

Diversity and Children's Empathy: The Mediating Role of Parent's Prejudice

Shani Safarah Rohmah, Rose Mini Agoes Salim

Universitas Indonesia
shani.safarah@ui.ac.id

Abstract

The high cases of aggressive behavior in the Indonesian primary school indicate the low empathy of children. One of the factors that influence empathy development is the social environment. Furthermore, Indonesian society is very diverse as the social environment of children. Therefore, this study aim was to see the relationship between diversity and child's empathy. Several previous studies provided evidence of a correlation between diversity and prejudice. Some studies also proposed that prejudice attitude of children and parent predicts each other. Additionally, prior researches proved the correlation between prejudice and empathy. Therefore, this study also intended to investigate the mediating role of parent's prejudice attitude on the relationship between diversity and child's empathy. Participants of this research were 233 pairs of parent and child in Jakarta. We measured the variables using the adapted Kids' Empathy Development Scale, the adaptation of blatant prejudice scale, and the scale of opportunities for contact. This study showed that the direct effect of diversity on children empathy was not statistically significant, but the parent's prejudice attitude confirmed to mediate the relationship. Our findings indicate that diversity does not directly affect children's empathy, but diversity influences the parents' prejudice attitude which then affects the children's empathy.

Keywords: diversity, empathy, prejudice

1. INTRODUCTION

In the first quarter of 2019, the results of supervision by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) showed that the most common cases in the educational environment were bullying (Maradewa, 2019). Furthermore, KPAI revealed that the highest number of bullying occurred at the level of primary education at 67%. 6-8 years old children have been able to identify their identities and others among their diverse environments (Gerasimova, Krasova, & Chuikova, 2018). The occurrence of bullying and aggressive behavior is closely related to the low empathy of people in the bullying environment (Wang, Lei, Yang, Gao, & Zhao, 2017). Contrarily they have been able to realize the relationship between their feelings and the feelings of others to empathize (Gerasimova et al., 2018). This explanation indicates that Indonesian children are less empathetic.

Earlier theorist, such Eisenberg, Feshbach, and Hoffman proposed that empathy could inhibit aggressive behavior (Stanger, Kavussanu, McIntyre, & Ring, 2016). Moreover, empathy is considered as the motivator of altruism and influencing prosocial development and actions (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Knafo-Noam, 2015). Another study showed that an empathetic person has a positive attitude towards the discriminated groups (Monroe & Martinez-Mart, 2008). Empathy is a crucial element of socio-emotional development in children (Sánchez-Pérez, Fuentes, Jolliffe, & González-Salinas, 2014).

From various definitions of empathy, this study used a consensus which concluded that the best way to interpret empathy is to look at two components (Sánchez-Pérez et al., 2014). Those components are cognitive and affective empathy. Cognitive empathy was defined as a person's ability to understand other people's feelings and is a cognitive process during the understanding of another person's mental state (Sánchez-Pérez et al., 2014). Whereas affective-empathy is the tendency to feel certain emotions in response to other's affective states (Sánchez-Pérez et al., 2014). Therefore this study we use the definition of empathy as an affective response that comes from understanding the emotional state of others and resembling what the person feels (Eisenberg, 2010) In the first quarter of 2019, the results of supervision by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) showed that the most common cases in the educational environment were bullying (Maradewa, 2019). Furthermore, KPAI revealed that the highest number of bullying occurred at the level of primary education at 67%. 6-8 years old children have been able to identify their identities and others among their diverse environments (Gerasimova, Krasova, & Chuikova, 2018). The occurrence of bullying and aggressive behavior is closely related to the low empathy of people in the bullying environment (Wang, Lei, Yang, Gao, & Zhao, 2017). Contrarily they have been able to realize the relationship between their feelings and the feelings of others to empathize (Gerasimova et al., 2018). This explanation indicates that Indonesian children are less empathetic.

