

OPTIMIZING PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH DISCUSSION-BASED GROUP GUIDANCE SERVICES

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Abstract

This study addresses prosocial behavior as a foundation for healthy interpersonal relationships and for the emotional, social, and academic development of elementary school children. In practice, prosocial behavior often develops incidentally and is rarely facilitated through a systematic group-based guidance strategy, creating a gap between social-learning theory and school practice. This study aims to describe the implementation of a discussion-based group guidance service and the dynamics of students' prosocial development across three aspects: empathy, cooperation, and sharing. A qualitative approach with a descriptive design was applied to fifth-grade students of SDN 1 Karangpawitan, Ciamis, selected purposively. Data were collected through participatory observation, interviews with the classroom teacher and students, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing; trustworthiness was ensured through technique and source triangulation. The guidance program was designed systematically from a needs analysis and delivered in six structured sessions, each following opening, core, and closing stages in which students shared roles, discussed problems, and presented results. The findings indicate that discussion-based group guidance optimized students' prosocial behavior: empathy increased through active listening and appreciation of peers, cooperation strengthened through equitable task-sharing and responsibility, and sharing grew through openness in offering help and ideas. The service is a viable, contextual model that supports the SDGs, particularly quality education.

Keywords: Personal social guidance, Group discussion, Prosocial behavior, Empathy, Elementary school.

1. Introduction

Primary education plays a strategic role in shaping students' character and social behavior. Elementary-aged children are at a crucial developmental stage in which they learn how to interact with others, understand different points of view, and develop caring attitudes toward their social environment. One social behavior that forms the foundation of healthy interpersonal relationships is prosocial behavior, namely voluntary positive social actions intended to benefit others. Such behavior includes helping individuals in difficulty, sharing personal resources, cooperating to achieve common goals, comforting or giving emotional support, empathizing as an affective basis for understanding others, and behaving honestly in accordance with social norms that maintain fairness and collective well-being (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989).

Prosocial behavior in elementary-aged children not only contributes to a positive social climate in school but is also closely related to emotional development, social acceptance, and long-term academic success. Research indicates that students with higher levels of prosocial behavior tend to have better social relationships, lower levels of conflict, and more adaptive emotion regulation (Wentzel, 2015). Prosocial behavior therefore functions as both a social and an academic asset, because a supportive classroom climate enables students to learn more optimally. Consequently, the development of prosocial behavior needs to be reviewed in terms of its main constituent aspects.

Scholars place empathy, cooperation, and sharing as the principal aspects of prosocial behavior because the three represent the affective, social, and concrete-action foundations of caring for others. Empathy is regarded as the primary motivational basis of prosocial behavior, because the capacity to understand and feel others' emotions drives individuals to help sincerely (Hoffman, 2000; Eisenberg et al., 2015). Cooperation is considered crucial because it reflects a child's ability to balance self-interest and group interest, build reciprocal relationships, and adjust to social norms in achieving shared goals, which is the core of social competence in school (Wentzel, 2015). Sharing becomes a concrete indicator of social concern because it involves sacrificing personal resources for the well-being of others, thereby reflecting the internalization of moral and social-justice values (Carlo & Randall, 2002). The three aspects are interrelated: empathy fosters internal motivation, cooperation directs behavior within a social context, and sharing demonstrates concrete action.

From a social-learning perspective, prosocial behavior is formed through observation and imitation of social models in the surrounding environment. Bandura (1986) emphasizes that children learn to behave by observing others, including teachers and peers, and through direct experience in social interaction. Vygotsky (1978) further argues that social interaction and the exchange of perspectives are the primary means by which children construct social understanding. Environments that provide children with opportunities to engage in meaningful social activities will strongly support the development of prosocial behavior.

