

## *Original Paper*

# A Systematic Review of the Impact of School Education on Children's Ethnic Prejudice

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### ***Abstract***

*Ethnic prejudice may arise from a very young age, so it is important to pay attention to early school education. A systematic review is carried out to discuss whether school education can have an impact on reducing young children's ethnic prejudice through empirical research. Based on PRISMA, 7 studies that meet the requirements were selected, followed by a quality assessment. 6 studies show that school education can have a positive impact on reducing young children's ethnic prejudice and 1 study shows no effect on reducing prejudice. Generally, three kinds of methods are used in school education to reduce children's ethnic prejudice, that is, intergroup contact, imagination, and multimedia. The result shows that school education can have a positive impact on reducing young children's ethnic prejudice by increasing their empathy, and this kind of impact is more effective for older children.*

### ***Keywords***

*Ethnic prejudice, school education, systematic review*

## **1. Introduction**

Prejudice is a preconceived view of one group before it fully and correctly understands another group, which arises only because one person belongs to another group (Abrams, 2010). Ethnic prejudice is a negative attitude, especially against other races (Keenan et al., 2016). Most ethnic prejudice is a prejudice of the majority which is white people in most cases against the minority, such as ethnic groups from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This form of prejudice may cause social stigmatization and discrimination of minorities by the majority and even lead to physical attacks against minorities, or 'hate violence' in other words (Barnes & Ephross, 1994). With the rise of migration and globalization, the whole social environment tends to be diversified, which may lead to an increase in communication between various ethnic groups (Titzmann & Jugert, 2019). However, ethnic prejudice still exists all over the world. For example, violence and bullying related to racial conflicts are increasing in

university campuses since the 2016 presidential election in the United States (Garibay et al., 2020). Garcia et al. (2011) mention racially themed parties which mean a social activity that invites participants to dress up as representative of racial stereotypes or laugh at any race or ethnic group.

Unfortunately, many universities have held such parties, and this is only one of the bad results caused by racial prejudice.

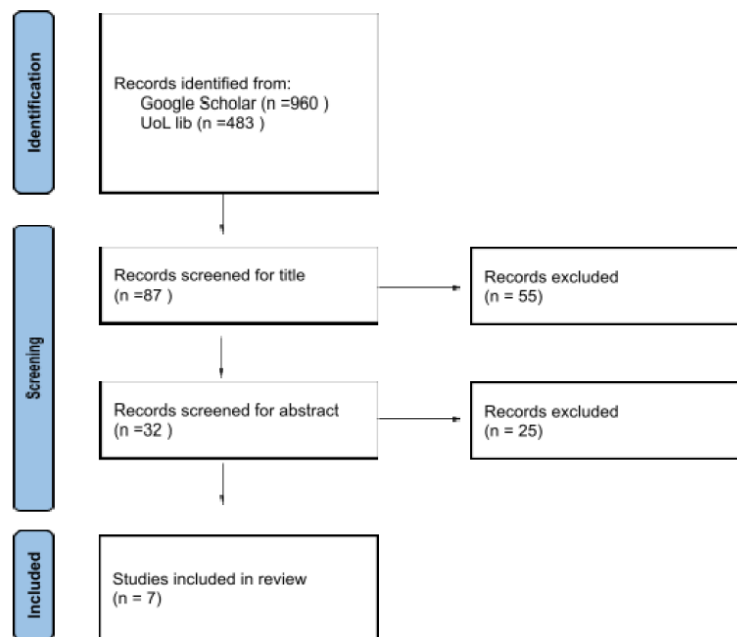
Also, when focusing on ethnic prejudice among children, it is discovered that racial discrimination in schools may have a detrimental impact on the academic performance of the discriminated (Titzmann & Jugert, 2019). And research shows that if such discrimination comes from peers, the harm of discrimination will be greater and leave a deeper shadow (Verkuyten, 2002). A study has shown that racial prejudice in children occurs and increases between the ages of 3 and 6 (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). Since early childhood lays the foundation for future attitudes and behaviors, it is important to focus on children's education (Aboud, 2012). It is suggested that five kinds of intervention can be used in school education, that is, cognitive development approaches, socio-emotional development approaches, social learning approaches, awareness-raising approaches, and anti-bias approaches (Keenan et al., 2016). Although some researchers have already discussed the role of education in reducing people's racial prejudice, few researchers have focused on analyzing the role of education in children and systematically analyzing them. Also, most of these studies generalize education as a process of general education for children without specifically analyzing the different approaches to education. Thus, this systematic review aims to systematically find out whether school education can have an impact on reducing young children's ethnic prejudice through empirical research.

