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Beliefs, Practices, and Challenges of Early Childhood Educators in Moral Education

A Qualitative Study

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Early childhood is a foundational stage for moral development (Killen & Smetana, 2015). Recognising this, the Malaysian Ministry of Education has integrated Moral education as part of the Preschool curriculum (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2017). While early childhood educators are introduced to children's moral development during their training period, not all receive formal or sufficient preparation on this matter (Posli & Mohd Radzuan, 2020). Additionally, the adaptation of moral education varies between preschools depending on the religious demographics of the preschool children. Consequently, the delivery varies between institutions depending on institutional support, teacher readiness, and oversight mechanism (Jonglai et al., Chan et al., 2016). Given their daily interactions with young learners, Early Childhood Education (ECE) practitioners are uniquely positioned to influence this dimension of development. Yet, within the Malaysian context, little research has examined how these educators conceptualise moral development, what they do in practice, and how their actions align with or at times diverge from their personal professional beliefs. The purpose of this study is to address the gap by capturing the lived experiences of Malaysian Early Childhood Education (ECE) practitioners. It aims to uncover both the implicit and explicit ways in which moral education is embedded in preschool practices, the challenges educators may experience, and how they navigate cultural, religious, and societal expectations in their work.

This study involved 4 ECE practitioners from 4 different Malaysian preschools. Data were collected through face-to-face and online interviews. Semi-structured prompts guided discussions. The data was then transcribed and analysed using two analysis methods: an abductive thematic analysis method to focus on their beliefs and practices, and inductive thematic analysis to focus on the challenges they faced.

The findings revealed that educators hold a multifaceted view of morality, encompassing not only behavioural expectations but also emotional, relational, and cultural dimensions. Their practices reflect both intentional and responsive strategies, grounded in daily routines, peer interactions, storytelling, and classroom management. While some educators positioned moral education as an embedded, ongoing process, others framed it as secondary to academic preparation, often in response to perceived pressure from parents or the primary education system. The analysis also revealed challenges, particularly relating to institutional constraints, parental engagement, and the complexity of navigating diverse expectations within and beyond the preschool setting. Additionally, it exposed a disconnect between leadership-level visions of holistic child development and classroom-level practices. These insights suggest that while ECE practitioners have an extensive understanding of preschoolers' moral development, appropriate support and cooperation from the institutional

level, as well as from parents and the community, are needed to practice moral education to its full potential.

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Table of contents

1 Introduction 7

2 Theoretical Background 9

2.1 Introduction to moral education in early childhood 9

2.2 Theoretical framework underpinning moral education 10

2.2.1 Piaget's Theory of Moral Development 10

2.2.2 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory 11

2.2.3 Social Domain Theory by Turiel and Colleagues 11

2.2.4 Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory 12

2.2.5 Eisenberg's Model of Prosocial Reasoning 13

2.2.6 Social-Emotional Learning 13

2.3 Role of beliefs and practices in teachers' effectiveness 14

2.4 Existing research on moral education in early childhood settings 15

2.5 Gaps in the literature 17

2.6 Conclusion 18

3 Context: Moral education in Malaysia 19

4 Research task and research question 21

5 Methods 23

5.1 Introduction 23

5.2 Research Strategy 23

5.3 Research Design 23

5.4 Data Collection 24

5.5 Instruments & Procedures 25

5.6 Data Analysis Procedures 26

5.6.1 Transcription and Familiarisation 26

5.6.2 Coding 27

5.6.3 Codebook 28

5.6.4 Development of Themes 28

5.6.5 Theorising 29

5.6.6 Comparison of datasets 30

5.6.7 Data display 30

5.6.8 Writing up 30

5.7 Ethical Consideration 31

6 Results 32

6.1 Beliefs 32

6.1.1 Morality 33

6.1.2 Preschoolers' Learning 40

6.1.3 Teacher's Role 48

1.1.1 52

6.1.4 Pedagogical Approaches 53

6.2 Practices 55

6.2.1 Pedagogical Approaches 56

6.2.2 Classroom Management 64

6.2.3 Teacher's Role 67

6.2.4 Interactions and Relationships 71

6.3 Challenges 73

6.3.1 Attending to Special Needs Preschoolers 74

6.3.2 School and Employers 74

6.3.3 Parents 76

7 Trustworthiness and Validity 78

8 Discussion 79

8.1 Summary of findings 79

8.1.1 Beliefs: Summary 79

8.1.2 Practices 80

8.1.3 Challenges 81

8.2 Reflections 82

8.2.1 Beliefs 82

8.2.2 Practices 85

8.2.3 Challenges 88

8.3 Limitations and Implications 89

8.3.1 Curriculum and Policy Reform 89

8.3.2 Teacher Practice and Professional Development 89

8.3.3 Parent-School Collaboration 90

8.3.4 Limitation 90

8.4 Suggestions for Future Studies 91

8.5 Conclusion 92

References 94

Appendices 106

Appendix 1: Interview Protocol 106

Appendix 2: Information Sheet 108

Appendix 3: Consent form 111

1 Introduction

A strong moral compass is fundamental for individuals to make ethically sound decisions and act morally, ultimately contributing to a better humanity. Morality, as a social construct, is largely context-specific, with individuals typically internalising local moral norms from early childhood. Recognising the crucial developmental stage of preschool years, the Malaysian Ministry of Education has integrated moral education as a dedicated subject within the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK) (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2017, p.4). The curriculum allocates approximately 120 minutes per week specifically to moral education, focusing on values such as respect, empathy, cooperation, and responsibility (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2017, p. 71; Hafizi & Wiyono, 2023). This subject is mandatory for all government-registered preschools. However, implementation is conditional on demographic composition. If a preschool has fewer than five non-Muslim children, it is not required to offer moral education as a separate subject (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2017, p. 24). While early childhood educators are introduced to children's moral development during training, not all receive formal or comprehensive preparation in this area (Bailey et al., 2015; Rosli & Mohd Radzuan, 2020). Consequently, the delivery of moral education varies between institutions depending on teacher readiness, institutional support, and oversight mechanisms (Jonglai et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2016). These inconsistencies in practice have raised concerns about whether the current implementation of moral education is effectively supporting long-term character development. This concern is further amplified by the increasing prevalence of reports detailing immoral actions among local youth, which raises critical questions about the broader impact and effectiveness of early moral education initiatives (Daud, 2023; Rifin, 2024; Shaari & Morat, 2024).

In light of these concerns, this thesis seeks to explore the beliefs and practices of early childhood education professionals in relation to moral education, with a particular focus on how they understand, interpret, and enact moral teaching in their everyday work. It also examines the challenges they face when implementing moral education in preschool settings. To achieve this understanding, the study employed an abductive and inductive thematic analysis of interviews conducted with Malaysian Early Childhood Education (ECE) professionals. Ultimately, this study aims to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical application, as well as between

the intended goals and the actual outcomes of moral education in Malaysia's preschool system.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Introduction to moral education in early childhood

Early childhood is widely recognised as a critical period for moral development. The preschool years, often described as a “golden phase” of character formation, are when children begin to construct their moral identity—a sense of self shaped by their understanding of values, behaviour, and ethical norms (Nucci, 2001; Smetana et al., 2023). During this period, children lay the foundations for empathy, social understanding, personal responsibility, and self-regulation. These early experiences are essential for developing moral competence and have enduring implications for future behaviour and relationships.

Research consistently shows that moral development in early childhood is closely linked to later emotional maturity, social competence, and the ability to make thoughtful moral judgments. Children who form strong moral foundations in the preschool years are more likely to grow into individuals who are empathetic, ethically responsible, and socially engaged (Spinrad & Eisenberg, 2023). Significantly, these moral foundations are not developed in isolation. Positive interactions with caregivers, including parents, educators, and other significant adults, play a central role in shaping a child’s prosocial behaviour (Nucci, 2001; Sears et al., 1957, as cited in Grusec, 2023). When caregivers provide emotional support, model moral actions, and offer gentle guidance, they promote behaviours such as sharing, helping, and comforting, all of which contribute to the formation of a moral self-concept (Grusec, 2023).

In the preschool context, moral education refers to the structured yet relational process through which children begin to understand and internalise ethical values (Thornberg, 2008). It serves as a foundation for shaping children’s behaviour, choices, and sense of right and wrong (Hafizi & Wiyono, 2023). While moral values are often culturally and socially constructed, principles such as fairness, justice, and concern for others are commonly recognised across contexts (Turiel et al., 1973). At this developmental stage, moral education is not about teaching abstract ethical theories, but rather about fostering practical moral habits and prosocial dispositions that children can apply in everyday social interactions (Nucci, Narváez, & Krettenauer, 2014).

Given the central role that educators play in young children's daily moral experiences, understanding how preschool practitioners perceive and implement moral education is essential. Their beliefs, values, and everyday teaching practices directly influence how children encounter and make sense of moral concepts in early learning environments.

2.2 Theoretical framework underpinning moral education

Moral development in early childhood has been widely studied across developmental, cognitive, social, and educational psychology. A range of theoretical perspectives has shaped the way researchers and educators understand how young children develop moral reasoning, values, and prosocial behaviours. These theories are particularly relevant for understanding the beliefs and practices of preschool practitioners, who play a key role in shaping children's early moral experiences through everyday interactions, curriculum choices, and social guidance. This section outlines key theoretical frameworks and approaches that underpin contemporary perspectives on moral education for children aged 4 to 6, providing a foundation for interpreting how practitioners conceptualise and implement moral learning in early childhood settings.

2.2.1 Piaget's Theory of Moral Development

Jean Piaget (1932) made a significant contribution to the field of moral development by linking children's moral understanding to their cognitive development. According to his theory, moral reasoning progresses in stages that correspond to a child's growing ability to think logically. For children aged 4 to 6, this development typically occurs within the heteronomous stage, where rules are viewed as fixed and imposed by authority figures. Moral judgments are based more on consequences than intentions, and children tend to follow rules to avoid punishment. From Piaget's perspective, this stage reflects the early foundations of moral understanding, shaped mainly by external regulation rather than internal principles. Understanding this developmental stage can inform how practitioners scaffold early moral concepts such as fairness or rule-following, in a developmentally appropriate manner.

Building on Piaget's work, Lawrence Kohlberg (1977) proposed a six-stage theory of moral development, grouped into three levels. Each stage reflects a more advanced

capacity for reasoning about morality. Children aged 4 to 6 typically fall within the pre-conventional level, where moral reasoning is centred on self-interest and obedience to avoid punishment. Stage 1, the obedience and punishment orientation, defines right and wrong in terms of avoiding negative consequences. Stage 2, the instrumental-relativist orientation, introduces a sense of reciprocity—doing what is right to gain rewards or favours. Moral thinking at this level remains concrete and egocentric, closely aligned with Piaget's heteronomous phase. This understanding informs how preschool-aged children perceive rules and moral expectations in early learning environments, and may help explain the focus many educators place on consistency, behaviour management, and clear consequences.

2.2.2 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, while not directly aimed at moral development, offers valuable insights into how young children begin to form moral understanding through social interaction. According to Vygotsky, children's cognitive and moral development is shaped by their engagement with the social and cultural environment. Language plays a central role in this process, serving both as a means of communication and as a tool for internalising moral concepts (Tappan, 1997). Through guided interactions with more knowledgeable others, such as parents, teachers, or peers, children learn to navigate moral situations and gradually build their own moral reasoning. The concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) highlights the importance of identifying the level at which a child is ready to learn and scaffolding their learning through support and dialogue. For children aged 4 to 6, this implies that moral education should be interactive and responsive, providing space for children to actively participate in discussions and experiences that help them construct a personal sense of right and wrong. This aligns with educator practices that emphasizes guided discussion, social interaction, and reflective dialogue in early moral learning.

