



Teachers' Perspectives towards their Working Environment and Superiors

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Moral development during early childhood lays the foundation for empathy, ethical behavior, and lifelong character formation. This qualitative study explores the perspectives of preschool teachers regarding moral values among preschoolers, focusing on themes such as respect for others, empathy, honesty and integrity, accountability, and discipline. Using a purposive sampling technique, five preschool teachers were interviewed to gain insights into their experiences and observations. The findings reveal a perceived decline in respect, empathy, and accountability among preschoolers, attributed to increased digital exposure, parental attitudes, and post-pandemic social challenges. While some positive behaviors were noted, such as occasional acts of kindness and honesty, these were less prevalent compared to previous years. The study underscores the need for consistent reinforcement of moral values through creative and structured interventions in preschool settings. Recommendations include parental collaboration, play-based learning strategies, and teacher modeling of desired behaviors to nurture moral development in early childhood.

Keywords: *Nurturing Moral Values, Preschool Students, Early Childhood Education.*



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1. Introduction

The early years of a child's life are critical for shaping their moral values. During this formative period, children begin to internalize values, develop empathy, and discern between right and wrong. Preschool education provides a unique environment to nurture these values through structured activities, social interactions,

and the positive modeling of behaviors by educators. Therefore, this study aims to explore the moral values present among preschoolers, focusing on how these values are fostered and perceived within early childhood education settings.

The perception of moral values lacking in today's children often varies based on cultural,

societal, and personal perspectives. Concerns typically center around issues such as a lack of respect for others, empathy, honesty, integrity, accountability, and discipline. Addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering individuals capable of contributing positively to society.

The development of moral values in young children has garnered increasing attention in recent years. Scholars argue that early education plays a vital role in laying the foundation for a child's future success, shaping their cognitive, social, and emotional development. (Anglia, 2024; Lickona, 2019). However, the integration of these values into preschool curricula varies widely across cultural, social, and educational contexts (Fry, 2017) and the process of integrating these values into preschool curricula significantly contributes to character development, emphasizing universal virtues such as cooperation, tolerance, and social responsibility (Ciampa & Wolfe, 2021).

2. Research Background

In many societies, preschool education focuses predominantly on cognitive and physical development, often overlooking the moral dimensions. Yet, these dimensions are essential for fostering a well-rounded individual capable of contributing positively to society. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how moral values are cultivated in preschoolers and the perceptions of educators and parents regarding this development.

During the early years, children undergo a critical transition from simply "being good" because they are told to do so, to developing an internal sense of morality and virtue. This process—whether described as internalizing values, assimilating moral principles, or forming good habits—plays a pivotal role in shaping their character (Piaget, 1932; Kohlberg, 1981). Early childhood educators and caregivers bear the significant responsibility of guiding and facilitating this development through structured activities, meaningful interactions, and intentional role modeling (Eliot, 2019).

While achieving perfection in instilling moral values is unattainable, there are key areas where progress can be observed and nurtured in preschoolers. Cultivating an active and meaningful

sense of moral value that influences everyday attitudes and decisions is foundational (Hay & Nye, 2006). Equally important is fostering respect for others, regardless of age, race, gender, appearance, or behavior, alongside an attitude of respect for authority figures and a growing understanding of accountability to higher principles or a divine presence (Noddings, 2013).

Teaching children to respect the property and possessions of others is another vital aspect of moral development. At the same time, helping them understand that happiness and fulfillment are not solely dependent on material possessions encourages the development of gratitude and a broader sense of purpose (Froh et al., 2009). Promoting honesty and integrity through consistent practices and nurturing a habit of truthfulness lays the groundwork for ethical decision-making (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004).

Additionally, instilling self-control, patience, and the ability to delay gratification fosters perseverance in achieving long-term goals (Acharibasam & McVittie, 2022). Lastly, encouraging an aversion to inappropriate, offensive, or profane language reinforces respectful communication and empathy for others (Vygotsky, 1978). By emphasizing these areas, early childhood education settings can provide a robust foundation for spiritual and moral growth, supporting preschoolers as they embark on their journey toward becoming compassionate and virtuous individuals.