Beyond Social Learning Theory, this study is also grounded in Social Interdependence Theory proposed by Johnson and Johnson (2009), which explains that positive interdependence encourages individuals to work collaboratively, support one another, and develop responsibility toward shared goals. Within discussion-based group guidance, students become mutually dependent in completing tasks, exchanging ideas, and solving problems collectively. Such interactions create opportunities to practice empathy, cooperation, and sharing in authentic social situations. In addition, experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984) suggests that meaningful learning occurs through concrete experience followed by reflection. Therefore, structured group discussions provide repeated opportunities for students not only to understand prosocial values cognitively but also to internalize them through direct social experiences.

In the context of primary education, however, social-learning processes are often not designed in a structured manner within classroom guidance services, so that stimulation of empathy, cooperation, and sharing still occurs incidentally and is not yet facilitated through a systematic group-interaction strategy. This condition reveals a gap between the theoretical foundation on the importance of meaningful social interaction and the actual practice of developing prosocial behavior in schools, which calls for a more directed intervention approach.

A preliminary study conducted through interviews with the classroom teacher and fifth-grade students of SDN 1 Karangpawitan confirmed these concerns across the three aspects. Regarding empathy, the teacher explained, "During discussions, some students already pay attention well when their friends speak, but there are still those who are less focused or talk among themselves; when a friend does not understand, only a few take the initiative to help explain." Regarding cooperation, the teacher noted, "In dividing tasks, students still often wait for my direction to determine their roles, and not all of them are actively involved; some dominate, while others tend to be passive." Regarding sharing, the teacher stated, "In terms of sharing, students are not yet accustomed; some who do not bring stationery are not immediately helped, and only a few actively share their ideas." These statements indicate that students' prosocial behavior during group discussion still needs to be developed.

A number of previous studies confirm that prosocial behavior can be enhanced through structured social interaction in the school environment. Denham et al. (2012) emphasize that deliberately designed social stimulation contributes to the development of children's emotional and social competence. Mulyawati, Marini, and Nafiah (2022) and Widiatmoko (2017) report that empathy positively and significantly contributes to elementary students' prosocial behavior. In the context of educational intervention, Atma, Solehuddin, and Yustiana (2025) found that a collaborative guidance program based on social interaction was effective in improving prosocial behavior, while Mahfuzh et al. (2025) showed that prosocial training based on interactive activities also contributed to such improvement. These findings strengthen the relevance of using a group-discussion strategy to develop the prosocial behavior of elementary school students.

This study is also relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 3 (good health and well-being), because strengthening prosocial behavior

supports the creation of an inclusive, collaborative, and character-oriented learning environment. Accordingly, this study focuses on two research questions: (1) how is a discussion-based group guidance service implemented in elementary school; and (2) how do the dynamics of students' prosocial behavior in the aspects of empathy, cooperation, and sharing develop during the activities.

2. Literature Review

Prosocial behavior and its aspects. Prosocial behavior encompasses a range of voluntary positive actions oriented toward the welfare of others (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). In the school context, three aspects are frequently highlighted as the core of prosocial behavior in children: empathy, cooperation, and sharing. Empathy is the affective and cognitive capacity to understand and share another person's feelings, and it serves as the primary motivator for helping behavior (Hoffman, 2000; Eisenberg et al., 2015). Cooperation reflects the ability to work together, take responsibility, and maintain positive interdependence in achieving shared goals (Wentzel, 2015; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Sharing denotes the willingness to give material resources, help, or ideas to others and is a tangible manifestation of social concern (Carlo & Randall, 2002).

Personal-social guidance and group guidance services. Within guidance and counseling, personal-social guidance aims to help students develop self-understanding, interpersonal skills, and positive social relationships. Group guidance is a service that harnesses group dynamics as a means of developing students' personal, social, and academic competencies through directed interaction among group members (Prayitno & Amti, 2004). Such services provide space for students to understand themselves and others, develop communication skills, and build positive social relationships by exchanging experiences, expressing opinions, and accepting differing viewpoints (Tohirin, 2013). Group guidance can be implemented through several techniques, including group discussion, question and answer, role play, simulation, and group problem solving (Prayitno, 2017; Sukardi, 2010).

