

## **Fostering Altruism in Elementary School**

**Iklima Istiqomah, Mamat Supriatna, Nandang Budiman**

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia  
*iklima.istiqomah@upi.edu*

### **Abstract**

Altruism is an important factor in maintaining the continuity of social life in society, especially in high diversity communities such as Indonesia. Research shows individuals tend to show altruistic behavior in other people who have similarities with them, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, and race so that altruism in a multicultural environment tends to be difficult to be formed. Therefore, altruism needs to be developed early in school. The right age to develop altruism is at the age of 11-12 years or in the fifth grade of elementary school. So it can be assumed that the effort to develop altruism will be more effective if done in elementary schools. This article was written to explore various efforts to develop altruism that can be done at the elementary school level based on the theory of Batson's altruistic empathy hypothesis. This is because the helping behavior carried out on the basis of empathy can certainly be included in the altruist category.

**Keywords:** altruism, empathy, elementary school

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Altruism is essential in our lives so that our community can thrive and succeed as a whole. The lack of altruism in individuals can disrupt the continuity of social life in society (Zwick & Fletcher, 2014), to enable the creation of chaos, especially in countries that have cultural diversity such as Indonesia. Besides, altruism has very significant implications in the process of developing people's collective well-being (Buragohain & Senapati, 2016). Therefore, altruism needs to be developed early in school (Scourfield et al., 2004; Sutton, Utting, & Farrington, 2006). The right age to develop altruism according to Brocas, Carillo, & Kodaverdian (2017) is at the age of 11-12 years or in the fifth grade of elementary school because 11-12 years old is a turning point where children can maintain their altruistic behavior. So, it can be assumed that the effort to develop altruism will be more effective if done in elementary schools.

Developing altruism in a society with high diversity tends to be difficult to do. Based on the level of altruism proposed by Zwick & Fletcher (2014) Indonesian society must at least have altruism at the fifth level, which is species altruism. At this level, individuals show altruism based on more common similarity, which is as human, so that they will show their altruism to other humans regardless of differences in gender, race, ethnicity, and religion.

In education, altruism is one of the characters to be achieved through classroom learning and extracurricular activities. In Indonesia, character-building efforts are in the form of *Gerakan Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter* (Character Education Strengthening Movement), which is a program of

the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture since 2016. On the Character Education Strengthening Movement road map, schools should have been implementing character education strengthening program in full and independently by prioritizing the character traits that each school wants to carry out following the school's vision and mission.

There are five main characters that are the priorities of the Character Education Strengthening Movement, namely religious, nationalist, cooperation, integrity, and autonomy. The characters included in the altruism of the five characters are religious, nationalist, and cooperation. Altruism is related to sincerity in Islam, besides that in Christianity, there are also teachings to accept with gratitude and give with sincerity. Also, altruism teaches to place the interests of others and groups above personal interests, this relates to the nationalist character shown by behavior that is concerned with the interests of the nation and groups above personal interests. Furthermore, altruism is also related to cooperation, which is an act of helping one another to achieve a common goal.

Research shows that empathy is a determinant of altruism (Farsides, 2007; Fry & Runyan, 2017; Li, Jiang, Yong, & Zhou, 2018). In addition, it is more likely for empathetic individuals to provide help to people in need (Dixon, 2011; Gordon, 2009). That means individuals who have high empathy tend to have high altruism too. So, it can be concluded that one of the effort to develop altruism is to increase people's empathy. The empathy referred to by Farsides (2007), Fry and Runyan (2017) and Li et al. (2018) is similar to the opinion of Batson (2011), which is empathic concern. Research shows that empathy is a competency that can be taught (Riess, 2017). This is because humans have the capacity to understand and resonate with the suffering of others, which allows us to feel and understand their pain

(Riess, 2017). Therefore, some experts compiled an empathy training program as an effort to improve prosocial behavior, reduce aggression and bullying in schools (Sohravardi, Bafrooei, & Fallah, 2015; Sahin, 2012). However, an empathy training program specifically designed to develop altruism in elementary schools has not been a concern. This article will discuss what factors need to be considered in developing altruism through an empathy training program in elementary schools.

## 2. DEFINING ALTRUISM

The term Altruism was first put forward by Auguste Comte, which was defined as "vivre pour atrui" which is life for others (Campbell, 2006). Comte even revealed that individuals who do not love anything outside themselves, and live only for themselves, are in fact condemned in sad ignorance and uncontrolled happiness (Campbell, 2006). Comte's extreme statement then led to much debate so that the meaning of altruism then moves away from its original meaning so that altruism can be more accepted in society.

In its development, some experts have tried to express their opinions regarding the definition of altruism which was then grouped by Feigin, Owens, and Goodyear-Smith (2018) become pseudo-altruistic and altruistic. The pseudo-altruistic approach has dominated psychology theory. Altruism is better known as altruistic behavior, which is ultimately motivated by selfish motivation, which is to obtain personal welfare. Altruism is thus redefined to fit the argument that all human actions are to serve themselves. While the altruistic approach retains the meaning of altruism referred by Comte. Motivation is directed towards the ultimate goal to improve others well-being and any feeling of self-appreciation or alleviation of personal pressure is considered a side effect. The existence of 'traits' of altruism and the type of 'altruistic personality' becomes possible (Feigin et al., 2018).