## 2. Method

All searches for review articles are carried out in Google Scholar and the University of Liverpool Library. Key search terms include "ethnic prejudice", "prejudice reduction", "children", "education", and "school education". Alternative search terms include "racial prejudice", "racial bias", "anti-bias", "child", "young children", "intervention", "multicultural curriculum", and "empathy training".

Studies will be included if they fit 4 criteria. First, they have to include children between 3 to 11 years old. Second, they have to assess at least one method used in school education and at least one kind of children's attitude or social behavior towards ethnic minorities. Third, they have to provide the results of quantitative analysis. Fourth, studies have to take place in school. Studies will be excluded for 5 reasons. First, they will be banned if children participating in the study are not between 3 and 11 years old. Second, they will be excluded if they do not assess at least one method used in school education or at least one kind of children's attitude or social behavior. Third, they will be excluded if they talk about prejudice but have nothing to do with ethnic prejudice. Fourth, they will be excluded if they do not provide the results of quantitative analysis. Fifth, they will be banned if studies do not take place in school.

PRISMA flowchart is used to showcase the article identification and selection process. The initial search finds 1260 articles in Google Scholar and 483 articles in the University of Liverpool Library. After screening the title, 87 articles are selected. Then 32 articles are selected by screening the abstract. After screening the entire article, 25 articles that do not meet the requirements are deleted, some of which are not quantitative research and some do not involve school education. Ultimately, 7 articles that meet the requirements are retained.



**Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart Used to Showcase the Article Identification and Selection Process**

### 3. Results

Table 1 shows the study characteristics and participant characteristics of 7 articles included in this systematic review. It includes the authors, publication date, country of study, focus of the study, number of participants, age, and gender composition. Both Berger et al. (2016) and Berger et al. (2018) focused on the racial prejudice of

Israeli-Jewish children against Palestinians in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Five other studies focused on prejudice between white people and other ethnic minorities or local racial prejudice against immigrants or refugees. All studies have at least one educational program to test whether it can reduce prejudice or not. All studies have a sufficient sample size and participants are aged between 3 and 11 years old. Gender distribution is relatively average.

**Table 1. Study Characteristics and Participant Characteristics**

Study	Country	General study focus	Participants	Age	Sex
Berger et al. (2016)	Israel	ECEP reducing prejudicial attitude	322 students (161= intervention group 161=control group)	3rd and 4th grades students	Intervention group:F=84 M=77 Control group:F=86 M=75
Berger et al. (2018)	Israel	C2C-I reducing prejudicial attitude	324 students (175=experimental group 149=control group)	Experimental group:M(SD)=9.77(0.81) Control group:M(SD)=9.63(0.73)	Experimental group:F=90 M=85 Control group:F=77 M=72
Gabrielli et al. (2022)	Italy	School program reducing prejudice	77 students (38=experimental group 39=control group)	M(SD)=10 (0.36)	Experimental group:F=19 M=19 Control group:F=15 M=24
Killen et al. (2022)	America	Testing program	DIY 983 students	3rd grades: M(SD)=8.64(0.36) 4th grades: M(SD)=9.65(0.38) 5th grades: M(SD)=10.63(0.36)	F= 502 M= 481
Perkins & Mebert (2005)	America	Multicultural curricula for developing “racial expertise”	79 children	M= 64.1 months	F= 36 M= 43
Stathi et al. (2014)	UK	Testing imagined contact reducing prejudice	129 white children	M= 8 years and 7 months	F= 59 M= 65 Unkown= 5
Vassilopoulos et al. (2020)	Greek	Testing prejudice-reduction group	106 students	M(SD)= 10.57(0.55)	Intervention group:F=28 M=27 Control group:F=22 M=29

ECEP= Extended Class Exchange Program; C2C-I= Call to Care-Israel; DIY=Developing Inclusive Youth;

Table 2 shows the study results of 7 articles included in this systematic review. Overall, all seven studies were based on guiding and educating children in the classroom in an attempt to influence their attitudes toward other ethnic groups. One kind of method was to let children of different races to better understand each other through practical contact. Berger et al. (2016) used Extended Class Exchange Program (ECEP) to enable Israeli-Jewish students and Palestinian students to engage in artistic and sports activities in the same course. The second method was to provide positive guidance to children through classroom multimedia. Killen et al. (2022) used an interactive tool based on the Internet in class to allow children to choose from different scenes involving racial prejudice and experience the feelings of the characters. Vassilopoulos et al. (2020) used several media (e.g. video, story, and picture) to enable children to intuitively see the real life of refugees and their experiences of discrimination. Both two studies reduced children's prejudice against them by making them feel the injustice and unfairness suffered by discriminated races. The third method was to reduce children's prejudice against other races through imagination or mindfulness. Gabrielli et al. (2022) let children draw pictures about their own lives and imagined lives of immigrant children and understand immigrant children's situation through comparison. Berger et al. (2018) made children aware of the importance of giving a helping hand to others and care others through mindfulness and meditation. Stathi et al. (2014) provided some photos of Asian children, asking participants to imagine playing with them. These three studies all increase children's empathy and sympathy for ethnic minorities through imagination. However, only the result of Perkins & Mebert's study (2005) differed from other studies. Perkins and Mebert explored whether multicultural curricula will affect children's racial biases from a macro perspective. It turned out that multicultural curricula allowed children to have more knowledge of race but do not reduce prejudice.