Moral development in early childhood is a multidimensional process influenced by environmental, cultural, and social factors. According to Hay and Nye (2006), spirituality in children encompasses a sense of awe, wonder, and connectedness, which can be nurtured through experiences that encourage reflection and empathy. Similarly, moral development, as outlined by Kohlberg's (1981) stages of moral reasoning, begins in early childhood with the acquisition of basic moral principles such as fairness and reciprocity.

The role of preschool education in fostering these values is highlighted by Lickona (2019), who emphasizes character education as a vital component of early learning. Effective character education integrates values into daily interactions, stories, and play, enabling children to practice and internalize moral behaviors. Additionally,

Montessori's educational philosophy underscores the importance of creating environments that respect children's spiritual and moral growth through freedom, respect, and meaningful activities (Montessori, 1967).

However, the implementation of spiritual and moral education in preschools varies significantly. Fry (2017) notes that cultural and religious contexts often shape how these values are defined and taught, leading to diverse practices worldwide. For instance, in collectivist cultures, moral education often emphasizes community and interdependence, whereas individualistic cultures may focus on autonomy and personal responsibility.

Furthermore, educators play a pivotal role in modeling and reinforcing moral values. Studies suggest that professional development and resources are crucial for equipping teachers with the skills to integrate these dimensions into their pedagogy effectively (Abubakar et al., 2021). However, challenges such as time constraints, curriculum demands, and differing cultural perspectives may hinder this integration (White & Warfa, 2011).

3. Problem Statement

Early childhood is a critical period for the development of moral values, which form the foundation for empathy, ethical behavior, and decision-making throughout life. Preschoolers, being in their formative years, are particularly receptive to the values imparted by family, educational institutions, and the broader social environment. However, the mechanisms through which these values are nurtured remain underexplored, particularly in diverse cultural and societal contexts.

The global COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated challenges associated with fostering moral values among preschoolers. Prolonged lockdowns, social distancing measures, and shifts to online learning disrupted traditional learning environments and limited children's opportunities for social interaction—a critical factor in value formation. Additionally, heightened family stress, economic instability, and emotional strain during the pandemic likely influenced the home environment's role in shaping children's moral growth. Increased reliance on digital technologies also exposed children to diverse and often

contradictory moral influences, creating a complex landscape for value development.

This study investigates moral values among preschoolers in the post-pandemic era, providing actionable insights for educators, parents, and policymakers to foster holistic moral development in early childhood, particularly during times of societal change and uncertainty.

4. Research Objective

This study aims to explore the experiences of preschool teachers regarding moral values among their preschool students.

5. Methodology

Research Design: This study employed a qualitative research design to explore preschool teachers' experiences regarding moral values among their students. Data were collected through structured interviews focusing on the themes of moral values.

Respondents: The study involved five preschool teachers teaching in preschools within a district in Penang. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring all participants had at least five years of teaching experience in early childhood education. This criterion ensured respondents possessed adequate expertise to provide informed insights.

Instrument: Data were collected through structured interviews, with questions designed to explore perceptions of moral values among preschoolers. Responses were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes.

Data Analysis: Thematic analysis was used to categorize interview responses into identified themes: respect for others, empathy, honesty and integrity, accountability, and discipline. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of how preschool teachers perceive and integrate moral values into their teaching practice.

6. Findings

Interviewer: *Could you share your thoughts on the the moral value of respect for others among children today?*

For theme of 'Respect for Others', Respondents noted a decline in respect for others among preschoolers, which they attributed to

increased exposure to gadgets and reduced social interaction during the pandemic. Teachers observed behaviors such as students failing to greet teachers, using rude words, and exhibiting less polite behavior compared to previous years.

Respondent 1 stated, "...nowadays, children are not as polite as they were before, especially before the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic, in my view, has changed how children interact with others. They were isolated for long periods, and this might have affected their social skills and understanding of proper behavior."

