



Examining Prosociality in a Sample of Undergraduates in North-Central Nigeria: The Roles of Psychological Wellbeing, Emotional Intelligence and Perceived Self-Esteem

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Abstract: *This study examined the roles of psychological wellbeing, emotional intelligence and perceived self-esteem on prosociality in a sample of undergraduates at the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, North-Central Nigeria. Adopting cross sectional survey design, 347 undergraduates from the University were conveniently sampled for this study. The age range of participants from 18 to 28 [$M=19.8$; $SD=3.0$] and they responded to standardized measures of Psychological Wellbeing Scale [$\alpha = .88$], Emotional Intelligence [$\alpha = .85$], Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale [$\alpha = .89$] and Prosocial Behaviour Scale [$\alpha = .84$]. Four hypotheses were formulated and tested. The result indicated that the independent variables; psychological wellbeing [$\beta = .261$, $p > .05$], emotional intelligence [$\beta = .147$, $p > .05$] and self-esteem [$\beta = .255$, $p > .05$] predicted prosocial behaviour. The joint contributions of all predictor variables were also significant [$R^2 = .075$, $t = 5.096$; $p < .05$]. Based on the findings of this study it was recommended that university management should lay emphasis on learning process to promote psychological wellbeing, emotional intelligence, self-esteem and prosocial behaviour among the students. Training programmes for effective development of the psychological wellbeing, self-esteem and emotional intelligence of the students should be designed to develop their emotional and social skills.*

Keywords: *Psychological wellbeing, emotional intelligence, self-esteem, prosocial behaviour, undergraduates*

Introduction

Prosocial behaviour-voluntary actions intended to benefit others-has been a central topic in social and personality psychology since it gained prominence following the 1964 Kitty Genovese murder, which highlighted widespread public indifference (Bierhoff, 2002; Olmos-Gómez et al., 2023). Most definitions of prosocial behaviour agree that it involves a deliberate decision to enhance the welfare of others, often at a personal cost (Aronson et al., 2004; Pfattheicher et al., 2022; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). This behaviour can take many forms, including sharing, donating, volunteering, cooperating, or even risking one's life for others, and

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is considered essential for fostering social cohesion and personal growth (Eisenberg et al., 2007; Huppert, 2009; Van Willigen, 2000).

A growing body of literature identifies three key intrapersonal factors that consistently promote prosociality: psychological well-being, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem. Psychological well-being, as outlined by Ryff (1989), includes six core dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. It has been linked to increased empathy and a stronger tendency to help others (Omisola et al., 2022). Emotional intelligence (EI)-the ability to perceive, use, understand, and regulate emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997)-enhances one's capacity to recognize others' emotional states and respond with care and adaptability (Goleman, 1998; Martí-Vilar et al., 2022). Likewise, self-esteem-defined as an individual's overall self-evaluation-has been associated with social confidence and greater willingness to help (Fu et al., 2017; Kruk et al., 2018).

Despite these advances, the existing literature remains geographically imbalanced. Most empirical studies on prosocial behaviour have been conducted in North America and Europe, with limited exploration in developing contexts such as Nigeria (Afolabi & Idowu, 2014). Within Nigeria, studies on prosociality among university students are scarce; research efforts have focused more on children, older adults, or organizational contexts. This gap is significant because prosocial engagement among undergraduates has been shown to promote academic success, stronger peer relationships, and civic responsibility (Penner et al., 2005). Therefore, understanding what predicts prosocial behaviour in this population is crucial for designing evidence-based interventions in higher education.

Addressing this research gap, the present study investigates the predictive roles of psychological well-being, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem on prosocial behaviour among undergraduates at the University of Ilorin, Kwara State. Specifically, the study aims to determine whether each of these variables individually predicts prosocial behaviour, and whether they jointly contribute to a higher tendency toward prosocial actions. Four hypotheses are tested: (1) psychological well-being significantly predicts prosocial behaviour; (2) emotional intelligence significantly predicts prosocial behaviour; (3) self-esteem significantly predicts prosocial behaviour; and (4) the combination of all three variables significantly predicts prosocial behaviour.

This study is grounded in several theoretical perspectives that explain helping behaviour as a product of biological, social, and cognitive processes. The socio-biological theory (Trivers, 1971) emphasizes inclusive fitness and evolutionary advantages to helping kin. The social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1963) highlights the role of observation, modelling, and reinforcement in developing prosocial tendencies. Social cognitive theory (Latane & Darley, 1970) focuses on situational appraisal and rapid decision-making in helping contexts. Lastly, social exchange theory (Homans, 1961) views helping as a cost-benefit transaction influenced by reciprocity norms. Together, these frameworks offer a comprehensive lens for understanding how internal traits like well-being, emotional regulation, and self-evaluation translate into external social actions.

The conceptual model proposed in this study presents direct paths from psychological well-being, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem to prosocial behaviour. It also anticipates

an additive effect, suggesting that individuals with higher levels across all three domains are more likely to act prosocially.