2.2.3 Social Domain Theory by Turiel and Colleagues

Eliot Turiel's (1973) Social Domain Theory proposes that children's understanding of the social world is not uniform but differentiated into distinct domains: the moral, social-conventional, and personal. These domains develop through children's everyday experiences with different kinds of social regularities. In the moral domain,

judgements are based not on the adherence to rules but on the perceived effects of actions on others, such as harm, fairness, or justice. This perspective contrasts with views of Piaget and Kohlberg, who emphasised rule-based reasoning and external authority in early childhood. In contrast, Turiel suggests that even young children are capable of identifying moral issues based on how actions impact others, rather than simply on whether a rule was broken. In early childhood, moral reasoning tends to be focused on concrete, observable concerns, particularly physical harm and individual welfare (Smetana, 2013). As children's cognitive abilities and understanding of others' perspectives grow, they become more capable of evaluating complex and abstract moral situations, including those involving conflicting intentions or competing moral claims. Social domain theory has had a significant influence on moral development research, as it integrates both social context and cognitive development, making it especially applicable to the moral education of preschool-aged children. Practitioners who observe children distinguishing between harm and rule-breaking may be drawing, perhaps intuitively, on principles consistent with this theory.

2.2.4 Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory

Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory emphasises the role of observational learning, social influences, and self-regulation in moral development (Bandura, 1991). Rather than viewing morality as a linear cognitive progression through fixed stages, Bandura argues that children develop moral standards by observing the behaviours, reactions, and reasoning of others, particularly parents, peers, and media figures. For preschool-aged children, this suggests that modelling is a central mechanism through which moral norms are learned. Bandura highlights that moral behaviour is not governed solely by abstract reasoning but also by the development of internal self-regulatory mechanisms, such as self-evaluation and self-sanction, which begin forming in early childhood through consistent social reinforcement and reasoning-based discipline. Effective moral education for children aged 4 to 6, therefore, involves not only teaching moral concepts but also modelling moral behaviour and fostering empathy, as young children internalise moral standards through interactive, socially rich experiences. This underscores the importance of adult modeling and positive reinforcement in shaping preschoolers' moral understanding.

2.2.5 Eisenberg's Model of Prosocial Reasoning

Nancy Eisenberg's model of prosocial moral reasoning provides a developmental framework for understanding how children think about helping others. The model outlines five levels of reasoning, ranging from self-focused motives to deeply internalised moral values (Eisenberg, 2005). For preschool-aged children, the first three levels are most relevant. These include hedonistic reasoning, where actions are motivated by self-interest; a needs-oriented stage, in which children begin to recognise and respond to others' needs; and a social approval-oriented stage, where helping behaviours are guided by the desire to gain approval or conform to social norms (Llorca-Mestre et al., 2017). This perspective highlights that even in early childhood, children are capable of basic prosocial reasoning, though often without the complex emotional or cognitive processes seen in older children. This suggests the importance of fostering empathetic concern, perspective-taking, and guided social interactions that help children gradually move from self-centred to other-oriented moral thinking in moral education. Practitioner strategies that encourage sharing, helping, and discussing feelings directly reflect and support this developmental trajectory.

2.2.6 Social-Emotional Learning

Social-emotional learning (SEL) represents a practical, evidence-based framework that supports the moral and social development of young children. According to Durlak et al. (2011), SEL focuses on cultivating five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies are closely linked to the foundational elements of moral development, such as empathy, emotion regulation, and perspective-taking. For children aged 4 to 6, SEL programs provide structured opportunities to recognise emotions, consider the feelings and needs of others, and engage in prosocial behaviours. Research shows that high-quality SEL interventions in early childhood lead to increases in cooperative behaviour, emotional understanding, and reduction in conduct problems, thereby directly contributing to the development of a child's moral reasoning and social responsibility. SEL thus offers a developmentally appropriate approach to moral education that aligns with both cognitive and emotional aspects of early childhood development. Its structured, whole-child focus

is increasingly visible in early years practice, often informing classroom routines, relationship-building strategies, and conflict resolution approaches.

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive understanding of how moral development unfolds in early childhood and how it can be supported through intentional educational practices. Each framework contributes unique insights into the ways young children interpret moral situations, develop empathy, and internalise values. These insights are crucial for examining how preschool practitioners understand and approach moral education in their day-to-day work, shaping the beliefs, strategies, and goals that guide their teaching. While theoretical frameworks offer a developmental lens, understanding how these ideas are translated into daily practice requires a closer examination of teachers' beliefs and pedagogical decisions.

2.3 Role of beliefs and practices in teachers' effectiveness

The beliefs and practices of educators play a central role in shaping children's moral development, particularly in the preschool years when moral understanding is highly responsive to social cues and adult guidance. Teachers' beliefs refer to the values, assumptions, and personal theories that educators hold about children, learning, and their own role as moral guides (Pajares, 1992; Fang, 1996). These beliefs act as a lens through which teachers interpret children's behaviour, make decisions, and construct their classroom environments. Research has shown that teacher beliefs directly impact teaching methods and pedagogical approaches more broadly (Lunn Brownlee et al., 2013; Phang et al., 2021; Rosli & Mohd Radzuan, 2020), reinforcing the idea that what teachers believe about moral development is likely to shape how they implement moral education.

In the context of moral education, educator beliefs influence what is morally significant, which values are prioritised, and how these values are communicated to children. While some educators may emphasise obedience and respect for authorities, others may promote autonomy, fairness, or empathy as core moral goals (Halstead & Taylor, 2000). A combination of cultural background, personal experiences, training, and institutional expectations shapes these differences. As Johansson (2007) notes, moral education in preschool settings often unfolds through

everyday interactions rather than explicit instruction, making it particularly sensitive to the educator's implicit beliefs and values.

Educators' practices reflect how these beliefs are enacted in the classroom. Moral education is integrated into a wide range of daily activities, such as storytelling, play supervision, conflict resolution, and emotional coaching, through which children encounter moral norms and expectations. Teachers scaffold children's moral understanding by modelling behaviour, guiding reflection, and encouraging empathy. However, studies have shown that holding positive beliefs alone is not sufficient. For example, Bailey et al. (2014) emphasise that teachers must also possess the appropriate skills and strategies to effectively implement their beliefs in practice. Moreover, contextual factors, such as institutional demands, curricular frameworks, and cultural expectations, can significantly shape or constrain teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices (Jonglai et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2015). As a result, even well-intentioned educators may adapt or limit their moral teaching practices in response to the realities of their classroom environments.

Despite the significance of this topic, relatively new studies have examined how preschool educators conceptualise moral education or how their beliefs inform actual practice. Existing research tends to focus more broadly on values education or social-emotional learning without deeply exploring the belief-practice connection in early childhood moral development. Understanding this relationship is essential for designing effective moral education strategies and professional development programs that are both responsive to educators' perspectives and developmentally appropriate for your children.

2.4 Existing research on moral education in early childhood settings

Research on moral education in early childhood settings has increased in recent years, reflecting a growing recognition of the preschool years as a formative period for moral development. Recent research reflects a growing interest in how moral education is understood and implemented in early childhood settings. Scholars widely agree that moral education during the preschool years is a complex and dynamic process that extends beyond the transmission of fixed values (Perepeliuk, 2023; Johansson, 2002). Instead, it is increasingly seen as contextual, experiential,

and rooted in relationships, with a strong emphasis on children's active participation in everyday moral experiences (Shih, 2022; Lokhvytska, 2016).

Several studies highlight the importance of modelling and moral exemplars in shaping young children's understanding of right and wrong. Teachers' behaviours, emotional responses, and interactions provide implicit cues that children internalise as moral norms (Johansson, 2002; Shih, 2022; Cheng et al., 2021). This supports the idea that moral education in preschool is often embedded in daily routines, social interactions, and conflict resolution, rather than being treated as a separate or formalised subject (Radulescu, 2020; Robson, 2019). At the same time, researchers have noted key challenges in the implementation of moral education. These include a lack of pedagogical mastery among teachers (Sabri & Mohamed, 2022), reliance on teacher-centric methods such as preaching or didactic instruction (Cheng et al., 2021), and an overemphasis on rule-following without fostering deeper reasoning. Some findings suggest that moral education becomes ineffective when it is isolated to classroom instruction and does not involve the broader environment, including family and peer contexts (Shih, 2022).

A recurring theme across studies is the need for professional development and clearer frameworks to guide moral education in early years (Perepeliuk, 2023). Without consistent training and support, teachers often rely on personal beliefs or cultural norms, which can lead to inconsistency in how moral issues are addressed across settings (Johansson, 2002). Moreover, moral education is increasingly being recognised as grounded in real-life experiences, requiring that children engage with moral ideas through peer interactions, reflective discussions, and emotional understanding (Shih, 2022; Johansson, 2002). This also highlights the educator's role not only as a teacher but as a co-participant in shaping the child's moral learning environment.

Overall, existing research emphasises that moral education in early childhood is not a uniform process; it is deeply influenced by teacher beliefs, pedagogical strategies, and contextual constraints. However, despite these insights, many studies stop short of examining how educators themselves conceptualise and operationalise moral education in practice, an area this thesis seeks to explore more deeply.

2.5 Gaps in the literature

Despite the growing recognition of moral education as a critical component of early childhood development, current literature reveals several significant gaps—particularly in relation to local early childhood education (ECE) contexts. First, research on how moral education is implemented in Malaysian preschools remains limited. While national curricula mandate moral education as a subject, few empirical studies have examined how it is interpreted and enacted by educators at the ground level.

Second, most research on teachers' beliefs and classroom practices has focused primarily on academic subjects, such as literacy, numeracy, or STEM education (Brownlee et al., 2012; Rosli & Mohd Radzuan, 2020). In contrast, studies exploring educators' beliefs and pedagogical approaches toward moral or values-based education, especially in the preschool setting, are noticeably scarce. Third, and most critically for this study, there is a notable lack of research specifically examining the beliefs and practices of early childhood educators related to moral education in the Malaysian context. Existing local research tends to focus on general classroom practices, multicultural education, and language teaching and learning, without addressing the nuanced perspectives and day-to-day moral education decisions of preschool practitioners themselves (Jantan et al., 2015; Wai Leng et al., 2021; Yussof & Sun, 2020).

This lack of research is concerning, given that educators beliefs and practices are central to how moral values are communicated and reinforced in early learning environments. Without a deeper understanding of how teachers perceive their role in moral education or the challenges they face in implementation, efforts to improve curriculum effectiveness and teacher training may fall short. To address these gaps, the present study explores how early childhood education (ECE) professionals in Malaysia conceptualise, implement, and experience moral education in preschool settings. By focusing on both beliefs and practices, the study aims to generate insights that are theoretically grounded, contextually relevant, and practically informative for policy development, curriculum design, and teacher education.

2.6 Conclusion

In summary, a wide array of theoretical frameworks, from cognitive-developmental models to sociocultural and emotional learning theories, help explain how moral development unfolds in early childhood. These perspectives highlight the significance of adult guidance, social interaction, and contextual learning experiences in shaping young children's moral development. However, the actual implementation of moral education is deeply influenced by educators' beliefs, values, and institutional environments. While global research has shed light on various aspects of moral education, particularly in Western contexts, Malaysian studies remain limited in scope and depth. In particular, there is a lack of empirical research that examines how preschool educators in Malaysia interpret, negotiate, and enact moral education in practice. This study addresses the gap by examining the beliefs, experiences, and challenges faced by early childhood education (ECE) professionals as they implement moral education in preschool settings.

3 Context: Moral education in Malaysia

The first chapter of the thesis that is given a number is the introduction. All text chapters are numbered. References and appendices are not numbered.