Respondent 2 claimed, "Current children do not respect their teachers. For example, they don't greet their teachers with a proper 'Good morning, teacher.' Instead, some just say 'hi,' while others simply smile—or, even worse, they don't say anything or acknowledge us (their teachers) at all. It's as if the formality and respect traditionally shown to teachers are fading. I believe this is partly due to how society now emphasizes informality and casualness in interactions."

According to Respondent 3, "I have noticed students in my class using more negative and rude words when they quarrel or argue with their friends. Words that were once considered inappropriate are now spoken casually, even in the presence of teachers. They don't seem to care, even if we (the teachers) are in the classroom. This kind of behavior shows a lack of self-control and discipline, which was more evident in the past."

Respondent 4 and Respondent 5 both highlighted how preschool children today are overly pampered by their parents. Respondent 4 noted, "Many parents give their children gadgets to keep them occupied and quiet, and this has a long-term impact on their social skills. When children spend more time on devices rather than engaging in face-to-face communication, they lack opportunities to practice social etiquette, such as greeting others or showing politeness."

Respondent 5 added, "The problem is not just the time spent with gadgets but also the attitude of some parents. They often allow their children to get away with disrespectful or inappropriate behavior, saying it's 'just a phase' or that 'kids are kids.' This leads to children growing up without understanding the importance of respecting teachers and others. When I compare this to the preschool students I taught years ago, the difference is significant. Those children were

taught to value respect and proper manners from a young age."

Interviewer: Could you share your thoughts on the moral value of empathy among children today?

For theme 'Empathy', the teachers reported reduced empathy among students, with many appearing more self-centered and less inclined to show kindness or put themselves in others' shoes. While some children still displayed empathy, it was noted as less common than before.

Respondent 1 remarked, "...I've noticed a reduced ability among my students to put themselves in another's shoes. It seems like they struggle to understand or relate to the feelings of others, which affects how they interact in group activities." When asked for examples, the respondent added, "For instance, during role-playing activities, many students find it challenging to imagine how their peers might feel in certain situations. They focus more on their role and less on the context or the emotions of others involved."

Respondent 2 stated, "...There's a noticeable lack of kindness among children nowadays, especially when it comes to social interactions. I observe this in my class when they find it difficult to share or help their peers. It's a growing concern." When probed further, the respondent elaborated, "I've seen instances where a child cries because they don't get help from their classmates when they drop their things. Sometimes, even when I encourage kindness, it feels like I have to intervene more than before to resolve conflicts or encourage empathy."

Respondent 3 commented, "...Empathy is something hard to emphasize in my class. I try to instill it, but nowadays, the value of empathy seems less evident in students. They tend to be more self-centered, focusing on their own needs rather than considering others." The respondent added examples to illustrate this point, "For example, during group work, some students argue over who gets to speak instead of working together as a team. Even when a peer struggles, they rarely step in to help unless prompted."

Respondent 4 mentioned, "...The value of empathy appears to be lacking in current preschool students. I see that they are often more focused on their own wants and may not naturally show concern for their friends." Upon further

questioning, the respondent shared, “There are moments when I see some children ignoring others who are upset or in need of assistance. However, when I guide them by modeling empathetic behavior, a few begin to imitate it. I think it needs consistent reinforcement.”

Respondent 5 observed, “...Empathy is something that is hardly seen among current preschool students. However, there are still some who show they have empathy—like when they comfort a friend who is upset or offer to share their toys. It’s not common, but it’s not entirely absent either.”

The respondent added, “Sometimes, I see sparks of empathy when children see others getting hurt. For example, they might bring a tissue to a friend who’s crying or tell me when someone is feeling sad. These small acts of kindness give me hope that empathy can be nurtured further.”

Interviewer: Could you share your thoughts on the moral value of honesty and integrity among children today?