By identifying the psychological conditions that promote prosocial behaviour in the Nigerian university context, this study provides practical insights for student affairs professionals, counsellors, and educators working to cultivate ethical citizenship and social responsibility on campus. Moreover, it contributes to the global literature by extending empirical evidence on prosocial development to underrepresented cultural settings and provides a foundation for further comparative studies in African higher education.

Method

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, which allowed for the collection of data from a broad range of undergraduate students across various faculties within the University of Ilorin. The design was appropriate because the study variables-psychological well-being, self-esteem, and emotional intelligence (as independent variables), and prosocial behaviour (as the dependent variable)-were not actively manipulated. Rather, the focus was on examining natural variations in these psychological constructs within the student population.

The research was conducted at the University of Ilorin, situated in Ilorin, Kwara State, located in the North-Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The sample comprised 347 undergraduate students selected from across all faculties of the university. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 27 years and included students from academic levels one to five. A convenience sampling technique was employed due to the practical constraints posed by students' demanding academic schedules. This non-random approach allowed the researcher to engage willing participants who were available during the data collection period.

Data were collected using a paper-based questionnaire that was divided into five sections: A, B, C, D, and E. Section A captured participants' socio-demographic information, including age, sex, faculty, department, and academic level. Section B measured prosocial behaviour using the Prosocial Behaviour Scale developed by Afolabi (2013). This scale includes sample items such as "I enjoy helping others," "It is Godly to work for the well-being of one's community," and "I feel fulfilled whenever I have helped somebody in need of assistance." The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for this scale in the present study was .85, indicating good internal consistency.

Section C assessed psychological well-being using an 18-item short form of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff, 1989), which evaluates six dimensions of well-being. Sample items include statements like "I like most parts of my personality," rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The internal reliability of this scale in the present study was $\alpha = .53$. Section D measured emotional intelligence using a 25-item Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Afolabi (2004). The scale consists of five subscales: interpersonal skill (items 1-5), mood regulation (items 6-11), mood understanding (items 12-16), mood adjustment (items 17-21), and self-knowledge (items 22-25). This instrument demonstrated strong reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .88 in this study.

Section E assessed participants' levels of self-esteem using the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Example items include "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others," rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly

agree). Five items were reverse coded to ensure that higher scores reflected higher self-esteem (e.g., “I certainly feel useless at times”). The reliability coefficient for this scale in the present study was $\alpha = .92$, indicating excellent internal consistency. Overall, the selected instruments have established psychometric properties and were deemed suitable for capturing the core constructs examined in this study.

Results

Regression was used to test the in the prediction of psychological wellbeing, self-esteem and emotional intelligence can predict prosocial behaviour. Also, Pearson product moment correlation (PPMC) was used to determine the relationship between the variables.

Table 1. Correlation Matrix Showing the Mean, SD and the Inter-Variable Correlations of the Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	1							
2. Gender	-.049	1						
3. Qualification	.084	-.166*	1					
4. Religion	-.009	.341**	.186**	1				
5. Psychological Wellbeing	.023	-.109	.106	-.056	1			
6. Emotional Intelligence	-.048	.104	-.030	-.004	-.079	1		
7. Self-Esteem	.142*	-.045	.101	-.075	.126	.024	1	
8. Prosocial Behaviour	-.042	-.040	-.001	-.104	-.147*	.242**	.002	1
Mean	19.81	--	--	--	89.10	161.59	22.12	49.50
SD	3.08	--	--	--	5.08	6.76	2.49	2.32

Note: ** Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

From the results on Table 1, psychological wellbeing had a significant but negative relationship with Prosocial behaviour [$r(347) = -.147$; $p < .05$], meaning that the psychological wellbeing of the undergraduate has an influence on their Prosocial behaviour. Emotional intelligence was also found to have significant positive relationship with Prosocial behaviour [$r(347) = .242$, $p < .01$]. This means that the higher the level of emotional intelligence of the undergraduate, the higher they behave in prosocial manner.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 2. Summary of Linear Regression Analysis Showing the Influence of Psychological Wellbeing on Prosocial Behaviour

Independent Variable		β	t	P	R	R^2	F	P
Dependent variable								
Prosocial Behaviour	Psychological Wellbeing	.261	-.145	>.05	.211	.073	4.126*	<.05

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, $N = 347$

The results of the Table 2 above showed that only psychological wellbeing [$\beta = .261$, $p < .05$] independently predicted prosocial behaviour among undergraduate students. This implied that undergraduates with high psychological well-being will exhibit more prosocial behaviour among their counterparts. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was accepted.

Table 3. Summary of Linear Regression Analysis Showing the Influence of Emotional Intelligence on Prosocial Behaviour

<i>Independent Variable</i>		β	t	P	R	R^2	F	P
<i>Dependent variable</i>								
Prosocial Behaviour	Emotional Intelligence	.178	.145	>05	.276	.013	2.178*	<.05

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, $N = 347$

The results of the Table 3 above showed that emotional intelligence [$\beta = .261, p < 0.05$] independently predicted prosocial behaviour among undergraduate students. This implied that undergraduate with high emotional intelligence will exhibit more prosocial behaviour among their counterparts. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was accepted.