The altruism theory that will be used as a reference in this study is included in the altruistic category, which is trying to maintain the meaning of the altruism referred by Comte but redefined so that it can be more acceptable. Myers and Twenge put the first theory forward. Altruism according to Myers and Twenge (2016, 2018) is a motive to improve the welfare of others without expecting compensation. Altruism behavior can arise easily if other people who will be prospered (helped) have the same characteristics. For example, an individual tends to help people who have the same religion as themselves compared to those who have different religions. From the explanation above, Myers (1996) concluded that altruism would easily occur in the presence of:

- a. Social responsibility, which mean that someone feels they have a social responsibility with what is happening around them.
- b. Personal satisfaction and suffering, which mean that someone will feel personal satisfaction when he helps people who are in trouble and will feel uncomfortable if he does not help the person.
- c. Kin selection, meaning that the victim or person who needs help has similar characteristics with him.

Batson, known as the empathy-altruism hypothesis, put the next theory forward. Batson views altruism as a motivation. More clearly Batson (2011) argues that altruism is a motivational state with the ultimate goal of improving the welfare of others. This altruistic motivation arises because of empathic concern. Empathic concern arises due to two conditions, when individuals consider others to be in need of help and concern for the well-being of that person. These two conditions are similar to the altruism mechanism proposed by Niezink (2008), the cognitive mechanism and the emotional mechanism. The cognitive mechanism of altruism is perspective taking, while the emotional mechanism is empathy.

Furthermore Smith, Bresnahan, & Smith (2013) defines altruism as a behavior intended to benefit others, more than just the ability to socialize or fulfill roles in society (parents, teachers, etc.). With his colleagues, Smith et al. (2013) found five main aspects of altruism namely concern, cost, benefits for recipient, empathy, and ease of escape. Concern means that the individual cares about others welfare. Cost means individuals willing to sacrifice to help people in need, whether in the form of material, time, or energy. Benefits for recipient means that individuals know the benefits of their actions towards people who need help. Empathy means that the individual gives help because they understand and feel the feelings of people who need help. Finally, ease of escape, which means the situation when help is needed. The easier it is for individuals to avoid helping, the higher their altruism if the individual continues to help.

From the explanation above it can be concluded that altruism is a behavior that is beneficial to help others without expecting anything in return. Aspects revealed in these helpful behaviors are cognitive, affective, and psychomotor.

Table 1.  
The Aspect of Altruism

Cognitive Aspect		Affective Aspect		Psychomotor Aspect	
1	Identify the needs of people who need help	1	Paying Attention to people in need	1	Helping without expecting reward
2	Knowing the risks that must be taken when helping other people and the benefits of their actions towards that person	2	Caring for the situation of people who need help	2	Provide material, time, or energy to help
3	Understanding the feelings of people who need help and their needs.	3	Feel happy when helping others, and feel guilty when not helping	3	Having inviations to help
		4	Feel what is felt by people who need help	4	Engaging in social activities (social service, community service, etc.)

### 3. EMPATHY

Empathy is an emotional reaction in certain situations (Wilson et al., 1999). Empathy refers to emotions that are influenced by others or affective resonance (de Waal, 2008). Goleman (2007) states that there are three types of empathy that is cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, and empathic concern. Cognitive empathy only understands how other people feel and what they might think. Sometimes called perspective taking, this kind of empathy can help in negotiating or motivating others. A study at the University of Birmingham found that managers who were good at taking perspective were able to move workers to give their best efforts. Emotional empathy is when you can feel the emotions experienced by other people as if the emotions can be contagious. While empathic concern not only understands and feels the emotions felt by others, but also spontaneously moves to help if needed.

Based on Hoffman's developmental stages of empathy (as cited in Schaffer, 1996), at the age 11-12 years a child begins to realize that other people's feelings may not only be due to the situation that occurred at that time but originated from a more durable life situation. Empathy can also be found with respect for all groups of people (the poor, the oppressed, etc.) and thus transcends direct experience. So that the development program of empathy at this age can be assumed to be effective in improving student altruism.

### 4. EMPATHY TRAINING PROGRAM IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Empathy is a complex concept, so to understand it we recognize cognitive empathy, affective empathy, and empathic care. Cognitive empathy is the ability of individuals to accurately understand and provide the right response to the thoughts and feelings of others, while affective empathy is a state of feeling the true feelings of others as if we are in the position of that person (Butters, 2010).

Cognitive empathy is often the target of training programs. In the empathy training program individuals are taught to recognize emotions and respond appropriately as social skills. The main assumption of most empathy training programs according to Butters (2010) is to empathize with others creating emotional experiences shared, this experience becomes the basis for building trust and affiliation, while empathizing with others also prevents individuals from hurting others because he understand how it feels to be in that position.