For theme ‘Honesty and Integrity’, the finding shows that all respondents highlighted a tendency among children to prioritize completing tasks quickly rather than valuing hard work and quality. Teachers noted a shift toward shortcuts and a diminished emphasis on honesty and integrity.

Respondent 1 stated “In preschool, we try to teach children about honesty and doing their best from an early age. However, I’ve noticed that even at this stage, some children are more concerned with finishing their tasks quickly. For example, during craft activities, they’ll rush to complete their work without paying attention to the instructions or quality. It’s our job to gently guide them to understand that doing something properly is more important than being the first to finish.”

Respondent 2 said “Integrity is something we try to model and instill in preschoolers through simple things like sharing toys or admitting if they’ve made a mistake. But sometimes, they’ll take shortcuts—for instance, pretending they’ve cleaned up their play area when they haven’t. It’s a small thing, but it shows how early this tendency to prioritize speed over honesty can start. We try

to address this by celebrating effort rather than just the end result.”

Respondent 3 added “I often see preschoolers copying what others are doing instead of trying on their own, especially during activities like writing or drawing. It’s not that they mean to be dishonest—they’re still learning—but this behavior can become a habit if it’s not corrected early. We work on praising their individual efforts and showing them that taking their time and doing their best is something to be proud of.”

Respondent 4 claimed that “Preschoolers are naturally eager to please, but sometimes this leads them to take shortcuts. For instance, during group activities, a child might say they’ve done their part when they haven’t, just to avoid disappointment. We try to teach them that it’s okay to ask for help and that being honest about their efforts is more valuable than pretending to have completed something.”

Respondent 5 gave her respond that “At this age, children are still forming their understanding of right and wrong, so it’s crucial to reinforce honesty in small, everyday situations. I’ve noticed that some children, when asked if they’ve completed a task, will say ‘yes’ even if they haven’t. It’s not out of malice—they’re still figuring things out. We use these moments to talk about integrity and why it’s important to tell the truth and put in genuine effort.”

Interviewer: Could you share your thoughts on the moral value of accountability among children today?

For theme ‘Accountability’, Teachers observed that students often avoided taking responsibility for their actions, showing reluctance to admit mistakes without teacher intervention. Educators emphasized the importance of helping students understand the value of accountability.

Respondent 1 shared, “There is a tendency among children to avoid taking responsibility for their actions, and they seem more inclined to blame others for their mistakes.” When asked why this might be the case, they elaborated, “It could be a lack of understanding about accountability or fear of punishment, but it’s something we as teachers need to address.”

Respondent 2 observed, “Children nowadays appear reluctant or find it difficult to

admit their mistakes.” They added, “This reluctance might come from embarrassment or fear of judgment from peers and teachers.”

Respondent 3 reflected, “My students are, somehow, a bit hesitant to admit their mistakes, especially when those mistakes involve their classmates.” They further explained, “For example, if there’s a conflict between two students, each tends to deny fault, which makes resolving the issue more challenging.”

Respondent 4 stated, “Children should be accountable for their mistakes, admit them, and learn from them. However, to make this happen, we teachers need to provide evidence of their mistakes before they are willing to admit them.” When asked about how this could be achieved, they suggested, “We could focus on creating a supportive environment where students feel safe admitting their errors without fear of harsh consequences.”

Respondent 5 commented, “Accountability is not easy for children to practice these days. For my students to admit their mistakes, we often have to help them realize what they did was wrong.” They emphasized, “This requires patience and guiding them through reflective discussions so they (the students) understand the impact of their actions.”

Interviewer: Could you share your thoughts on the moral value of discipline among children today?

For the last theme is ‘Discipline’. Discipline was another area of concern, with teachers noting shorter attention spans and reduced focus among students. Respondents stressed the importance of establishing discipline early but acknowledged the need for creative approaches, such as play-based learning, to engage students effectively.

Respondent 1 remarked, “...children nowadays seem to have shorter attention spans compared to before. Many of them struggle to sit still and focus unless activities are highly engaging or interactive. I think this has a lot to do with the digital exposure they get at home, which has changed how they respond to traditional teaching methods.”