Table 4. Summary of Linear Regression Analysis Showing the Influence of Self-Esteem on Prosocial Behaviour

<i>Independent Variable</i>		β	t	P	R	R^2	F	P
<i>Dependent variable</i>								
Prosocial Behaviour	Self-Esteem	.255	.232	>05	.201	.053	3.868*	<.05

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, $N = 347$

The results of the Table 4 above showed that self-esteem [$\beta = .255, p < 0.05$] independently predicted prosocial behaviour among undergraduate students. This implied that undergraduate with high self-esteem will exhibit more prosocial behaviour among their counterparts. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was accepted.

Table 5. Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the Influence of Psychological Wellbeing, Emotional Intelligence and Self-Esteem on Prosocial Behaviour

<i>Independent variable</i>		β	t	P	R	R^2	F	P
<i>Dependent variable</i>								
Prosocial Behaviour	Psychological Wellbeing	.131	-.131	>05				
	Emotional Intelligence	.231	3.28*	<.01	.274	.057	5.096*	<.05
	Self-Esteem	.213	.347	>.05				

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, $N = 347$

The results of the (Table 4.2.4 above) showed that only emotional intelligent [$\beta = .231, p < 0.05$] independently predicted prosocial behaviour among undergraduate students. This implied that undergraduate with high emotional intelligence will exhibit more prosocial behaviour among their counterparts. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was accepted. The joint contributions of the predictor variables were also significant [$R^2 = .075, t = 5.096, p < .05$]. The R^2 indicates that this observed joint predict is 5.1% of the total influence on the prosocial behaviour of the participants. The other 94.9% influence is from other sources outside the variables in the study. Therefore, hypothesis 4 was accepted.

Discussion

This study explored whether psychological well-being, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem predict prosocial behaviour among undergraduates at the University of Ilorin. Contrary to expectations, psychological well-being did not emerge as a significant predictor. This finding echo earlier research by Brackett et al. (2004a) and Eisenberg et al. (2005), which suggested that contemporary students may be less inclined to help purely on empathic or moral

grounds. Many appear to frame helping in instrumental terms-seeking tangible rewards, reciprocation, or social approval-rather than as an intrinsically valued act.

In contrast, emotional intelligence proved to be a robust predictor of prosocial behaviour, consistent with evidence from Brackett et al. (2004) and Afolabi (2013). Students capable of accurately perceiving and regulating emotions seemingly recognise others' needs more readily and respond with greater empathy, translating emotional insight into concrete helping actions. Self-esteem also significantly predicted prosocial behaviour. This aligns with Wymer (1997) and Laible et al. (2004), who observed that individuals with higher self-esteem tend to view themselves as helpful, nurturing, and compassionate; valuing themselves appears to facilitate valuing-and assisting-others.

Taken together, psychological well-being, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem jointly accounted for 43 percent of the variance in prosocial behaviour, leaving 57 percent attributable to factors not captured in the present model. Potential contributors include prior helping experience, perceived competence, cognitive empathy, situational cues, and broader contextual influences.

Several limitations temper these findings. First, although the three predictors were jointly significant, more than half of the variability in prosocial behaviour remained unexplained, signalling the relevance of additional factors such as personality traits, past altruistic experiences, and contextual moderators. Second, participants were drawn from a single federal university and, within that, primarily from the Department of Psychology; the modest and discipline-skewed sample constrains generalisability. Future studies should recruit larger, multi-institutional samples spanning diverse academic fields and Nigerian states.

Third, all measures relied on self-report. Such instruments are vulnerable to social-desirability bias and may not capture actual helping behaviour. Incorporating behavioural observations-whether in laboratory simulations, naturalistic settings, or peer-report formats-would provide a more objective assessment. Finally, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; longitudinal or experimental approaches are needed to clarify temporal dynamics and directional links among psychological well-being, emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and prosocial action.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of psychological wellbeing, emotional intelligence and self-esteem on the prosocial behaviour of undergraduates in University of Ilorin, Kwara State. This study established that psychological wellbeing, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem, were significant contributors to prosocial behaviour among undergraduates. Thus, this result demonstrates that more attention should be given to emotional intelligence to promote positive social behaviours and to reduce anti-social behaviour; because students with high emotional intelligence will participate in prosocial activities which will promote their participation in activities which benefit the society.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that universities integrate the promotion of psychological well-being, emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and prosocial

behaviour into the learning process through structured training programs aimed at developing students' emotional and social competencies. Institutions should also create opportunities for students to actively engage in prosocial activities that align with cultural and environmental values of altruism. Furthermore, educational policies in Nigeria should be revisited to incorporate themes of altruistic development through initiatives such as symposiums and conferences. Colleges and universities are encouraged to evaluate their current extracurricular offerings and foster a culture of continuous improvement, supported by evidence-based practices. Lastly, greater investment in research related to prosocial behaviour is essential, and this can be achieved through increased sponsorship and targeted allocation of research grants.

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