In Malaysia, formal education begins at the age of four, with preschool serving as an introductory stage to the school system (National Digital Department, 2025). Although preschool education is not mandatory, the majority or chidlren under the age of 6 participate in preschool as preperation for formal schooling. Preschool education in Malaysia is managed by various agencies, including the Ministry of Education (MoE), Tabika Perpaduan, Tabika KEMAS, as well as state government-managed preschools such as MAIWP (federal territory Islamic Religious Council) Islamic Kindergarten, and JAIS (Selangor Islamic Religious Department) preschools, alongside private kindergartens.

The National Standard Preschool Curriculum (KSPK) serves as a guideline for preschools registered under the Ministry of Education. This curriculum is designed around six strands: Communication, Spirituality, Attitudes and Values, Humanity, Physical Development and Aesthetics, Science and Technology, and Personal Competence. Moral Education falls under the Spirituality, Attitudes and Values strand, alongside Islamic Education, reflecting the fact that Islam is the official religion of Malaysia.

Moral Education in Malaysia focuses on developing individuals with strong moral values across three key domains: moral reasoning, moral emotions, and moral behaviours. These domains are applied alongside 14 universal values (refer to Table *1*) that align with the religious teaching and cultural norms of Malaysian society. By the end of their moral education, students are expected to “understand and appreciate societal values”, “practice courteousness in their daily lives”, and “build stronger ties within their communities to promote unity.”

Table 1

14 universal values as outlined in the National Standard Preschool Curriculum (KSPK)

Universal Values	Content Standard
Belief in God	Belief in the existence of God
	Know the religions or beliefs in Malaysia

Universal Values	Content Standard
Kindness	Be helpful to others
Responsibilitiy	Be responsible to oneself
Gratitude	Show gratitude for assistance, appreciation, and contribution received
Courtesy	Be polite in speech and behaviour
Respect	Be respectful
Love	Love oneself, others, and animals
Fairness	Practice fairness in interactions
Courage	Be courageous in daily life
Honesty	Be honest in life
Diligence	Be diligent in life
Cooperation	Be cooperative in carrying out tasks
Moderations	Be moderate in life
Tolerance	Be tolerant in interactions

Notably, the curriculum specifies that “Islamic education will be taught to Muslim pupils, while Moral education will be taught to non-Muslim pupils.” This clear distinction creates a division that may have significant implications. The separation could influence how children perceive each other’s values and beliefs, potentially fostering a sense of “use” versus “them.” Additionally, this distinction may shape how teachers approach the teaching of values in their classrooms.

4 Research task and research question

The significance of this study lies in its exploration of how early childhood educators in Malaysia perceive and implement moral education in preschools, a topic that remains underexplored despite its growing relevance. Early childhood is a foundational stage for moral development (Killen & Smetana, 2015). The beliefs, values, and behaviours that children are exposed to during this period can have lasting effects on their character, worldview, and interpersonal relationships (Nucci, 2001). Given their daily interactions with young learners, early childhood education (ECE) professionals are uniquely positioned to influence this dimension of development. Yet, within the Malaysian context, little research has examined how these educators conceptualise moral development, what they do in practice, and how their actions align with, or at times diverge from, their personal and professional beliefs.

This study aims to address that gap by capturing the lived experiences of Malaysian early childhood education (ECE) practitioners. It aims to uncover both the implicit and explicit ways in which moral education is embedded in preschool practices, the tensions educators may experience, and how they navigate cultural, religious, and societal expectations in their work. Insights from this research can inform policymakers striving to create curricula that are both developmentally appropriate and culturally inclusive. Furthermore, the findings provide valuable guidance for teacher educators designing programs that prepare early childhood education (ECE) professionals to handle complex moral scenarios within increasingly diverse classrooms.

In addition, the formal structure of moral education in Malaysian preschools reflects the country's broader multicultural and multi-religious context. Within the national preschool curriculum (KPSK), children are typically divided along religious lines, with Islamic education designated for Muslim children and moral education for non-Muslim children. While both aim to promote positive values and character development, their content, emphasis, and philosophical underpinnings differ, at least in how they are framed in official curriculum documents. This separation raises important questions about the coherence of moral messaging across communities, the kinds of values children are exposed to, and how educators interpret and

implement these differences in their day-to-day teaching. By examining how educators perceive and play their roles within this system, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive moral education in Malaysia.

Moreover, in a rapidly changing world where young children are increasingly exposed to a wide range of influences, particularly through digital media, educators are constantly required to re-evaluate and adapt their approaches to moral guidance (Livingstone & Third, 2017; OECD, 2021). Understanding how they navigate these contemporary challenges contributes to a more nuanced picture of what it means to support moral development in the 21st century. Ultimately, this study seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice, as well as between intention and implementation, in the moral education of Malaysia's youngest citizens.

The primary aim of this research is to examine the beliefs, practices, and challenges surrounding moral education, as experienced and articulated by early childhood education (ECE) professionals in Malaysia.

To achieve this aim, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What beliefs about preschoolers' moral development do Malaysian ECE professionals express?
2. What are the practices related preschoolers' moral development do Malaysian ECE professionals employ?
3. What challenges in supporting preschoolers' moral development are expressed by Malaysian ECE professionals?

To address these questions, a semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the national preschool curriculum and existing literature on early childhood moral development. Data collected from the interviews were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns, key insights, and underlying themes related to the beliefs, practices, and challenges associated with moral education in preschool settings.

5 Methods

5.1 Introduction

The primary aim of this research is to explore the beliefs and practices, as well as the challenges faced, by Malaysian early childhood education (ECE) professionals in the context of moral education. This chapter presents the methodology used to answer the research questions constructed to achieve the research aim and objectives, as outlined in Chapter 1.

5.2 Research Strategy

A qualitative approach is employed due to the exploratory nature of the research questions and the need for an in-depth understanding of the beliefs, practices, and lived experiences of Malaysian early childhood education (ECE) professionals regarding the moral development of preschool-aged children. The phenomenon under investigation is deeply contextual and tied to the subjective meanings that teachers construct from their daily interactions. Hence, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate.

5.3 Research Design

The aim of this research is to examine the beliefs, practices, and challenges in the context of moral education from the lived experiences of early childhood education (ECE) professionals. Therefore, a phenomenological approach is taken to guide the research. In addition to experiences, phenomenology enables us to explore participants' thoughts, perceptions, and emotions (McLeod, 2024). One of the key characteristics of phenomenology is 'intentionality,' as explained by Husserl; everything we do, we do with intention (McLeod, 2024). Based on this, we may analyse participants' shared experiences as intentional and conscious. Another critical aspect in phenomenological research is bracketing, also known as "Epoché." It is a term coined by Husserl that emphasises the importance of setting aside personal beliefs and assumptions about something and looking at it from a fresh perspective (Marinay, n.d.). Heidegger, another phenomenology philosopher, emphasised hermeneutics in phenomenology. According to Heidegger, phenomenological inquiry seeks to reveal the hidden structures of experience, what is not immediately apparent

or explicitly stated. Our experience of any given moment is not just shaped by the event itself, but also by our prior assumptions and past experiences, which collectively influence how we interpret the present.

5.4 Data Collection

Participants for this research project were recruited through homogeneous purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves deliberately selecting individuals who have first-hand experience with the phenomenon under investigation, in this case, early childhood educational practitioners. This non-probability sampling method was chosen because the aim was not to achieve statistical generalisation, but to gain deep, rich insights from individuals with specific knowledge and expertise relevant to the research questions (Rai & Thapa, 2015). Participants were required to meet the following inclusion criteria to be eligible for the study:

1. an early childhood educational practitioner in Malaysia.
2. currently is or have been engaged in the care and education of Malaysian preschoolers.

The recruitment process involved a multi-pronged approach to identify and contact potential participants who met the inclusion criteria. Initial contacts were established with a network of preschool principals and teachers known to the researcher through prior professional experience in the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE). These individuals were provided with information about the study's aims and were invited to participate. This initial step was supplemented with snowball sampling, where the initial contacts were asked to recommend colleagues who might also meet the study's criteria and be interested in participating. Snowball sampling is particularly effective in qualitative research for accessing participants with specific knowledge or experience, especially within close-knot or hard-to-reach professional communities (Noy, 2008). This technique was helpful in reaching beyond the researcher's immediate professional network. To further broaden the recruitment pool, formal outreach was conducted by sending informational emails to two ECE organisations in Malaysia. These emails described the purpose of the study and respectfully requested that the information be circulated to their members. Through this recruitment process, 4 participants were recruited.

Table 2

Participants' demography.

Participant	Profession in ECE	Religion	Preschool Children Demography
T1	Preschool Teacher	Islam	Chinese Only
P1	Head of Education	Islam	Mixed Races
P2	Principal / Owner	Islam	Mixed Races
T2	Preschool Teacher	Christian	Mixed Races

5.5 Instruments & Procedures

Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with the participants. The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews enables researchers to delve in-depth with their participants on the topic being discussed, while still providing a guideline that keeps the interview on track (Ruslin et al., 2022). Hence, it is a suitable method for this study, which aims to explore the personal beliefs of participants and their relationship to their professional practice as ECE educators. When creating the interview protocol, I referred to the Malaysian Preschool Curriculum Standard (KSPK) by the Malaysian Ministry of Education and past literature related to the research topic. While the interview protocol (Appendix 1) served as a guide for conducting the interview, the questions were adjusted during the interviews to match the tone of the conversation, ensuring it flowed smoothly and comfortably for both the interviewee and the interviewer. To facilitate rich and detailed responses, the interviews were conducted bilingually, allowing participants to express themselves in either English or Malay, or a combination of both. Participants were given the flexibility to conduct the interview in person or via the online platform "Zoom" and choose a time that suited their schedule.

On the day of the interview, before the interviews begin, participants are briefed on the nature of the study to ensure a complete understanding of their rights and responsibilities as participants. They were also given a brief explanation about what would be discussed during the interview. Afterwards, they were given the opportunity to ask for any clarification before the consent form is shared and signed, ensuring the interview officially begins. One participant agreed to an in-person interview, and three chose to have it over Zoom. Thus, only one person signed the consent form

before the interview, and the rest requested that it be done after the online interview session for convenience. All the interviews were recorded using the iPhone app Voice Memos, except for P2's interview, which was recorded on Zoom. The recording was unsuccessful. Thus, the data from this participant were from the notes taken during the interview.

As mentioned before, the interview protocol was used as only a guide for me. Hence, the content of the interview may not follow the order in which each question was written in the protocol. During the interview, I had a notebook with me to note down any points that I believed would be important for the analysis or to help me improve upcoming interviews with other participants.

5.6 Data Analysis Procedures

This study employs a mixed-method approach. An abductive approach was chosen to analyse research questions 1 and 2, facilitating a flexible and iterative analysis process that enables movement between empirical data and existing theory. This approach supported a deeper understanding of how teachers conceptualise children's moral development. To guide the analysis, I followed the eight-step framework proposed by Thompson (2022).

Regarding Research Question 3, which examines the challenges faced by participants, an inductive approach was employed. This decision was based on the understanding that such challenges are often deeply rooted in the participants' contextual experiences, which may not be adequately captured by existing literature. An inductive approach also ensures that participants' voices are presented authentically, without being constrained by pre-existing theoretical frameworks. The steps taken were similar to those of abductive thematic analysis, without being guided by existing theories or concepts during the coding process.

5.6.1 Transcription and Familiarisation

The process began with manually transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews into Microsoft Word documents. Each transcript was labelled as Tn for those in teaching roles, or Pn the ones in leadership roles. A naturalised transcription approach was adopted, in which participants' speech was transcribed verbatim without grammatical corrections or structural alterations. This decision was made to

ensure that participants' voices were represented authentically, rather than being shaped by the transcriber's interpretation (Schegloff, 1997, as cited in Oliver et al., 2005). Manual transcription also allowed me to become deeply familiar with the data through repeated listening to the recordings. Simultaneously, I took preliminary notes on potential codes and emerging patterns that would inform the later stages of analysis.