Group discussion as a strategy. Group discussion is a technique that provides a dialogic space in which students develop empathy, appreciate differences, and construct social understanding through the exchange of perspectives (Vygotsky, 1978). An effective discussion is characterized by concept elaboration, active participation, and mutual respect among members. Cooperative learning theory suggests that well-managed discussion fosters positive interdependence, individual accountability, and constructive interaction (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Reflective activities based on social experience further help students internalize values of caring and social responsibility (Kolb, 1984; Denham et al., 2012). Given the characteristics of the problem and the objective of developing prosocial behavior, group discussion was selected as the focus of the group guidance service in this study.

Previous studies and research gap. Prior research has demonstrated the effectiveness of social-interaction-based interventions for improving prosocial behavior (Atma et al., 2025; Mahfuzh et al., 2025), as well as the contribution of empathy to prosocial behavior (Mulyawati et al., 2022; Widiatmoko, 2017). Nevertheless, most studies emphasize measuring the effect of variables, whereas relatively few describe in depth the process and dynamics of prosocial development within a systematically designed discussion-based group guidance program at the elementary level. This study addresses that gap by describing both the implementation process and the developmental dynamics of prosocial behavior.

3. Research Methods

To enhance the credibility of the findings, this study employed both source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from students, the classroom teacher, and documentary evidence to identify consistent patterns of prosocial behavior. Methodological triangulation was achieved by integrating participatory observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation analysis. Furthermore, member checking was conducted by confirming interview interpretations with participants, while peer debriefing with academic supervisors was undertaken to minimize researcher bias and strengthen the trustworthiness of the analytical process.

3.1 Object, Time, and Place

The object of the study was fifth-grade students of SDN 1 Karangpawitan, Kawali District, Ciamis Regency, West Java, who participated in the group discussion activities. The choice of fifth grade was based on the consideration that at this stage students' socio-emotional development enables them to understand others' perspectives, participate actively in discussion, and display indicators of prosocial behavior. Participants were selected purposively because the study required individuals directly involved in the phenomenon under investigation and thus able to provide relevant, in-depth data. The classroom teacher

was involved to enrich the data through continuous observation of students' behavior before and after the service. The number of participants was determined by data saturation. The study was conducted in the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year (May 2026) in the natural school setting without manipulation of conditions.

3.2 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three main techniques. First, participatory observation was used because the study focuses on the process and dynamics of student interaction during the discussion; the researcher was directly involved in the activity while maintaining the role of an observer, enabling a deeper understanding of how students listened to peers, responded to differing views, divided tasks, and showed spontaneous concern. Second, interviews with the teacher and students were conducted to explore perceptions, feelings, and perceived changes that are not always visible through observation. Third, documentation including Service Implementation Plans (RPL), group work products, attendance lists, and teacher notes was used to complement and strengthen the observation and interview data. The instruments comprised observation guidelines, student and teacher interview guidelines, and documentation guidelines.

3.3 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed following the interactive qualitative data analysis framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2020). The analysis consisted of five interconnected activities conducted simultaneously throughout the study. First, data collection, in which observation notes, interview transcripts, and documentation were gathered systematically. Second, data condensation, involving selecting, simplifying, coding, and organizing relevant information according to the study focus. Third, data display, in which condensed data were organized into matrices and narrative descriptions to facilitate interpretation. Fourth, conclusion drawing, where recurring themes, patterns, and relationships regarding students' prosocial behavior were identified. Finally, conclusion verification was conducted continuously by revisiting the data, comparing findings across different sources, and discussing interpretations until credible and consistent conclusions were obtained.