Earlier theorist, such Eisenberg, Feshbach, and Hoffman proposed that empathy could inhibit aggressive behavior

(Stanger, Kavussanu, McIntyre, & Ring, 2016). Moreover, empathy is considered as the motivator of altruism and influencing prosocial development and actions (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Knafo-Noam, 2015). Another study showed that an empathetic person has a positive attitude towards the discriminated groups (Monroe & Martinez-Mart, 2008). Empathy is a crucial element of socio-emotional development in children (Sánchez-Pérez, Fuentes, Jolliffe, & González-Salinas, 2014).

From various definitions of empathy, this study used a consensus which concluded that the best way to interpret empathy is to look at two components (Sánchez-Pérez et al., 2014). Those components are cognitive and affective empathy. Cognitive empathy was defined as a person's ability to understand other people's feelings and is a cognitive process during the understanding of another person's mental state (Sánchez-Pérez et al., 2014). Whereas affective-empathy is the tendency to feel certain emotions in response to other's affective states (Sánchez-Pérez et al., 2014). Therefore this study we use the definition of empathy as an affective response that comes from understanding the emotional state of others and resembling what the person feels (Eisenberg, 2010).

Empathy is influenced by external and internal factors (McDonald & Messinger, 2011). Children at early school age (6-8 years old) are much influenced by their environments such as family and school environments (Decety, 2015). However, Indonesia is a plural nation consisted of various ethnic groups and religions where Muslims are the majority religion (Indonesia.go.id, 2018). Prior studies have shown a positive correlation between diversity and empathy (Brown, Tam, & Aboud, 2018). Another study showed empathy improvement after participating in diversity courses (Remer, 2008). In line with those studies, experimental research conducted by Sorensen (2010) showed that there was an increment in empathy for participants who made contact in the intergroup dialogue program. The present study aimed to see the relationship between the diversity of extended family and living environments in Indonesian society on the empathy of children.

Contact hypothesis argued that diversity encourages intergroup contact which gives understanding to one another and reduces prejudice (Laurence, 2014). On the other hand, the threat hypothesis argued that diversity increases prejudice and leads to intergroup conflict (Laurence, 2014). Previous studies provided evidence that diversity correlated to prejudice both positively and negatively (Rapp & Freitag, 2015).

The study conducted by Odenweller and Harris (2018) showed that there is prejudice transmission from parents to children through the child's identification of their parents. In line with the study, the result of research by Pirchio, Passiatore, Panno, Maricchiolo, and Carrus (2018) showed that parents' prejudice predicts children's prejudice regardless of the parenting style applied. Miklikowska (2016) through his longitudinal study proposed that the relationship between parents' and child's prejudice is a bidirectional relationship.

Further, Miklikowska (2017) provided evidence that empathy plays an important role in the formation of prejudice. Moreover, previous research has shown an association between prejudice attitudes towards outgroups and empathy

Turner et al., (2007). An experimental study involving empathy showed positive changes in participants' prejudice (Monroe & Martinez-Mart, 2008). Based on the elaboration of the evidence that diversity correlated to prejudice moreover prejudice correlated to empathy. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the role of parent's prejudice attitude on the relationship between diversity and child empathy.

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

This study used a purposive sampling technique, so the research subject based on accessibility and by the characteristics needed (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Parental data was taken by employing a booklet of the questionnaire with informed consent inside. We measured the children's empathy in their schools after parents returned the informed consent. There were three Islamic schools and three public schools (2-5 % non-Muslims) involved. Our participants were 223 children-parent and we excluded 10 pairs of participants' data due to an incomplete score. Therefore, we used 223 pairs of data in the analysis. We also provided cereals as the incentive to students and a pen for parents.

2.2 Measurements

2.2.1 Child's Empathy

We measured the child's empathy using the adaptation of the Kids' Empathy Development Scale that consisted of 8 items (Reid et al., 2013). The internal consistency of the measurement was 0.61 in our sample. Each item provided visual scenario and a set of answer choices. Each question requires participants to express the character's emotions (cognitive empathy) and their feelings about the scenario (affective empathy).