5.6.2 Coding

After the transcription process was completed, I began the coding process using Delve, an online qualitative data analysis software. According to William and Moser (2019), coding is "a process that enables collected data to be assembled, categorized, and thematically sorted, providing an organized platform for the construction of meaning" (p. 45). In the initial stage of analysis, every meaningful piece of information was coded. For example, when a participant stated, "Yes. It's not easy. Because parents being parents. They only want one thing", it was initially coded as 'challenges', 'parents/families', and 'teacher's perception'. These codes were then grouped into broader themes during subsequent phases of analysis. I employed a combination of coding methods, including in vivo and simultaneous coding. In-vivo coding helped preserve participants' intended meanings and minimised the influence of my own interpretive bias (Manning, 2017). Simultaneous coding, meanwhile, allowed multiple codes to be applied to a single excerpt, helping to capture the complexity of participants' responses without reducing them to a single interpretation. For example, an excerpt from one participant was initially coded for 'religion', 'challenges', and 'parents.'

"And also, if you ask me what the challenge is, our clientele is of different religions, and also different ways of living their lives. Some of the parents are not married. And when they are not married—one example is the mother is a Muslim, and the father is a Christian. And the daughter is—we do not know. It is something we do not want to ask. It is (a) very sensitive (topic). And then, the mother wants the children to learn Al-Fatihah, and the father says do not even say the word. So it's very hard. It's a challenge for us. But as for school, you are a Muslim, so this is a responsibility (of ours) to share with you. At home, that's your story." (P1)

Following the first round of coding, similar codes were grouped into broader themes, while repetitive or insignificant codes were removed. At this point, some of the in vivo codes were refined into shorter phrases or single words that captured the essence of related codes. For instance, instances in which participants used the phrases “to be grateful” and “to be thankful” were initially coded separately, but were later merged under the broader code of “gratitude”, as the expressions were used interchangeably.

5.6.3 Codebook

A codebook was also developed to guide the analytic process. Since coding and analysis are iterative, the codebook provided a consistent framework, invaluable when returning to the data after breaks in analysis (Guest et al., 2012, as cited in Thompson, 2022). Following the guidelines of DeCuir-Gunby and Marshall (2011), each code in the codebook included a code name, a definition explaining its scope, and a representative quotation from the transcripts (see Table 3). The coding process was conducted in four cycles, with each iteration resulting in the consolidation of codes into broader categories.

Table 3

Codebook extract for the code: Individual Differences

Code Name	Individual Differences
Definition	Participant mentioning anything related to people having differences, whether it is a description, or a practice of catering to the differences.
Example	P2: “One method might work for a person but not another. This contributes to the experience in diverse context for the children.”

5.6.4 Development of Themes

After all the transcripts had been coded, the next step was to develop themes. Themes serve as a structure for organising and presenting the researcher's analytical insights (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Guided by the research questions, the codes were grouped into themes, allowing the data to be transformed into meaningful insights that addressed each question. Upon completing the analysis, I identified a set of themes and subthemes corresponding to each research question. In some cases, the thematic structure included two levels of subthemes to capture the depth and complexity of the data (see Table 4 n for an example).

Table 4

The theme ‘morality’ and its subthemes, under research question 1.

Themes	Subthemes (level 1)	Subthemes (level 2)
Morallity	Moral Emotions	Empathy
		Sympathy
		Compassion
		Love
		Gratitude
		Guilt

5.6.5 Theorising

A crucial step in that defines abductive analysis is theorising. That is, linking the themes to the broader dataset, highlighting patterns, tensions, and insights that respond to the research questions and are informed by existing literature. This process involves moving back and forth between the data and existing theories or concepts to find explanations that best fit the patterns observed. In this study, after identifying key themes and subthemes, I examined how these themes related to one another and to the overall research questions. For instance, the subtheme “Learning through Diversity” emerged from participants emphasising the role of multicultural classroom settings in moral development. This was linked to Social Domain Theory, which explains how social interactions influence children’s understanding of moral and social rules.

However, not all themes aligned directly with the theoretical frameworks or literature reviewed in earlier chapters. For example, under the subtheme “Approaching Sensitive Topics with Care”, participants' insights revealed context-specific realities or emerging challenges that are not yet well-documented in the existing body of knowledge. Rather than excluding these findings or forcing a theoretical fit, I chose to present them as meaningful contributions that reflect the complexity of educators’ lived experiences.

For themes that did not appear to be supported by previously reviewed literature, I conducted further searches using platforms such as Google Scholar and Consensus.ai to explore whether more recent or less prominent research could provide relevant

insights. This iterative approach allowed for a more comprehensive and contextually grounded interpretation of the data.

5.6.6 Comparison of datasets

While this is a qualitative study, comparisons between datasets were possible due to the existing differences in the demographics of the participants, as illustrated in Table 2. Notably, some themes emerged exclusively among those in leadership roles and were not present in responses from participants with teaching roles, and vice versa. For example, the theme “socialisation” only emerged among those in leadership roles, while “qualification-based roles/tasks” only emerged among those in teaching positions.

5.6.7 Data display

There is no exact way one should create a data display. However, it is crucial to show how theoretical themes emerge from empirical text and codes. I personally have opted for a simple table to illustrate the connection between codes and themes. (see

Table 5

Example of a data display, showcasing how codes are categorised into themes.

Themes	Subthemes	Codes
Teacher’s Role	Approaching Sensitive Topics with Care	Avoiding Political Statements
		Approaching Taboo Topics
Pedagogical Approaches	Material Used	Books
		Visual
		Picture
		Game

5.6.8 Writing up

After steps 1 to 7 are completed, the findings are reported in the ‘results’ section of this thesis. For each theme, if applicable, a theoretical explanation is provided to show how the theory is linked to the empirical data. Quotations from the interviews were also included to support the findings. The quotations, initially in a mix of English and Malay, have been translated fully into English to enhance readability, with careful attention to preserving the original meaning and tone.

As for Research Question 3, which explores the challenges faced by participants, an inductive approach was employed. This decision was based on the understanding that such challenges are often deeply rooted in the participants' contextual experiences, which may not be adequately captured by existing literature. An inductive approach also ensures that participants' voices are presented authentically, without being constrained by pre-existing theoretical frameworks. The steps taken were similar to those of abductive thematic analysis, without being guided by existing theories or concepts during the coding process.

5.7 Ethical Consideration

Participants were provided with an information sheet (see Appendix 2) detailing all aspects of the study, available in both Malay and English. The sheet outlined how confidentiality would be maintained in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). To protect participants' identities, all identifiable information, such as workplace names, was removed from the transcripts. Participants were also informed that they were not required to answer any questions they found uncomfortable, such as those regarding religious affiliation, although all participants chose to share openly. Their participation was voluntary without any incentive given.

6 Results

In this section, I present the findings from my thematic analysis of the interview data, structured around the three research questions. I adopted an abductive approach for the first two parts of the analysis, which involved an iterative process of moving between the data and relevant theoretical frameworks to interpret participants' beliefs and reported practices related to moral development in early childhood education (ECE). For the third part, which explored the challenges experienced by educators, I took a more inductive approach. This allowed me to stay close to the participants' personal experiences, without applying any predefined theoretical lens. Themes were developed through in vivo and simultaneous coding, then refined and organised through repeated rounds of analysis. The findings are presented thematically under each research question, with excerpts from the interviews included to illustrate the interpretations and highlight key insights.

6.1 Beliefs

The first research question addresses the beliefs of Malaysian ECE professionals that emerge in a conversation regarding preschoolers' moral development. While analysing the data corpus for Malaysian ECE professionals' beliefs, I identified four main themes with subthemes, as presented in the table below.

Table 6

Table 6 presents the main theme and subthemes that emerged in the data, answering Research Question 1: What beliefs about preschoolers' moral development do Malaysian ECE professionals express?

Main Themes	Subthemes
Morality	Morality as Right vs. Wrong
	Social Inclusion
	Equality
	Moral Emotions
	Moral Actions
	Religious Influences
Preschooler's Learning	Individual and Contextual Influences
	Structured Environment
	Learning as an Enjoyable Experience

Main Themes	Subthemes
	Enhanced Learning through Diversity
	Learning as a Continuous Process
	Focus on Socialisation
	Social Learning
	Emotional Understanding & Regulation
Teacher's Role	Relationships
	Qualification
	Professional vs. Work Life
	Self-Awareness
Pedagogical Approaches	Child-centred approach
	Material Use

6.1.1 Morality

6.1.1.1 Morality as Right vs Wrong

A fundamental question to ask the participant is what they understand by the term 'morality'. When asked about what morality is, participants often resort to describing it as knowing "what is right, and what is wrong", or "how to differentiate when something is not good", as explained by T2. Similarly, P1 stated, while expressing the role of preschools in children's moral development, "Once you send your kids to school, your children are going to learn…what is okay, what is not okay, how to behave, how to 'that', how to 'this'." When teaching about morality using visual aids, T1 would ask the children, "What is okay? What is not okay?". This view of morality aligns with Kohlberg's preconventional stage of moral development (Kohlberg, 1977). At this stage, children learns and respond to rules and labels of good and bad, or right and wrong, that are set by authority figures, which in this case are the preschool teachers.

6.1.1.2 Social Inclusion

T1 emphasised the importance of ensuring that all children feel included, particularly during group activities. While academic lessons are organised by age group, T1 explained that group activities are intentionally mixed to ensure inclusivity, "so that

they do not feel—the five-year-olds do not feel left out," even if they cannot follow the game as well as the six-year-olds. This pedagogical choice reflects a strong commitment to inclusivity. According to Social Domain Theory, children develop moral understanding through their social interactions and come to distinguish moral concerns from social conventions through their everyday experiences. (Turiel, 1983; Smetana, 2006). T1's approach aligns with this framework. Although not explicitly discussed with the children, the group activities communicate moral values. Furthermore, this inclusive practice may play a preventive role in supporting children's socio-emotional development. According to Stenseng et al. (2014), experiences of social exclusion in preschool are linked to increased aggression and reduced cooperation over time. Their study highlights how exclusion disrupts children's ability to self-regulate and may activate maladaptive social strategies. Conversely, practices that promote a sense of belonging and inclusion may foster positive peer relationships and emotional regulation, contributing to the development of prosocial behaviour and moral understanding.

6.1.1.3 Fairness and Equality

T1 also reinforced the principle of fairness and equality when addressing rules and routines, telling the children, "You are all the same, and I love every one of you," particularly in situations where no one is allowed to be excluded from expectations or responsibilities. This approach to fairness was not just about sharing toys or taking turns, which is what most research on moral development in young children tends to focus on (e.g., Paulus, 2023). The participant demonstrated that fairness meant including every child equally in expectations and responsibilities. This reflects a more profound moral message that children deserve to be treated with the same level of respect and accountability. From the perspective of Social Domain Theory (Turial, 1983; Smetana, 2006), this type of fairness would be considered a moral concern, because it is based on ideas of justice and equality, rather than just following classroom rules.

6.1.1.4 Moral Emotions

During the interviews, participants frequently referred to a range of emotions associated with morality. Two such complex emotions were empathy and sympathy, and were often mentioned in the context of teaching morality, usually as a situational

example presented to children. For instance, Participant T1 described using a picture of a child falling and asked, “If our friend fell, how would we feel? What is our feeling towards that friend?” to help children understand and reflect on sympathetic responses. T2 included “How to feel your classmates” in their list of lessons included in their moral education practices. While not directly relating it to morality, P2 noted helping children develop empathy as one of their preschool’s core focuses. The use of empathy and sympathy in moral instruction aligns closely with Hoffman’s (2000) empathy-based theory of moral development, which views such emotions as foundational to moral understanding and prosocial behaviour. It also reflects Tangney et al.’s (2007) broader framework of moral emotions, where empathy is seen as a prosocial emotional driver of moral conduct. More recently, Spinrad et al. (2023) have categorised empathy and sympathy as empathy-related responses that contribute to children’s developing moral cognition and behaviour, further reinforcing their importance in early moral education.