The empathy training program has been implemented before in elementary school students as an effort to reduce aggression and bullying (Sohravardi, Bafroei, & Fallah, 2015; Sahin, 2012). However, an empathy training program that is designed to develop altruism in elementary schools have not been a concern though empathy is known as a determinant of altruism. Therefore, an empathy training program specifically designed to improve altruism needs to be made. The factors that need to be considered in designing an

altruism training program in elementary schools are the development of student empathy. Activities in the empathy training program need to be designed and adapted to the development of student empathy, especially in the type of cognitive empathy. This is because some students experience different developments with other students, so it should be noted as individual differences in cognitive development. Furthermore, it should be noted that experiencing empathy directly by meeting people who need help (victims of natural disasters, orphanages, etc.) will be more effective in training students' empathy. However, if it is not possible to carry out these activities, we can replace them by displaying videos from YouTube. Then, the next thing to note is that this program needs to develop three types of empathy, cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, and empathic concern in sequence. This is because these three empathy are needed in different situations, so that having these three types of empathy in full can effectively improve student altruism.

### 5. CONCLUSION

As explained in the previous point, most empathy training programs are focused on increasing cognitive empathy, reducing aggressive behavior, and bullying at school. While the empathy training program to develop student, altruism has not been a concern, so it is necessary to design an empathy training program specifically designed to develop student altruism. The program should be adapted to the characteristics of students, environmental conditions and the surrounding culture. In the long term, programs that have been created can be used as a benchmark for example in developing character independently in school.

### 6. REFERENCES

- Batson, C. D. (2011). *Altruism in humans*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Buragohain, P., & Senapati, N. (2016). Teaching altruistic behaviour among adolescent students. *SSRG International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3(6), 15–20.
- Butters, R. P. (2010). A meta-analysis of empathy training programs for client populations. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, 71(4-A), 1443.
- Brocas, I., Carrillo, J. D., & Kodaverdian, N. (2017, September). Altruism and strategic giving in children and adolescents. *CEPR*. Retrieved From: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3035284>.
- Campbell, R. L. (2006). Altruism in Auguste Comte and Ayn Rand did Rand misunderstand altruism?. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*, 7(2), 357–369.
- de Waal, F. B. M. (2008). Putting the altruism back into altruism: The evolution of empathy. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 59, 279-300.

- Dixon, A. (2011, May 22). Can empathy reduce racism?. *Greater Good Magazine*. Retrieved from: [http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/empathyreduces\\_racism/](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/empathyreduces_racism/).
- Farsides, T. (2007). The psychology of altruism. *The Psychologist*, 20(8), 474-477.
- Feigin, S., Owens, G., & Goodyear-Smith, F. (2018). Theories of human altruism: A systematic review. *Journal of Psychiatry and Brain Functions*, 1(1), 5.
- Fry, B. N., & Runyan, J. D. (2018). Teaching empathic concern and altruism in the smartphone age. *Journal of Moral Education*, 47(1), 1-16. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2017.1374932>.
- Goleman, D. (2007). *Social intelligence: The new science of human relationships*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Gordon, M. (2009). *Roots of empathy*. New York: The Experiment LLC.
- Li, R., Jiang, T., Yong, J., & Zhou, H. (2018). College students' interpersonal relationship and empathy level predict internet altruistic behavior - empathy level and online social support as mediators. *Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*, 7(1), 1-7. doi:<https://doi.org/10.11648/j.pbs.20180701.11>.
- Niezink, L. W. (2008). *Considering others in need: on altruism, empathy, and perspective taking*. German: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.
- Riess, H. (2017). The science of empathy. *Journal of Patient Experience*, 4(2), 74-77. DOI: 10.1177/2374373517699267.
- Sahin, M. (2012). An Investigation into the efficiency of empathy training program on preventing bullying in primary school. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34(7), 1325-1330. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.03.013>
- Schaffer, H.R. (1996). *Social development*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Scourfield, J., John, B., Martin, N. & McGuffin, P. (2004). The development of prosocial behavior in children and adolescents: A twin study. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 45, 927-935.
- Smith, S. W., Bresnahan, M. J., & Smith, S. L. (2013). Application of the altruistic behavior coding scheme to cross-cultural contexts. *World Cultures eJournal*, 18(1), 1-12.
- Sohravardi, B. B. H., Bafrooei, K. B., & Fallah, M. H. (2015). The effect of empathy training programs on aggression and compatibility students of elementary school in Yazd, center of Iran. *International Journal of Pediatrics*, 3(4), 841-851. doi: 10.22038/ijp.2015.4694.
- Sutton, C., Utting, D. & Farrington, D. (2006). Nipping criminality in the bud. *The Psychologist*, 19, 470-475.
- Wilson, B. J., Linz, D., Federman, J., Smith, S., Paul, B., Nathanson, A., ... & Lingsweiler, R. (1999). *The choices and consequences evaluation*. Santa Barbara, CA: Center for Communication and Social Policy.
- Zwick, M., & Fletcher, J. A. (2014). Levels of altruism. *Biological Theory*, 9(1), 100-107. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13752-013-0145-8>.