Children filled an online form by electronic media (laptop or tablet) and headsets in measurements. There was a video that showed how to answer the questions then we double checked the children's understanding before it started. We gave visual scenarios and supported by audio that reads the story and the question. Then the children answered by clicking one of the options according to what they thought and felt. This method is done to avoid the occurrence of children conformity to researchers and to avoid bias caused by differences in children's reading ability.

2.2.2 Diversity

This study defined diversity as the opportunity for contact that describes exposure to outgroups in the neighborhood and extended families (Turner et al., 2007). So parents and children participants have the equivalent score of opportunity for contact. This measurement was about the proportion of outgroup members in participants' neighborhood and

extended family (1 = none, 5 = almost all). This study refers to Muslims as ingroup and other religions as outgroups.

2.2.3 Parents’ Prejudice Attitude

The short form of Blatant Prejudice Scale that consisted of 6 items measured the parent's prejudice attitude (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). We adapted this measurement to get in Indonesian culture and context. The internal consistency of the scale is 65 in our sample. Items are scored by 6 point scales that a higher score indicating more prejudice.

2.3 Data Analysis

We first tested the relationship between each pair of variables used Pearson’s bivariate correlation. Then we examined the mediating role of parent’s prejudice attitude on the relationship between diversity and child’s empathy by applying the PROCESS macro of Hayes for SPSS. In the mediation analysis, we will test the direct and indirect effects. Conclusion of the role of the mediator is if the results of the analysis reveal significant indirect effects with 95% confidence intervals.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlation between each pair of variables. The results of this bivariate correlation give us the idea of the relationship between variables. Our results show that diversity is not significantly correlated to child empathy ($r = .09, p > .05$), whereas prior studies have shown that diversity influenced empathy (Remer, 2008; Sorensen, 2010). This result indicates that although Indonesian people have a high 'opportunity for contact' with their outgroups, it does not always lead to outgroup perspective-taking. So that children's empathy is not automatically high in diverse environments. Therefore, we need to explore how diversity affects children's empathy.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations between Each Pair Variables

Variable	M	S	1	2	3
Opportunity for contact	7.74	.56	–		
Child’s empathy	6.57	.55	.09	–	
Parent’s prejudice attitude	14.39	.20	-.26**	-.16*	–

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

This study result also showed us the significant negative relationship between the opportunity for contact and the parent's prejudice attitude. This means that the increment in the opportunity to interact with the outgroup goes hand in

hand with a decrement in the parent's prejudice attitude ($r = -.26, p < .01$). These findings show us that contact theory suits the Indonesian society. This also indicates that intergroup interactions within extended families and neighborhoods in Indonesia (1) are equal, (2) have common experiences and goals, and (3) frequent, long-lasting, and intensive (Janmaat, 2012). Our findings supported by the idea of the collective culture of Indonesian society (Purba, Oostrom, Van Der Molen, & Born, 2015).

Parent's prejudice attitude also inversely correlated with children empathy ($r = -.16, p < .05$). This relationship shows that high parents' prejudice attitude coincides with low children empathy. This study result indicates the influence of parent's attitudes and values on child empathy. Further saying, it supports the argument of the existence of intergeneration transmission of parent's prejudice attitude to their children (Miklikowska, 2016; Odenweller & Harris, 2018; Pirchio et al., 2018). The intergenerational transmission of prejudice might occur because of the imitation and conformity that children make in looking at parents’ values (Blake, Corbit, Callaghan, & Warneken, 2016; Kim, Chen, Smetana, & Greenberger, 2016). It also justifies the existence of a relationship between prejudice and one's empathy (Monroe & Martinez-Mart, 2008; Turner et al., 2007). The bivariate relationship between these variables illustrates the mediating role of parent’s prejudice attitude on the relationship between children's diversity and empathy.