Additionally, compassion was also included in the list of morally related emotions by participants. Expanding on T1’s example of sympathy, they added, “When your friend is hurt, what should you do?” to encourage children to notice others’ feelings and care for them. In another interview, P2 expressed “to be kind” as the moral of the story that they were reading to the children, teaching children to act from compassionate feelings, this highlights how moral emotions like compassion not only invovel feeling but also inspire carign actions (Goetz et al., 2010; Tangney et al., 2007).

Other emotions mentioned include love, specifically towards parents, which T2 considered part of morality. They stated during the interview, “You have to love your parents, above all…”. While love is not always categorised as a distinct moral emotion in traditional moral psychology, Goetz et al. (2010) suggest that love can be closely intertwined with compassion. In this sense, love for parents as expressed by T2 may reflect a culturally embedded moral sentiment that fosters relational bonds and moral obligations within family contexts.

Gratitude was also brought up by two of the participants. P1 shared an experience of preschool children asking about the current situation in Palestine, and described using this opportunity to teach gratitude, “Ask them to be more thankful. Be grateful for what you already—that is the out—that is the learning outcome of that.” This response demonstrates how gratitude was not only framed as an emotion but also as

a moral reflection prompted by exposure to global suffering. This aligns with Yu et al.' (2002) argument that gratitude is morally sensitive. In this context, gratitude becomes a way to foster moral awareness and emotional perspective-taking among young children.

There was only one mention of a negative moral emotion, which was guilt. Although the participant did not explicitly name guilt, T1 indirectly instilled this feeling in a child whose actions had unintentionally hurt another. T1 said, "You see? Do you know that his mommy asked to see the CCTV recording?". The teacher did not directly punish the child, but instead highlighted the social consequences of their action. This led the child to "panic", suggesting an internal emotional response. This aligns with Vaish and Tomasello's (2023) view that guilt is an internalised form of moral judgement, shaped by early social experiences. Furthermore, the situation reflects Tangney et al.'s (2007) distinction between guilt and shame, where guilt is a response to one's action and can support moral reflection and self-regulation.

6.1.1.5 Moral Actions

The theme of moral actions captures the behavioural dimension of morality as described by the participants. They emphasised various behaviours that children are encouraged to develop as part of their moral growth. For example, T2 expressed that the outcome of moral education is that the children "have good manners", such as knowing how to "say 'please'." Whereas P1 highlighted the need for children to learn to "speak nicely." These behavioural cues can be understood as more than just polite behaviours. They reflect moral expectations in action. As Stohr (2012) argues, manners often serve as visible expressions of moral values. In early childhood, teaching manners may be a way for educators to cultivate foundational moral habits through everyday interactions.

Furthermore, respect was frequently discussed among all participants. P1 and P2 shared similar instances of the concept of respect, using the example of dealing with and interacting with people with disabilities or special needs. P1 shared that "we need to teach them not to underestimate people with disabilities". P2 also shared a distinct situation that highlights the importance of respect within a culturally and religiously diverse classroom. In their Muslim-majority classroom, a non-Muslim child brought food from home to share with classmates. This prompted the Muslim children to

question whether the food was permissible (halal) for them to eat. This moment created an opportunity for the children to navigate differences in beliefs and practices, emphasising respect for others' customs and fostering moral awareness around diversity and inclusion. Respect has been discussed in previous literature as a response to others' prosocial behaviour (Malti et al., 2020). However, it is less commonly examined as a moral behaviour taught or practised by young children, as participants in this study have described.

An interesting aspect of respect highlighted by all participants was the importance of respecting one's personal boundaries. P1 emphasised teaching children how to protect themselves by introducing the concept of "safe touch," explaining to children that "oh! This should not be touched, this should not be revealed," along with messages like "this secret, I cannot share with others" and "we cannot have secrets with our parents." Similarly, T1 recounted an interaction with their niece, who was wearing a dress that was slightly too short. T1 told her, "That is embarrassing," which prompted the niece to cover up. Additionally, T2 shared that children should be taught "when there is something you do not really like to do, how do you say no." P2 also mentioned that children need to learn how to decide whose needs should be prioritised in various situations. These examples show that the idea of respecting personal boundaries is not only about safety, but also about helping children understand their own worth and autonomy. This connects with Ryan's (2022) argument that self-respect in childhood carries moral significance. According to Ryan, learning to value and protect oneself is a crucial aspect of developing moral understanding. In this study, the way participants describe teaching children about safe touch, saying no, and deciding whose needs to prioritise reflects this connection between self-respect and early moral learning.

Beyond personal boundaries and self-advocacy, the participants also described moral behaviours related to actively helping and caring for others in the preschool environment. When responding to the children about the situation in Palestine, P2 said, "They are not happy with this, so we need to help them by? How? We cannot do anything. We need to teach them, we need to be grateful." Here, the act of helping was mentioned before the lesson of gratitude, suggesting that the initial moral impulse toward people in need is to offer help. Similarly, T1 identified "helping each other" as one of the outcomes of mixed-age group activities. On caring for others, T2,

in their list of moral education practices, is to teach children “how to care for your friends in class”. Other prosocial behaviours participants have shared include maintaining positive relationships with others and sharing and taking turns. These moral actions reflect well-established prosocial behaviours in early moral development. Einesberg (1986) describes these as outcomes of children’s growing ability to reason about others’ needs, while Social Domain Theory (Smetana, 2006) suggest that children view such actions as moral obligations grounded in fairness and harm avoidance.

Within the subtheme of moral actions and behaviour, is the concept of accountability. In the story shared by T1 involving a child and a CCTV recording, the intention was not only to evoke a sense of guilt but also to teach the child about accountability—that actions have consequences. T1 later reinforced this idea by including in their list of moral lessons, “what must you say when you do something wrong.” This reflects the early stages of moral understanding, as described by Piaget and Kohlberg, where children transition from an external focus on punishment to an appreciation of rules and personal responsibility. Bandura’s (2011) social cognitive theory further supports this interaction. He explains that individuals can disengage morally by displacing or diffusing responsibility. In contrast, T1’s strategy appears to reinforce moral agency by helping the child acknowledge their role in the event, thereby encouraging the development of internal moral standards and self-regulation.

Lastly, two participants noted that children should also learn to reject or avoid transgressions. When explaining how to reason with children, P1 said, “If they have understood vocalised rules, reason why you cannot hit other children.” Similarly, T1 highlighted children’s understanding that they “cannot hurt other people.” These examples suggest that, beyond promoting positive moral behaviours, it is also crucial for children to recognise and avoid behaviours that are morally or socially unacceptable. This reflects early moral reasoning described by Piaget and Kohlberg, where children begin to internalise rules and understand that certain behaviours, like hurting others, are inherently wrong. Social Domain Theory further explains that children see these as moral violations because they involve harm to others, not just disobedience. It is worth noting that this aspect was mentioned less frequently compared to the emphasis on encouraging positive conduct.

Overall, the participants' beliefs reflect a view of moral development in early childhood as a relational and emotionally grounded process. They perceived moral growth not primarily as the acquisition of abstract rules, but as the internalisation of values through daily interactions and emotionally meaningful experiences. According to the participants, young children develop morality by engaging in respectful relationships, learning to care for others, understanding personal boundaries, and recognising both right and wrong actions. Rather than defining morality solely in terms of compliance with rules, participants viewed it as rooted in children's ability to reason about others' needs, develop self-respect, and build a sense of accountability. This suggests that, in the participants' view, early moral development is shaped by how children make sense of their social world and come to value fairness, empathy, and responsibility through lived experience

6.1.1.6 Religious Influences

As religion also plays a role in children's moral development and education, participants were prompted to discuss how it influences their practices. One of the questions asked of the participants was along the lines of "Does religion affect the way you reason with the preschoolers?". P1 shared an insightful example of how religion influences teachers' decisions:

> And also, if you ask me what the challenge is, our clientele is of different religions, and also different ways of living their lives. Some of the parents are not married. And when they are not married—one example is the mother is a Muslim, and the father is a Christian. And the daughter is—we do not know. It is something we do not want to ask. It is (a) very sensitive (topic). And then, the mother wants the children to learn Al-Fatihah, and the father says do not even say the word. So it's very hard. It's a challenge for us. But as for school, you are a Muslim, so this is a responsibility (of ours) to share with you. At home, that's your story. (P1)

Although the preschool this participant is working in is not explicitly an Islamic preschool, the teachers still chose to act in favour of the religion.

In a separate interview, T2 expressed a different perspective on the role of religion in the moral education of preschool children. They gave the example of reciting the Islamic prayer before eating as something that everyone in the preschool does, even

the T2, a non-muslim teacher, and the non-Muslim child in the class. They further explained, “Because it’s good to be thankful. The food that we receive, you know? It’s—it’s something that is the right moral way to do it.” T2’s response suggests a broader interpretation of religious practices as vehicles for universal moral values, such as gratitude. Rather than focusing on the religious identity behind the practice, T2 highlights the underlying moral lesson of being thankful for one’s food as something all children can learn and relate to, regardless of their faith. McKay and Whitehouse (2014) argue that religious systems play a dual role in moral development, not only by providing explicit teachings about moral rules, but also by fostering group identity and cohesion through shared rituals and values. This helps explain why participants viewed religious practices as central to moral instruction, even in settings where children may come from diverse faith backgrounds.

6.1.2 Preschoolers’ Learning

Under this theme are concepts and processes involved in preschoolers’ learning as expressed by the participants.

6.1.2.1 Individual and Contextual Influences

Participants shared various factors that shape children's learning processes and simultaneously influence how teachers plan their approaches to moral education. A recurring theme in the interviews was the importance of recognising individual characteristics and differences among children. One such factor is age. T2 expressed a preference for same-age group teaching, explaining that when students are of similar age, “we can concentrate on more teaching at the same time.” This suggests that developmental similarity supports more efficient instruction. Similarly, P2 shared that their preschool organises students into age-based classes to accommodate this variation. T1 elaborated on age-related characteristics, noting that “they can follow, for example, 5-year-olds, but slowly. But 6-year-olds, they pick up rather quickly,” and also pointed out that “3- to 4-year-olds… prefer to play games,” underscoring how both cognitive ability and interests vary by age group.

In addition to age, the topic of special needs also emerged under this theme of individual differences. For example, T1 observed how autistic children may express their need for attention differently: “Like autistic kids, they like to scratch. They want

(to gain) attention, right?" P2 addressed the need for different rules for special needs students, while P1 described them as being "categorised through a different way of thinking." These remarks reflect the participants' recognition that children with special needs may express themselves differently and require adapted educational approaches, including moral education practices. However, there is limited research that directly examines how moral development is supported among preschoolers with special needs. Most studies on early moral education focus on typically developing children, with little attention to inclusive approaches in this context. This indicates a promising area for future research on how moral values can be taught in ways that are both developmentally sensitive and inclusive of all learners.

Beyond group-level differences, participants also highlighted individual learning styles. P1 emphasised the importance of personalised lesson plans, stating, "Everyone understands differently." T1 echoed this challenge in the context of a high student-to-teacher ratio, noting that "different children [have a] different (way of) understanding," which complicates uniform delivery of moral lessons.

While not all findings explicitly referenced moral education, they provide insight into the broader learning context in which moral instructions take place. Participants' descriptions of the need to group children by age may reflect their attempt to accommodate developmental differences in learning speed and attention. Although the focus was general learning rather than morality, such structural decisions influence the effectiveness of moral education. These findings align with cognitive developmental theory (Piaget, 1932), which posits that children's ability to process rules and abstract concepts matures with age.