Respondent 2 supported this observation, stating, “...my students often lose focus during learning sessions unless I incorporate play-based learning activities to keep them engaged.

Interactive activities like storytelling or hands-on projects have helped me maintain discipline while keeping their interest.”

Adding to this, Respondent 3 commented, “...students today are not the same as students from years ago. We now need to actively capture their attention in our teaching and learning processes to ensure they stay disciplined in class. It’s also important to create a positive environment where students feel motivated to listen, learn, and respect the rules. Discipline now requires a more thoughtful and engaging approach.”

Respondent 4 highlighted the challenges of managing discipline, saying, “...discipline is very important, especially when instilled from the early years. However, with current children, it’s not as easy as it used to be. Sometimes, I have to resort to one-on-one consultations with my students to explain and reinforce discipline in my classroom. Additionally, I notice that early childhood discipline often requires collaboration with parents. In some cases, inconsistencies between what is taught at home and what we emphasize in school make it harder to manage the children’s behavior.”

Respondent 5 emphasized the long-term impact of discipline, stating, “...discipline is something we, as teachers, need to focus on with our preschoolers. The discipline they learn while studying in preschool will greatly influence their behavior and discipline when they move on to elementary school. It’s not just about correcting behavior but also about preparing them for the expectations of a structured learning environment in the future.”

7. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight significant challenges in fostering moral values among preschoolers in contemporary settings. The theme of Respect for Others revealed a decline in respectful behaviors, such as greeting teachers or refraining from rude language. Respondents linked these changes to increased gadget use, reduced social interactions during the pandemic, and shifts in societal norms emphasizing informality. This suggests that children’s early social development has been adversely affected by modern lifestyle changes, requiring educators to place greater emphasis on social etiquette in the

classroom. Similarly, the theme of Empathy pointed to diminished tendencies among children to show concern for others, share, or engage in prosocial behaviors without prompting. While some children exhibited empathy, it was less common, indicating a growing need for consistent reinforcement and modeling of empathetic behavior. Teachers emphasized that empathy can still be nurtured, but it requires structured activities and interventions.

For the theme of Honesty and Integrity, the study found that preschoolers often prioritized task completion over quality and honesty, with behaviors such as taking shortcuts or copying peers becoming prevalent. While these tendencies are developmentally typical to some extent, the findings underscore the need to instill the value of effort and integrity from a young age by celebrating process-oriented achievements. In terms of Accountability, children were often reluctant to admit their mistakes, frequently deflecting responsibility. Teachers attributed this to a fear of judgment or punishment, highlighting the importance of creating a supportive environment where children feel safe acknowledging errors. Finally, the theme of Discipline revealed challenges such as shorter attention spans and reduced focus among preschoolers. Teachers linked these behaviors to increased digital exposure and stressed the need for creative and engaging approaches to instill discipline, such as play-based learning. Collectively, these findings suggest that shifts in societal dynamics, parenting styles, and technological influences have significantly impacted the moral development of preschoolers. Educators must adapt their strategies to address these emerging challenges, emphasizing consistent guidance, modeling, and reinforcement of moral values.

8. Conclusion

This study underscores the evolving landscape of moral values among preschoolers, particularly in the areas of respect, empathy, honesty, accountability, and discipline. The findings highlight how external factors, such as digital exposure, reduced social interaction during the pandemic, and changing societal norms, have shaped children's moral behaviors. While challenges such as declining respect and empathy,

reduced accountability, and difficulties in maintaining discipline were observed, the potential for improvement remains evident. Teachers play a critical role in fostering moral values through deliberate and consistent interventions, modeling positive behavior, and creating environments that encourage empathy, honesty, and accountability. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts from educators, parents, and communities to nurture well-rounded moral development in young children. By integrating structured guidance and engaging pedagogical approaches, educators can mitigate the impact of these challenges and promote the growth of moral values in preschool settings.

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