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Preschool Teachers' Experiences in Nurturing Children's Moral Development: Preliminary Insights

[Malaysian Journal of Qualitative Research](#) • Article • 2026 • DOI: 10.61211/mjqr120106

[Kambali, Intan Diyana Md](#); [Karim, Aishah Hanim Abd](#)

Kulliyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia, IIUM Gombak Campus, Jalan Sungai Pusu, Selangor, 53100, Malaysia

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Abstract

Moral development in early childhood lays the foundation for lifelong ethical reasoning, prosocial behaviour, and character formation. Although international scholarship recognises the critical role of early education in shaping children's moral dispositions, limited empirical research has examined how Malaysian preschool teachers conceptualise and enact moral education within public preschool contexts. This present study addresses this gap by exploring the lived experiences of preschool teachers in nurturing moral development among young children in Malaysian government preschools. A collective instrumental case study design was employed to gain in-depth insights into teachers' perspectives and practices. Four experienced female preschool teachers, each with a minimum of five years of teaching experience and formal qualifications in early childhood education, were purposively selected. Data were generated through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted online and analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis was guided by

established moral development theories and case study methodology to identify both within-case and cross-case patterns. Five major themes emerged: (1) teachers' conceptions of moral development, (2) practical strategies in nurturing moral development, (3) parental influence, (4) lack of resources, and (5) societal pressures. Findings reveal that teachers perceive moral development as a collaborative process between home and school, and they actively embed moral values into daily routines, modelling behaviours, storytelling, and the integration of Islamic and cultural practices. However, their efforts are constrained by inconsistent parental reinforcement, limited structured training, and evolving social influences. The study highlights the central role of teacher agency in sustaining moral education despite systemic limitations. It recommends enhanced professional development and policy support to empower preschool teachers in their educational role, and calls for further research with broader samples to validate and expand upon these preliminary findings. © 2026, Qualitative Research Association of Malaysia (QRAM). All rights reserved.

Author keywords

Case study; early childhood education; moral development; morality; preschool teachers

Corresponding authors

Corresponding
author

A.H.A. Karim

Affiliation

Kulliyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia, IIUM
Gombak Campus, Jalan Sungai Pusu, Selangor, 53100, Malaysia

Email address

aishahanim@iium.edu.my

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Author keywords

Corresponding authors

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