Participants also highlighted the influence of external factors, particularly the role of the family and home environment, in shaping children's moral development. T2 praised the parents of their students, saying, "They (parents) actually put on a lot of effort for the child," and continued, "We have very good parents, and because of that, we are brought up right." T1 similarly noted, "Mostly, everything is from home, how the mother and the father educate the child." P1 reinforced this view by stating:

> "I think, on the morality itself, people have their—we have our family unit that sets what is normal, like how I said (before), what is acceptable, what is not acceptable. It is the family that sets the morality, I would say."

These perspectives reveal a shared belief among participants that the family plays a foundational role in moral development, with the school positioned as a secondary agent that reinforces values already established at home. This is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory (1979), which places the family at the centre of the child's microsystem, where immediate interactions and experiences shape development most directly.

Finally, religion and cultural background were also identified as influential factors. P1 noted that they "use a lot of sirah (Islamic history)" when teaching moral concepts to Muslim children, suggesting that religion not only provides a moral framework but also functions as a pedagogical resource. P1 also reflected on broader cultural change, stating that "how children think also changes over the years. Different generations, different ways of thinking.". These perspectives reflect the understanding that morality is not a universal or fixed construct, but one that is shaped by sociocultural contexts, including religious beliefs and traditions. This aligns with Narváez and Nucci's (2008) view that children 's moral understanding develops through culturally situated interactions, where moral norms are embedded within everyday social and institutional practices. From this perspective, religious teachings often act as a cultural blueprint that guides children's moral understanding.

6.1.2.2 Structured Environment

Across the interviews, creating structure through rules, routines, and discipline was consistently described as essential for fostering an environment where children can understand, internalise, and practise moral behaviours. Participants emphasised the importance of having clear rules in the classroom. For example, P2 explained that children need to learn the basic dos and don'ts, while T1 repeatedly highlighted the reminders given to preschoolers that "in school, there are rules." When discussing routine, participants focused on children's natural tendency to thrive in structured, routinised settings. As P1 noted, "So those… for children, they are easy to routinise," suggesting that children are highly adaptable to routine when it is consistently implemented. During the interview, while expressing concern about children spending extended hours in preschool and daycare, T1 acknowledged, "Of course, it's not that it's bad—it's good. There's discipline." Similarly, P2 also mentioned the importance of instilling discipline in young children.

Additionally, within the theme of a structured environment, participants highlighted the importance of consistency in children's learning. This consistency, they noted, should not be limited to the preschool setting but must also extend to the home environment. P2 stressed the role of parents in reinforcing what is taught at school, saying, "They (parents) also need to support whatever schools are teaching by portraying that at home." Similarly, T2 emphasised the need for ongoing collaboration between educators and families: "Whatever needs to be continuous and done, you also share with the parents so that the parents can help the child at home."

This structure is upheld not only through the establishment of clear rules and routines but also through frequent reminders that reinforce them. As T1 remarked, when discussing routines, "you always have to remind them," emphasising the need for repetition to help children internalise expectations. Similarly, P2, when talking about classroom rules, noted the importance of using cues to reinforce behaviour: "put a visual and remind."

These examples, while describing practices, also reflect underlying beliefs about how young children best learn and internalise moral values. Participants consistently expressed the view that a structured environment is essential for supporting moral development. Their emphasis on repetition, visual reminders, and consistency across home and school settings suggests a shared belief that children require repeated, scaffolded experiences to understand and adopt moral expectations. This belief aligns with Piaget's idea that children view rules as fixed in early stages, and with views from Kerr (2011) and Han (2024), who argue that children first learn morality through doing and experiencing, rather than abstract reasoning. Similarly, the belief that structure and discipline help children internalise consequences is supported by the principles of developmental discipline (Watson, 2008), where consistent guidance is seen as foundational to moral learning.

6.1.2.3 Learning as an Enjoyable Experience

Alongside creating a structured environment, participants also shared the need to create a learning environment and experiences that are enjoyable for the children. P1 expressed that at the preschool level, "what they need to know is to enjoy learning", so that the children would want to continue learning and view it positively, rather than as an obligation. In another interview with T1, in order to soothe children's

restlessness, “teachers have to create so many things that make things fun”. While T1 was referring specifically to transition activities rather than the lessons themselves, the point still reflects the broader intent to create an emotionally supportive and engaging learning environment.

Participants’ emphasis on enjoyable and emotionally engaging learning experiences reflects their belief that such an environment supports children’s development. This is supported by Williford et al. (2014), who found that positive engagement with teachers and tasks promotes emotional regulation and reduces behavioural dysregulation. Similarly, Coelho et al. (2018) reported that preschool engagement mediates the link between self-regulation and academic achievement, highlighting the importance of emotionally engaging environments in supporting both learning and behavioural outcomes. Since moral development in early childhood is closely tied to emotional regulation, these findings suggest that engaging classroom climate may also create the emotional conditions necessary for children to internalise moral lessons.

6.1.2.4 Enhanced Learning through Diversity

Turning to another dimension, participants highlighted how diversity in environment, school demographics, and children’s experiences plays a crucial role in enhancing learning outcomes. P2 expressed that it is better when there is diversity around them so they can learn about different cultures, beliefs, and ways of living. As T1 stated, “In a multi-race classroom, there are more things that you can teach.” Regarding exposure to diverse environments, T1 emphasised the importance of experiential learning beyond the classroom, noting that “children still need to go out of the school” through field trips. They further explained that such experiences allow children to “create new knowledge” while being supported by teachers who serve as trusted guides and sources of security.

T2 made a comment that explicitly relates exposure to moral learning, “When you are at school, the whole class and other students, friends, then there come many more instances and situations. So, from there, whatever happens, the teachers are there to guide them.” Participants’ emphasis on diversity and real-world experiences reflects their belief that children learn best when exposed to different perspectives and situations. This view aligns with Social Domain Theory, which highlights how

everyday social interactions, particularly those involving differences, support the development of moral reasoning (Turiel, 2002; Smetana, 2006). Similarly, constructivist approaches suggest that learning, including moral learning, takes place through active engagement with the environment (Piaget, 1965; Vygotsky, 1978). In this case, diverse classroom settings and field trips create meaningful opportunities for children to encounter moral situations, reflect on them, and receive guidance from teachers.

6.1.2.5 Learning as a Continuous Process

Two participants pointed out that learning is a continuous process. As mentioned earlier, participants recognise teachers as secondary agents who reinforce already established values by the parents and family. T2 further explained that "at school, we have to teach them one step further, how to apply that moral [values]."

P2 approaches continuous learning from a unique perspective that shapes their teaching methods. For example, when discussing the story of Prophet Lut, a narrative often used in Islamic education to address the prohibition of same-gender relationships, P2 emphasises a different aspect. They highlight how Prophet Lut "can work under pressure. Even though people are against him, he still stands his ground." P2 explained that "in the future, [the children] will discover this story that their teacher has shared before and realise that there is another story behind it, that they will self-discover." This illustrates P2's belief that moral learning is an ongoing process, where children initially receive foundational knowledge but, as they mature, engage in deeper reflection and reinterpretation, allowing for evolving understanding over time. This example will be discussed in greater detail under the theme of pedagogical approaches.

This perspective closely aligns with Social Domain Theory, which emphasises that moral understanding is not fixed but continues to evolve as children encounter diverse situations and engage in reasoning about fairness, rights, and social norms (Turiel, 1983; Smetana, 2023). It also reflects Piaget's (1965) view that moral reasoning develops through stages, shaped by experience and growing autonomy, and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which recognises the role of social interaction and guided participation in shaping how moral knowledge is internalised and reinterpreted across development.

6.1.2.6 Focus on Socialisation

Socialisation is defined as “the process by which individuals acquire social skills, beliefs, values, and behaviours necessary to function effectively in society or in a particular group” (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Among the four participants, two expressed the importance of socialisation. P1 stated that children go to preschool to learn “how to socialise”. The preschool’s role is to make sure that “once they (children) go out, they know how to make friends. They know how to interact with other human beings… Social skills are very important.” P1's statement underscores that preschool plays a vital role in shaping children into socially competent and morally aware individuals.

While P1 highlighted socialisation as a fundamental goal of preschool, P2 reinforced this view by identifying social interaction as a core component of assessment in their preschool. Specifically, P2 shared that they look at children’s participation in group activities and interaction among peers as part of evaluating their development. Interestingly, it was only the participants in leadership roles (P1 and P2) who explicitly discussed socialisation as a core aspect of preschool education. In contrast, teachers focused more on social learning, which will be addressed in the next subtheme. This distinction will be further explored in the following theme and expanded upon in the discussion section.

This perspective on socialisation also reflects established ideas in developmental theory. Piaget (1932) and Kohlberg (1969) emphasised that peer interactions support the development of moral reasoning, as children learn to take others’ perspectives, cooperate, and resolve conflicts. Similarly, Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory highlights the role of observation and imitation, suggesting that children learn appropriate social and moral behaviours by interacting with others in their environment. These ideas are supported by Brody and Shaffer (1982), who argue that peer groups contribute significantly to moral development by providing opportunities for children to practice fairness, empathy, and social understanding in real time.

6.1.2.7 Social Learning

Teacher participants’ observations centred around how children learn by observing others in social contexts. For instance, T1 explained that “when they see an older

classmate do it, they would want to do it too, even when they do not know how to do it," suggesting that peer modelling plays a key role in behaviour acquisition. Similarly, T2 noted that children "learn through example. They see other people, they learn," indicating that learning is often embedded in social interactions rather than formal instruction. T2 further elaborated, "because when the teacher asks them to do (something), maybe they get scared, and they do not want to do it. So you ask their friend to show them. Then, they will do it."

In addition to learning from peers, participants also emphasised the importance of social learning through teacher–child interactions. P2 noted that rules are communicated not only through visuals but also through the teacher's attitude: "There is a rule that you need to follow… the teacher needs to put a positive attitude. If the teacher doesn't have a positive attitude, children can feel it."

The participants' emphasis on children learning by observing peers and teachers reflects key ideas from Social Learning Theory. As Bandura (1977) proposed, children acquire behaviours not only through direct teaching but also by watching others. T1 and T2's examples of peer imitation show how modelling supports moral learning. P2's observation that teachers' attitudes communicate rules further highlights how adults' emotional expressions shape children's behaviour, and idea supported by Liu and Wang (2022), who found that teachers' emotions influence children's classroom engagement and moral responses. These views also align with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasises the role of social interaction in learning, where both peers and teachers act as scaffolds for moral development.

6.1.2.8 Emotional Understanding & Regulation

Throughout the analysis, it became evident that all participants acknowledged the importance of emotional understanding and regulation in early childhood. When describing their classroom practices, T1 highlighted the use of movement-based transition activities between lessons:

> "…to provide them with an enjoyable activity. They let loose, and they get to laugh. We do not want them to—what is it called? Like, stressed with the lesson… because they sit for too long, to do all the schoolwork."

This approach aims to reduce stress and help children manage their emotional states throughout the school day.

T1 also described how visual aids are used to help children "understand the feelings" connected to the situations depicted, suggesting that emotion recognition is integrated into moral instruction. Similarly, P1 stressed the significance of emotional development during assessments, particularly for six-year-olds, noting that it is important to evaluate "how they regulate their emotions," in addition to academic performance. P1 also highlighted the value of open emotional dialogue with children, "It is okay to be angry. But you have to know what your level of anger is and then how you want to regulate your emotions. Reflect on yourself."

T2 echoed this perspective, offering insight into how they manage children who are in a bad mood, highlighting classroom strategies that support emotional well-being. Likewise, P2 described the use of a 'calm corner' in the classroom where children are encouraged to "settle whatever is in their (children's) body," referencing an incident where a child initiated a conflict with a peer.