3.4 Research Procedure and Program Development

The service program was developed systematically from a needs analysis and comprised the components of rationale, needs description, objectives, action plan, and Service Implementation Plan (RPL). The rationale combined a conceptual basis (the importance of prosocial behavior in social development) and an empirical basis (the preliminary findings). The program aimed to develop empathy (listening to and understanding peers), strengthen cooperation (dividing and completing group tasks), and cultivate sharing (offering help and ideas). The action plan was arranged in six structured sessions delivered gradually, each consisting of an opening, a core activity, and a closing stage. In the core activity, students divided roles (leader, note-taker, presenter, and members), discussed a problem, compiled the results, and presented them, while the teacher and researcher acted as facilitators. The mapping of the six sessions is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Structure of the Six-Session Discussion-Based Group Guidance Program

Session	Prosocial Aspect	Discussion Focus	Target Indicator
1	Empathy	Listening attentively to peers	Listening to peers while they speak
2	Empathy	Caring for peers in difficulty	Helping peers who face difficulties
3	Cooperation	Dividing roles and tasks	Active involvement in task division
4	Cooperation	Completing tasks responsibly	Responsibility for completing shared tasks
5	Sharing	Sharing materials and help	Lending materials/helping peers' needs
6	Sharing	Sharing ideas and opinions	Contributing ideas/information to the group

Source: Program design based on needs analysis (2026)

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Implementation of the Discussion-Based Group Guidance Service

The discussion-based group guidance service was carried out over six sessions that alternately focused on the aspects of empathy, cooperation, and sharing, as outlined in Table 1. Each session followed an opening stage (apperception, ice-breaking, and statement of objectives), a core stage (role assignment as leader, note-taker, presenter, and members; group discussion of a contextual problem; compilation of

results; and group presentation followed by responses from other groups), and a closing stage (joint conclusion, reflection on the experience, and reinforcement). This structure gave students repeated, direct experience in interacting, exchanging opinions, and collaborating in authentic situations, while enabling the teacher and researcher to guide the group dynamics in a planned manner. Across the sessions, participation gradually became more even, and students grew more accustomed to the discussion routine.

1) Development of Empathy

During the process, students demonstrated an increasing ability to listen to peers while they were speaking and to appreciate differing opinions in the discussion. Whereas in the preliminary study only a few students took the initiative to help peers who did not understand, in the later sessions concern for peers in difficulty emerged more frequently and spontaneously for example, students voluntarily explaining material to group members who had not grasped it. Observation notes recorded more students turning toward the speaker, waiting for their turn, and responding to peers' ideas rather than continuing their own tasks in isolation. This development is consistent with the view of empathy as an affective basis that motivates prosocial action (Hoffman, 2000; Eisenberg et al., 2015). Evidence from classroom observations was consistent with students' interview responses and teacher reflections, indicating convergence across different data sources.

2) Development of Cooperation

Students' involvement in dividing group tasks became more equitable, with responsibility distributed among members. Students who had previously tended to be passive began to take on roles such as note-taker or presenter, while the dominance of particular individuals decreased. Groups increasingly reached agreement on task allocation without waiting for the teacher's direction, and members supported one another to complete the shared task on time. This improvement confirms that group discussion functions as a vehicle for cooperative learning that nurtures positive interdependence and individual accountability (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Wentzel, 2015). Similar findings emerged from documentation records, classroom observations, and participant interviews, demonstrating consistency in students' collaborative behaviors across multiple sources of evidence.

3) Development of Sharing

Students became more open in sharing, both in the form of material help such as lending stationery to peers who needed it and in expressing ideas and information to the group. The willingness to contribute opinions increased as students' confidence grew within a supportive group atmosphere, so that fewer students remained silent for fear of being wrong. The presentation stage, in which each group shared its findings and other groups responded, reinforced the habit of exchanging ideas. This development reflects the internalization of caring and social-justice values (Carlo & Randall, 2002). The consistency between observational data, interview narratives, and supporting documentation strengthened the credibility of these findings regarding the development of students' sharing behaviors. A summary of the changes across the three aspects is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Development of Students' Prosocial Behavior After the Service

Aspect	Indicator of Change	Findings After the Service
Empathy	Appreciating peers' opinions	Students were more able to listen to and appreciate peers' opinions during discussion
Empathy	Concern for peers	Students were more caring and took the initiative to help peers in difficulty
Cooperation	Involvement in task division	Students were more active and equitable in dividing group tasks
Cooperation	Responsibility for tasks	Students completed shared tasks with full responsibility
Sharing	Concern for peers' needs	Students were more attentive to peers' needs, e.g., lending stationery
Sharing	Openness in sharing ideas	Students were more open and confident in sharing ideas and opinions in the group