**Table 2. Study Results**

Study	Key finding
Berger et al. (2016)	ECEP is effective in reducing stereotypes and discriminatory tendencies.
Berger et al. (2018)	C2C-I is effective in reducing prejudice and negative stereotypes.
Gabrielli et al. (2022)	School program reduces implicit prejudice.
Killen et al. (2022)	Developing Inclusive Youth helps children realize that ethnic exclusion is wrong.
Perkins & Mebert (2005)	Multicultural curricula allow children to have more knowledge of race but do not reduce prejudice.
Stathi et al. (2014)	Imagined contact increases the willingness of groups to engage and communicate.
Vassilopoulos et al. (2020)	Prejudice-reduction group increases children's acceptance and tolerance towards refugees.

Table 3 shows the quality assessment of 7 articles included in this systematic review. EPHPP is used to check the quality of articles. The global rating shows that these studies have high quality.

**Table 3. EPHPP Quality Assessment Results**

Study	Selection Bias	Study Design	Confounders	Blinding	Data Collection Method	Withdrawals and Dropout	Global rating
Berger et al. (2016)	S	S	M	S	S	S	S
Berger et al. (2018)	M	S	M	S	S	S	S
Gabrielli et al. (2022)	W	S	S	M	S	S	M
Killen et al. (2022)	M	S	M	S	S	S	S
Perkins & Mebert (2005)	M	S	S	M	S	S	S
Stathi et al. (2014)	S	S	M	S	S	S	S
Vassilopoulos et al. (2020)	M	M	S	S	S	S	S

#### 4. Discussion

Based on a systematic review of the 7 articles mentioned above, it can be concluded that school education has a positive effect on reducing children's ethnic prejudice.

Generally, there are three kinds of methods used in school education to reduce children's ethnic prejudice, that is, intergroup contact, imagination, and multimedia. Due to the prejudice arising from insufficient understanding (Abrams, 2010), the commonality of these methods is to enable children to directly or indirectly experience the lives and situations of ethnic minorities, in order to achieve empathy with them. And this empathy can indeed reduce ethnic prejudice. However, Perkins & Mebert's study (2005) showed that multicultural curricula do not reduce prejudice but only allow children to have more knowledge of race. When paying attention to the age of participants in these seven studies, it can be observed that the average age of participants in the other six studies is between 7 and 10 years old. But participants in Perkins & Mebert's study (2005) were preschool children with an average age of 5 years old. Children are more likely to develop ethnic prejudice when their cognitive function is not yet fully developed (Doyle, 1988). Thus, the effectiveness of school education is related to the age of children. Reducing racial discrimination in children through school education is more likely to have an impact on older children compared to preschool children.

All seven included studies have designed reasonable experiments and obtained visual data results. However, some of them had sample sizes that were not large enough to accurately reflect the general situation of an ethnic group. For example, Gabrielli et al. (2022) only invited 77 Italian children in fifth grade. Also, these studies had varying intervention frequencies and durations for the experimental group, and some of them were conducted for too short a time. For example, both Stathi et al. (2014) and Vassilopoulos et al. (2020) interventions lasted for three weeks and were more frequent. But Berger et al. (2016) intervention frequency was once every two months, a total of twelve times, which lasted for a very long time. Besides, most studies only tested short-term effects and cannot guarantee long-term effects.

This systematic review selects 7 high-quality articles based on PRISMA and EPHPP quality assessment tools. They are all based on quantitative research and obtaining visual and clear data results. However, the systematic review still has some limitations. First, it only includes 7 studies, which may lead to biased results, or the results may not be generalizable to a more general level. Besides, the seven selected studies were mostly conducted in European and American countries, neglecting other cultures and populations with insufficient representativeness.

## 5. Conclusion

In all conclusion, this systematic review proves that school education can have a positive impact on reducing young children's ethnic prejudice by increasing their empathy, and this kind of impact is more effective for older children. The result of this systematic review has a certain degree of generalizability for children with the same cultural and living background. Further research and review should first increase the sample size and ethnic diversity of participants. Second, it is necessary to pay more attention to other cultures and populations with insufficient representativeness. Third, the long-term effectiveness of school education in reducing ethnic prejudice still needs to be explored.

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