The participants' emphasis on helping children recognise and regulate their emotions reflects key ideas from Social and Emotional Learning (Durlak et al., 2011) and Eisenberg's (2000) model of moral development, which positions emotional regulation as essential for prosocial and moral behaviour. Practices such as using visual aids, calm corners, and emotion-based dialogue are consistent with approaches that support emotional self-awareness and control. These practices also reflect Hoffman's (2000) view that empathy, often cultivated through emotional understanding, is central to moral action. More broadly, these beliefs align with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, as teachers see their role as actively scaffolding emotional development within supportive, interactive moments.

6.1.3 Teacher's Role

Extending from the theme of preschoolers' learning processes, participants highlighted not only the ways children learn but also the pivotal role teachers play in facilitating and nurturing that learning, especially in moral development.

6.1.3.1 Relationships

Firstly, participants emphasised the pivotal role of teachers as role models within the teacher-preschooler relationship. T2 noted, “Children, they actually look up to you, they rely on you, they trust you so much,” highlighting the deep trust and admiration children place in their teachers. This relationship positions teachers not only as educators but as influential figures whose behaviour and attitudes children observe and often imitate. Similarly, P2 expressed that their motivation to learn more about children’s moral development stemmed from a desire to serve as a positive example for the children. The participants’ emphasis on teachers as pivotal role models strongly aligns with Social Learning Theory, particularly Bandura’s (1977) concept of observational learning. Children’s deep trust and admiration for their teachers establish the necessary condition for attention and retention. Furthermore, P2’s personal motivation to embody a positive example directly reflects the participant’s conscious role as a model for moral conduct, suggesting prosocial behaviours and values are not merely taught but demonstrably learned through observation within this influential relationship.

Supporting said ideas, P2 expressed that teachers should “be there to guide and help the children.” Additionally, P1 expanded on how teachers act as facilitators in children’s learning,

> “You observe how they relate to whatever you have already taught them, the value and everything. How do they stand their ground? How do they want to—for example, give and take with other children and understand that people are different…”

A more direct connection to children’s moral development, T2 explained that children “already come with certain qualities” and the teachers are there to “develop from there”. A single mention of communication within the teacher-preschooler relationship further highlights this point. As T2 explained, “You really need to understand them. When you understand them, then you need to learn how to communicate with them.” This perspective of teachers as facilitators matches Vygotsky’s concepts of scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development, where teachers act as the “more knowledgeable others”, scaffold children’s moral

development by guiding them through social dilemmas and helping them internalise moral reasoning.

Participants also acknowledged the importance of establishing boundaries within the teacher-preschooler relationship. One participant emphasised that, although teachers often serve as a 'mommy' figure, they are not obliged to cater to every child's demand, "We cannot just listen to the child. When they say ' My mommy said this, this, this'. 'Well, that (is what your) mommy said, I am not your mommy.' That is that. 'sorry'" (T1). This belief resonates with Piaget's (1932) notion of moral development beginning with respect for authority and externally imposed rules. Another described teachers as a mother figure whom children should listen to in a similar way they listen to their own mothers. They would tell the children that "when you come to school, you must listen to teacher (me). Teacher (I) also loves you like your mommy" (T2). This, in turn, ties into attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), and suggests teachers believe warmth and affection foster moral internalisation. These differing perspectives may reflect variations in the demographics of the children at each participant's workplace or reveal distinct understandings of the respective roles of teachers and parents in children's lives.

Secondly, within the relationship subtheme, participants also discussed the parent-teacher relationship in considerable detail. Three participants emphasized the importance of maintaining a positive rapport with parents. P1 highlighted the role of school leaders, stating, "We, as the principal—we need to have a good relationship with the parents. Once we have a good relationship, we can share." Similarly, T2 noted that the principal at their school was "very good with—uh, parents," reflecting the shared belief that strong parent-teacher relationships are essential. Interestingly, there was a common understanding among participants that fostering this relationship is primarily the responsibility of school leaders or principals. This belief reflects the ecological systems theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), which emphasises the interconnected influence of family and school in shaping a child's development.

Thirdly, the teacher-colleague relationship also emerged in the data, though it was less prominent. T2 repeatedly mentioned that they "like the principal very much…the people there," attributing this positive workplace atmosphere to their overall job satisfaction. They explained, "because if you are not happy with your job, you won't

be able to do a good job at it." Similarly, P2, a principal, expressed a high level of trust in the teachers at their school. While not directly connected to moral development theory, this belief is supported by ecological models of moral development (Narvaez, 2008), which stress the importance of a nurturing and supportive environment across all levels of a child's developmental context, including the professional community surrounding the child.

6.1.3.2 Qualification

In three interviews, participants discussed the importance of teachers' qualifications. During the interview with T1, this topic arose in relation to challenges experienced in teaching. T1 emphasised that holding an official qualification is important as it equips teachers to provide quality education. Similarly, T2 expressed the belief that "you need to be specially trained" to work with children with special needs effectively. Both participants indicated a preference for formal training as essential for preschool teachers. This perspective aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which highlights the importance of a more knowledgeable other in helping children learn and internalise values through guided interactions.

An interesting shift in perspective emerged from a participant in a leadership role. P2 shared that their approach to selecting qualified teaching applicants has evolved over time. Initially, they focused primarily on formal qualifications, but gradually realised that relying solely on paper credentials is insufficient. Instead, they now consider how well a candidate manages the practical demands of teaching. This shift reflects what Schön (1983) calls "reflective practice", the idea that teachers grow professionally not only through formal training but also by learning from their experience in real situations. It also aligns with broader ideas in teacher education that suggest strong teaching combines theoretical knowledge with the ability to adapt to children's needs in real time (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

6.1.3.3 Personal vs. Work

Although personal and professional roles are often seen as separate, participants demonstrated how their experiences in one domain inform the other. For instance, P1 reflected, "We are also parents who send our kids to other schools. So we know—from different perspectives—we know what people need. As parents, how they see things.

As business owners, how they see things." This statement illustrates that educators draw on multiple identities, such as parent, teacher, and business owner, which shape their understanding and decision-making.

T1 offered a contrasting perspective by highlighting the emotional boundary expected of teachers. They began by explaining that young children are often unable to distinguish between school and home life, and as a result, they may bring negative emotions from home into the classroom. Teachers, on the other hand, are expected to maintain a professional boundary and not allow personal challenges to affect their interactions with children. This demonstrates conscious recognition of the child's limited and ongoing process of emotional regulation, while also managing personal feelings to maintain professionalism, as suggested by Hochschild (1983, as cited in Wharton, 2009) as emotional labour. This perspective recognises the expectation that teachers compartmentalise their personal struggles to ensure a stable and supportive environment for children, an important aspect in modelling emotionally regulated moral behaviour, as noted by Narvaez (2008).

6.1.3.4 Self-Awareness

Participants underscored the importance of self-awareness in teaching. P1 highlighted the need for teachers to recognise and respect their own limits, stating, "Once you have reached that limit, take a breather." This insight emerged during a discussion on classroom management, where P1 described how the noise and movement in a preschool setting can become overwhelming, potentially impacting a teacher's ability to remain effective and composed. This reflects how teachers' emotional states can influence their behaviour and interactions with children. This perspective is well supported by research on the effects of educators' stress on teaching and children's learning (Sönmez & Kolaşinlı, 2019; Zinsser et al., 2013). P1 also shared advice they often give to trainee teachers: "Whatever lesson you make, make sure you also enjoy it. If you do not enjoy the lesson, your children won't enjoy the lesson too." This also reflects the idea of emotional contagion (Hatfield et al., 1984), where children tend to pick up on and mirror the emotions expressed by adults. When teachers are visibly engaged and positive, children are more likely to feel and respond in the same way.

6.1.4 Pedagogical Approaches

Last but not least, the analysis also identified pedagogical approaches mentioned by the participants. During the interview, they expressed their opinions on child-centred approaches and how materials are used in their lesson.

6.1.4.1 Child-Centred Approach

Participants showed a preference for child-centred approaches. All participants shared the same appreciation for a personalised approach when it comes to effective teaching. P1 expressed, “I do not really like—one lesson plan to fit all because it does not work… it never works.” Similarly, P2 noted that one method might work for one child but not another. The other two participants discussed a personalised approach, specifically in relation to children with special needs. T1 stated, “We have to do one-to-one [lessons].” T2 reasoned by saying, “Because if you do not have the right method to bring these children out, you will get nowhere”, highlighting the need for a different pedagogical approach when dealing with special needs children. However, this does not mean that personalised approaches are only for those with special needs, as later on in the analysis of practices, we see that the two teachers, T1 and T2, do apply personalised approaches towards children without special needs.

This belief in personalised teaching aligns with contemporary approaches such as differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2001), which emphasises adapting teaching to suit individual learners’ needs. The one-to-one strategies shared by participants also reflect the principles of personalised and child-centred learning, as seen in approaches like Reggio Emilia, where teaching is flexible and responsive to each child. Such personalised approaches support children’s moral development by meeting them at their developmental level and promoting autonomy, both of which are foundational in constructivist moral development theories (Piaget, 1932; Kohlberg, 1977).

Another aspect of the child-centred approach mentioned by participants was the need for relevant pedagogical approaches. This point was expressed differently by each participant. T1 focused on the need for a future-oriented approach, explaining the role of preschools in preparing children for the school life that follows.

> "Our culture, our culture in Malaysia… Because Malaysia is more to Asia. Our system is very similar to that of China. Like—okay, you need to study. If you are not smart, you do not get As, you are going to have a difficult time."

In their workplace context, the preschoolers are assumed to be enrolling in a National Chinese Primary School where the educational focus is mainly on academic achievements. They believe that the pedagogical approach in the preschool where they work now, "…is not fit [said] culture."

In the interview with P1, the focus of relevant pedagogical approaches was expressed through the lesson planned for the children. One example given by P1 was, "Now there is a demand where children need to learn to protect themselves." This highlights the need for teachers to create lessons "according to the society's demand," rather than mindlessly following what is outlined in the curriculum. P2 shared the same value, discussing the various types of exposure that children face nowadays. These perspectives reflect a culturally responsive orientation to pedagogy, where teaching is adapted to align with the cultural, societal, and developmental realities that children face (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2010). Rather than viewing curriculum as fixed, participants positioned themselves as responsive educators who tailor learning to prepare children for the expectations of their broader environment.

6.1.4.2 Material Use

Aside from visual aids used to reinforce rules, as discussed earlier under the theme of 'structured environment,' participants also shared their preferences regarding classroom materials. Initially, T1 expressed a preference for a more 'traditional' approach, favouring the use of books during lessons and prioritising academic content such as literacy and numeracy. Educational games in the classroom were described as a reward given after academic tasks were completed. Although T1 later mentioned incorporating games in group activities that support social learning, these were not presented as core to the children's development.

Meanwhile, T2 shared an instance where they had advised a parent to watch a Malay-language cartoon together with their child to support the child's language development. She suggested, "Sit down with them and enjoy the whole show with them," and explained, "If you ask them to watch alone, it is not interesting to them

because they don't understand." This example highlights that while materials such as cartoons can be effective learning tools, their impact depends on how they are used.

Participants' views on classroom materials reflect different beliefs about how children learn. T1 preferred a more traditional approach, using books and treating games as rewards rather than core tools for development. In contrast, T2 emphasised the importance of shared engagement with materials such as watching a cartoon together with a parent, so that the content becomes meaningful. This reflects sociocultural and constructivist perspectives (e.g., Vygotsky, 2978), where learning happens through interaction and guided support. When used in this way, materials can also support moral learning by promoting reflection on emotions, social situations, and values.

In summary, the findings for Research Question 1 highlight the diverse ways in which early childhood education (ECE) practitioners perceive children's moral development, as well as the various factors that shape and influence their teaching approaches.