Source: Research data (2026)

4.2 Discussion

The findings show that discussion-based group guidance optimized students' prosocial behavior across all three aspects in a mutually reinforcing manner. Empathy, developed through active listening and appreciation of peers, provided the affective motivation for students to help and cooperate; this aligns with Hoffman (2000) and Eisenberg et al. (2015), who position empathy as the primary driver of prosocial action. Cooperation, strengthened through equitable task-sharing and responsibility, directed empathy into coordinated social behavior consistent with cooperative-learning theory and its principle of positive interdependence (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Wentzel, 2015). Sharing, grown through openness in offering help and ideas, translated internal motivation into concrete action reflecting social-justice values (Carlo & Randall, 2002).

The improvement observed across the three dimensions of prosocial behavior did not occur independently but rather represented a sequential developmental process. Empathy functioned as the affective foundation that encouraged students to recognize and respond to the needs of others. As students became more attentive to their peers' perspectives, collaborative behaviors emerged more naturally through shared responsibilities during discussion activities. These collaborative experiences subsequently promoted sharing behaviors, as students became increasingly willing to contribute ideas, provide assistance, and exchange learning resources. This progression supports Eisenberg et al. (2015), who argue that prosocial behavior develops through the interaction of emotional understanding, social engagement, and repeated opportunities for helping behavior.

These findings also indicate that discussion-based group guidance functions not merely as an instructional strategy but as a social learning environment where students actively construct interpersonal competence. The repeated cycles of discussion, reflection, and feedback allowed students to internalize prosocial norms through authentic interaction rather than passive instruction. This finding extends previous studies by demonstrating that the effectiveness of group discussion lies not only in collaborative task completion but also in the continuous social negotiation that facilitates behavioral transformation.

These results reinforce the perspective that prosocial behavior develops through meaningful social interaction and contextual learning rather than spontaneously (Vygotsky, 1978; Bandura, 1986; Denham et al., 2012). The structured six-session design appears to be a key factor: repeated exposure to authentic collaborative situations, combined with reflection and reinforcement at the closing stage, allowed students to internalize prosocial values and apply them in real actions rather than merely understanding them cognitively. The findings are also congruent with prior intervention studies reporting the effectiveness of social-interaction-based programs (Atma et al., 2025; Mahfuzh et al., 2025) and the contribution of empathy to prosocial behavior (Mulyawati et al., 2022; Widiatmoko, 2017).

From a practical standpoint, the results suggest that school counselors and teachers can integrate structured group discussion into personal-social guidance services as a low-cost, context-sensitive strategy for character development. Because the activities take place within the natural flow of classroom learning, the model is feasible to implement without requiring special facilities, and it supports an inclusive and collaborative learning climate in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 and SDG 3.

4.3 Relevance to Research Objectives

The findings answer both research questions. First, the discussion-based group guidance service can be implemented in a structured manner across six sessions with clear opening, core, and closing stages, supported by systematic program development from a needs analysis. Second, students' prosocial behavior developed noticeably in the aspects of empathy, cooperation, and sharing throughout the process. Thus, the service is relevant as a model of personal-social guidance that supports the creation of an inclusive and collaborative learning environment.

5. Conclusion

Discussion-based group guidance services can be implemented in a structured manner across six sequential sessions and have been shown to contribute to optimizing the prosocial behavior of elementary school students. Development was evident in three interrelated aspects: empathy (listening to and appreciating peers' opinions and caring for peers in difficulty), cooperation (active, equitable involvement and responsibility in group tasks), and sharing (openness in offering material help and ideas). Theoretically, the study reinforces the view that prosocial behavior develops through meaningful, structured social interaction; practically, it offers a feasible, low-cost model of personal-social guidance that supports

character education and the Sustainable Development Goals. The study recommends that school counselors adopt discussion-based group guidance as a systematic service and suggests further research with a broader range of subjects and longitudinal designs that measure the sustainability of behavioral change.

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