As we expected, the study result of simple mediation analysis shows that the diversity indirectly influenced children empathy through its effect on parent's prejudice attitude. As can be seen in Table 2, parents in the environment that gave more opportunities for intergroup contact had lower prejudice attitudes towards outgroup members ($B = -1.23, p < .01$), and low-prejudiced parents transmitted that value to their children so that their children could be more empathetic ($B = -.06, p < .05$). A bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect ($IE = .07, p < .05$) based on 10,000 bootstrap samples. This study provides no evidence that diversity influences children's empathy without its influence on parent's prejudice attitudes ($DE = 0.08, p = 0.49$).

Table 2. Result from multiple regression predicting outgroups contact

Variable	Parent’s prejudice attitude		Child’s empathy	
	B	SE	B	SE
Opportunity for contact	-1.23**	.31	.08	.12
Parent’s prejudice attitude			-.06*	.03
(Constant)	18.27**	1.02	7.10**	.60
F	15.83**		3.20*	
R ²	.07		.03	

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients are given. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Prior studies provided evidence that empathy can make someone perceive heterogeneity as challenges and could provide benefits (Hofhuis, Zee, & Otten, 2015). This research suggests Indonesian society to perceive the differences as opportunities. Communal culture in Indonesian society needs to be maintained so that we can still interact with outgroups and we will be less prejudice. Moreover, the research conducted by Miklikowska (2017) proposed that low-prejudice people expected to be more open in facing differences and that is closely associated with empathy. Our mediation analysis show that prejudice transmits its influence on empathy, therefore we also suggest to revisiting the unidirectional relationship of empathy and prejudice. After all, diversity in Indonesia is inevitable, so the education system better to use it to promote children's empathy. Adults can train children's empathy by understanding differences and practices to look at situations from the point of view of outgroups. Increasing empathy among Indonesian children is expected to reduce the level of aggressiveness and improve prosocial behavior.

4. CONCLUSION

This study still has limitation such as the absence of measurement of prejudice in children. To get a more detailed picture of the relationship between diversity and child empathy, might future research measure children's prejudice attitudes.

This study did not obtain evidence of the relationship between diversity and child empathy. However, we proved that diversity inversely correlated with parent's prejudice attitude in the context of Indonesian society. We also provide evidence of a negative correlation between parent's prejudice attitude and children empathy. Finally, this study explain how diversity transmits their effect on child empathy, specifically through influencing parents' prejudice.

