behaviour in Preschools

The study aimed to address variables of prosocial behaviours as influenced by peer socialisation, which is common in preschools. Several research reports on variables of prosocial behaviour seem to be more common among young children in preschools (Refer to Table 2). This can be supported by prosocial behaviour displayed by young children. For example, the main reported prosocial variables are sharing, comforting, helping, and cooperating (Brownell, 2016). This indicates that children should be oriented into prosocial behaviour in their early years, which forms a background to the developmental trajectory in children.

Influence of Peer Socialisation on Prosocial Behaviours in Preschools

This study aimed to explore systematically the influence of peer socialisation on prosocial behaviour among preschool children. In this study, we found a scarcity of literature on the influence of peer socialisation on prosocial behaviour among young children in preschools in particular. Few studies of this nature are found in developing countries; however, the influence is not clear. This is supported by a recent study by Salerni and Caprin (2022), who argue that studies on the influence of peer socialisation on prosocial behaviour are scarce. Child friendship and peer interaction have been considered the same as peer socialisation in this study in child peer socialisation. Salerno and Caprin. (2022) argue that peer socialisation has an influence on prosocial behavioural development in young children. Only eight articles were revealed to influence prosocial behaviour (Refer, Table 2), and some of them were not straightforward.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The development of prosocial behaviour in young children is not something that is automatic, natural, and straight, but it needs to be nurtured and modelled by role models and socialised by positive prosocial practices. During exploration, we found that prosocial variables are featured in the title and in the text in the area of early childhood, while variables of peer socialisation were very few. Studies on the influence of peer socialisation on prosocial behaviour among preschoolers are very few and mostly not straight. During child socialisation, children learn every behaviour they come across, prosocial and/or non-social, such as aggression, because they are in a developmental stage. It is not automatic that a child will select to learn prosocial behaviour, but children may adopt any behaviour they come across, prosocial or non-social. Since behaviour in the school context can be complex and not automatic, we recommend that teachers establish socialisation strategies that can focus on promoting prosocial behaviours among children during play and interactions. Furthermore, we recommend that teachers should design a framework for peer socialisation for young children to develop a trajectory of prosocial behaviour. Teachers should motivate young children in preschools to practice positive behaviours such as helping, sharing, and speaking nicely to other children, which are key to prosocial development in children.

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