5. REFERENCES

- Brown, C., Tam, M., & Aboud, F. (2018). Ethnic prejudice in young children in Indonesia: Intervention attempts using multicultural friendship stories. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 50(1), 67–84. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-018-0214-z>
- Decety, J. (2015). The neural pathways, development and functions of empathy. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 3(April), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2014.12.001>
- Eisenberg, N. (2010). Empathy-related responding: Associations with prosocial behavior, aggression, and intergroup relations. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 4(1), 143–180.
- Eisenberg, N., Spinrad, T. L., & Knafo-Noam, A. (2015). Prosocial development. In *Handbook of child Psychology and Developmental Science* (pp. 1–47). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118963418.childpsy315>
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Gerasimova, E. N., Krasova, T. D., & Chuikova, Z. V. (2018). Specificity of ethnic tolerance development in children of primary school age. *Journal of Fundamental and Applied Sciences*, 10(5S), 1029–1039.
- Hofhuis, J., Zee, K. I. Van Der, & Otten, S. (2015). Measuring employee perception on the effects of cultural diversity at work: Development of the Benefits and Threats of Diversity Scale. *Quality & Quantity*, 49(1), 177–201. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-013-9981-7>
- Indonesia.go.id. (2018, August 16). *Keragaman Indonesia*. Retrieved from Indonesia.go.id: <https://indonesia.go.id/>
- Janmaat, J. G. (2012). The effect of classroom diversity on tolerance and participation in England, Sweden and Germany. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38(1), 21–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2012.640007>
- Laurence, J. (2014). Reconciling the contact and threat hypotheses: Does ethnic diversity strengthen or weaken community inter-ethnic relations? *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 37(8), 1328–1349. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2013.788727>
- Maradewa, R. (2019, May 4). *KPAI: 67 Persen Kekerasan Bidang Pendidikan Terjadi di Jenjang SD*. Retrieved from Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia: ww.kpai.go.id
- Mcdonald, N. M., & Messinger, D. S. (2011). The development of empathy: How, when, and why. *Moral Behavior and Free Will: A Neurobiological and Philosophical Approach*, 341–368.
- Miklikowska, M. (2016). Like parent, like child? Development of prejudice and tolerance towards immigrants. *British Journal of Psychology*, 107, 95–116. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjop.12124>
- Miklikowska, M. (2017). Development of anti-immigrant attitudes in adolescence: The role of parents, peers, intergroup friendships, and empathy. *British Journal of Psychology*, 108(3), 626–648. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjop.12236>
- Monroe, K. R., & Martinez-Mart, M. L. (2008). Empathy, prejudice, and fostering tolerance. *PS - Political Science and Politics*, 41(4), 857–863. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096508081122>
- Odenweller, K. G., & Harris, T. M. (2018). Intergroup socialization: The influence of parents' family communication patterns on adult children's racial prejudice and tolerance. *Communication Quarterly*, 00(00), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2018.1452766>
- Pettigrew, T. F., & Meertens, R. W. (1995). Subtle and blatant prejudice in western Europe. *European Journal of*

Social Psychology, 25(1), 57–75.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420250106>

- Pirchio, S., Passiatore, Y., Panno, A., Maricchiolo, F., & Carrus, G. (2018). A chip off the old block: Parents' subtle ethnic prejudice predicts children's implicit prejudice. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9(110), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00110>
- Purba, D. E., Oostrom, J. K., Van Der Molen, H. T., & Born, M. P. (2015). Personality and organizational citizenship behavior in Indonesia: The mediating effect of affective commitment. *Asian Business and Management*, 14(2), 147–170. <https://doi.org/10.1057/abm.2014.20>
- Rapp, C., & Freitag, M. (2015). Teaching tolerance? Associational diversity and tolerance formation. *Political Studies*, 63(5), 1031–1051. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12142>
- Reid, C., Davis, H., Horlin, C., Anderson, M., Baughman, N., & Campbell, C. (2013). The Kids' Empathic Development Scale (KEDS): A multi-dimensional measure of empathy in primary school-aged children. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 31(2), 231–256. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjdp.12002>
- Remer, R. R. (2008). *Influence of diversity courses on undergraduates' ethnocultural empathy, openness to diversity, and awareness of privilege and oppression within a mastery or performance classroom context*. University of Kentucky.
- Sánchez-Pérez, N., Fuentes, L. J., Jolliffe, D., & González-Salinas, C. (2014). Assessing children's empathy through a Spanish adaptation of the Basic Empathy Scale: Parent's and child's report forms. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5(DEC), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01438>
- Sorensen, N. A. (2010). *The road of empathy: Dialogic pathways for engaging diversity and improving intergroup relations*. University of Michigan.
- Stanger, N., Kavussanu, M., McIntyre, D., & Ring, C. (2016). Empathy inhibits aggression in competition: The role of profocation, emotion, and gender. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 38(1), 4–14.
- Turner, R. N., Hewstone, M., & Voci, A. (2007). Reducing explicit and implicit outgroup prejudice via direct and extended contact: The mediating role of self-disclosure and intergroup anxiety. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 93(3), 369–388. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.93.3.369>
- Wang, X., Lei, L., Yang, J., Gao, L., & Zhao, F. (2017). Moral disengagement as mediator and moderator of the relation between empathy and aggression among Chinese male juvenile delinquents. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, 48(2), 316–326.