6.2 Practices

The second research question explores the practices of Malaysian ECE professionals that emerge in a conversation regarding preschoolers' moral development. Four themes emerged, each with subthemes.

Table 7

Table 7 presents the main theme and subthemes that emerged from the data, answering Research Question 2: What are the practices related preschoolers' moral development do Malaysian ECE professionals employ?

Themes	Subthemes
Pedagogical Approaches	Material-Mediated Practices
	Scaffolding
	Contingency-Based Learning
	Responsive Teaching
	Acknowledging and Addressing Preschoolers' Emotions
	Holistic Assessment
	Emphasis on Academic (Literacy and Numeracy) Teaching
	Group/Social Activities
	Moral versus Religion
Classroom Management	Dedicated Learning Area

Themes	Subthemes
	Setting Clear Rules
	Time-Outs
	Routines
	Teacher-to-Student Ratio
	Utilizing Peer Influence as a Strategy
Teachers' Role	Teacher as Facilitator
	Lead by Example
	Creating a Safe Environment for Children
	Early Identification of Potential Issues
	Have a Problem-Solving Approach
	Approaching Sensitive Topics with Care
	Qualification-Based Roles/Tasks
Interactions and Relationships	Teachers' Influences
	Collaboration with Colleagues
	Parent-Teacher Relationship

6.2.1 Pedagogical Approaches

During the interviews, participants described a range of pedagogical approaches they use in their classrooms. The analysis will encompass not only those aimed at moral education but also approaches applied across other subject areas.

6.2.1.1 Materials-Mediated Practices

Books were explicitly mentioned as educational materials by three participants. Interestingly, only one participant, T2, linked the use of books to moral education, stating, "We have our own sense of right or wrong, we have what we learn from moral books." However, even in this instance, it was not clearly indicated that moral books were actively used in classroom practice. For the other two participants, T1 and P2, books were mentioned primarily in the context of literacy and numeracy instruction. As T1 explained, "For children aged 4 to 6, I will mix more books [in their lessons]," while discussing why Montessori materials are used less frequently with this age group. While the explicit use of books for moral education was limited, the participants' later references to storytelling are discussed in the following sub-theme on scaffolding.

In the broader literature on moral education, the use of moral storybooks is widely supported in early childhood education as a means to introduce moral concepts (Thambu, 2017; Zhao, 2021). With the right methods of using storybooks, teachers can effectively introduce and instil moral values in preschool children (Betawi, 2022). This aligns with the constructivist view that learning is best supported through meaningful, contextual experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). However, the little emphasis placed on the use of books for moral education may suggest that while books are valued, their potential as moral tools is underutilised.

One material participant connected directly to moral education was the use of visual aids. T1 explained,

> "If we just talk to them, they might not understand. But if we provide pictures, they would. For example, 'Is it okay like this [points picture]? Is it okay? Which one do you think is good? Helping, or pushing?' So there are two pictures."

Meanwhile, P1 used visual aids as reminders of the class rules that children are expected to follow. This approach is supported by research showing that visual prompts can effectively promote desired behaviours among preschoolers (Iwasaki, 2022; Öngören, 2025). Additionally, Shih (2021) noted that children can develop empathy for the character in the pictures as they try to understand the character's feelings.

Participants also mentioned toys and educational games. Initially, T1 explained the use of educational games as transitional activities between lessons. However, as the interview progressed, it became evident that these games also play a role in children's moral development. T1 shared an example of children playing UNO cards in a mixed-age group, where "they would teach each other." This activity not only served as a form of peer learning but also fostered prosocial behaviours such as cooperation, patience, and helping others, key components of moral development. These observations align with Bergen and Davis (2020), who describe play as a meaningful context in which children explore the interaction between moral emotions, reasoning, and action. In this case, the mixed-age group play provided a natural setting for such exploration.

Furthermore, the participant reflected on how engaging children of different ages in the same game promoted a sense of equality and inclusion: “It’s as if they treat everyone equally, without favouritism,” as all children, regardless of age, were treated as capable contributors within the group. Grusec (2023) highlights that group play allows children to observe the moral behaviours of others and encourages imitation through the emotional experience of belonging. Moreover, play contributes to the development of self-regulation (Foley, 2017), which plays a critical role in moral development. Similarly, P2 equips the ‘calm corner’ with toys and tools to help children regulate their emotions when they are feeling overwhelmed.

Finally, cartoons were also mentioned as an educational tool by T2. T2 described recommending cartoons in Malay to a parent whose child was struggling to speak the language, saying, “I will share with them a nice cartoon in Malay.” However, this was not specifically aimed at moral education. Watching cartoons has been reported to help children understand moral concepts through the engaging storylines of these shows (Abdullah, 2023; Chang et al., 2021). However, the use of cartoons may be underutilised among the participants as a medium for moral education, similar to books.

6.2.1.2 Scaffolding

Participants described scaffolding as a more direct and intentional approach to moral education. T2 explained, “So you have to tell them, lead them [to] do it, and then when one says sorry, the other child will definitely give him one, you know?”, highlighting how teachers guide children through moral actions such as apologising and reconciliation. P2 was more explicit in framing this support as part of the teacher’s role: “If they still don’t understand, we do scaffolding… that is our responsibility. To introduce, to teach, to demonstrate to them.”

Storytelling emerged as a key scaffolding strategy employed by participants to support children's moral understanding. Instead of delivering direct instructions on what is right or wrong, teachers used stories and situational examples to introduce moral concepts in a way that was both engaging and developmentally appropriate. P2 explained that stories were particularly compelling because “in the story, there is a cause and effect. Children believe, or children understand,” highlighting how narrative structure helps children grasp the consequences of actions. Similarly, T2

extended the use of visual aids by constructing stories around the images shown to children, enriching their understanding through contextualised explanation. T2 also affirmed that "teaching the child through storytelling" was among the methods used to approach moral education. This practice of storytelling aligns with the claim by Hunter and Eder (2010), which suggests that children can utilise storytelling as a scaffold to make sense of and understand the complexities of the world around them.

Participants also described the use of reflective practices as a form of scaffolding in moral education. In this context, reflective practices refer to the intentional creation of opportunities and spaces for children to think about their actions, consider ongoing situations, and make sense of their behaviours. P2 shared that when a child seeks help in resolving a conflict with a peer, they are guided through a reflection process: "When we reflect, they will, okay 'If I have been hit by others, do I like it or not?…' that is the highest level, where they can self-reflect, and regulate their own emotions."

This approach was echoed by T1, who described prompting reflection following disciplinary moments: "So even if we scold them, we will ask them after, 'Why did I scold you? Do you understand why?" In this case, the teacher's questioning serves as a reflective scaffold, encouraging the child to think critically about their behaviour and its consequences. Although Morcom's (2016) study focused on early primary school children, its findings on using reflective methods to reduce antisocial behaviour and promote peer collaboration may offer insights into similar reflective practices in preschool settings.

Together, these examples illustrate the practice of scaffolding, where teachers provide structured, intentional support to help children internalise moral ideas. This aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), which emphasises the role of guided interaction within the child's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as essential for learning. The focus on context-specific, real-world situations also fits well with Social Domain Theory (Turiel, 2000), which suggests that children develop moral reasoning through active engagement in and reflection on everyday social interactions.

6.2.1.3 Contingency-based learning

Understanding the consequences of our actions can be a motivator for us to either maintain or change our behaviour. This idea was shared by the participants of this

study, especially when shaping children's moral behaviour. While the 'calm corner' mentioned by P2 was intended as a space for children to regulate their emotions, it may also be perceived by children as a consequence for undesirable behaviour, such as fighting over a toy, since it results in temporary separation from the rest of the class. T1 shared an instance of using contingency-based learning to sustain engagement in classroom tasks. When children were distracted or reluctant to complete a given activity, T1 would prompt them with, "Finish my work. Then you can have fun… You finish your work, then you can play," clearly linking their actions to future outcomes. Notably, participants only described scenarios in which consequences were directed at the individual child who committed the act.

These practices reflect a contingency-based approach, where children learn through the consequences of their actions. This aligns with behaviourist ideas of reinforcement (Skinner, 1953). From a moral development perspective, such experience supports social domain theory (Turiel, 2002), which suggests that children's moral reasoning is shaped through real-life social interactions. While the focus on individual consequences may suggest a more limited view of morality, one that emphasises personal responsibility and self-regulation, it does not necessarily exclude the social dimension. Instead, it may indicate that educators aim to support children in navigating moral situations independently within a broader social context.

6.2.1.4 Responsive Teaching

In this study, responsive teaching refers to instances where participants adapt their teaching methods to align with children's lived experiences or interests. For example, T2 responded to a child's disappointment over the death of a green bean plant by "explaining to them the life cycle of a bean." In another case, when there is a child who is unwell in the classroom, T2 took this opportunity to guide the class on empathy and how to be considerate of others, "Your friend is not well. Do not make a lot of noise. Let her rest." A third example involved children raising questions about the current situation in Palestine. Rather than dismissing the topic, P2 acknowledged their curiosity and discussed the issue in a developmentally appropriate manner.

These practices go beyond simple content delivery. They reflect emotionally responsive teaching, a strategy shown to enhance children's social-emotional

competence (Hyson, 1994; Zinsser et al., 2014). Such approaches are deeply connected to nurturing children's moral development by fostering empathy, self-reflection, and caring behaviour within meaningful, real-world contexts.

6.2.1.5 Acknowledging & Addressing Preschoolers' Emotions

Previously, we explored participants' beliefs on the importance of emotional understanding and regulation. In practice, participants demonstrated an attentiveness to preschoolers' emotions, integrating emotional awareness into their approach to moral education. T2 emphasised the importance of addressing children's emotional states as a prerequisite for learning, "If they are in a bad mood, they come to school in a bad mood. So then, you get to pacify them and help them."

P1 highlighted the role of emotional perspective-taking in moral reflection, guiding children to consider how others might feel in similar situations: "When we reflect, they will, okay—'If I have been hit by others, do I like it or not?'" Similarly, T1 shared that they actively invite children to express their feelings and reasoning, "We will also ask them about their feelings, why they did it…", encouraging children to connect emotions with their actions. P2 took a more spatial approach by setting up a 'calm corner'—a designated space to help children self-regulate when they feel overwhelmed, emphasising the importance of emotional awareness and control.

These classroom strategies reflect an emphasis in early childhood education (ECE) on integrating emotional development into daily routines. Practices such as asking children to articulate their feelings, guiding them through emotional reflection, and providing dedicated spaces are increasingly recognised in research as effective for helping children self-regulate and understand the emotional consequences of their actions. For example, Durlak et al. (2011) found that emotionally supportive environments significantly enhance children's socio-emotional and behavioural outcomes. Similarly, structured emotional support in classrooms has been linked to improved peer relationships and prosocial behaviour (Zinsser et al., 2013).

6.2.1.6 Holistic Assessment

Among the participants, only two discussed assessments from a holistic perspective. P2 stated four domains in which a child is assessed: Phonics, comprehension, interaction with other children, and participation in group activities. P1 expressed the

use of assessment, categorised into two, “Primary—under primary, they will be communication, social and also physical. Specific is on literacy, numeracy—all the (academic) lessons.” They further explained that assessment is not limited to the child alone but also extends to parents in order to understand the child’s context better. They highlighted that meaningful assessment goes beyond the child’s performance in school. It also involves understanding the child’s background and home environment to gain a fuller picture of their development and how best to support them.

These holistic assessments reflect the goals outlined in research on holistic early childhood education (ECE), which advocates for integrating cognitive, emotional, and social domains rather than isolating academic achievement (Rodiah et al., 2024). By including interaction and home environment in their evaluations, the participants are able to observe moral dimensions in children’s daily behaviours and relationships.

In contrast, T2 made no mention of assessment, and T1 explicitly stated that the school where they currently teach does not conduct any assessments. Notably, those who described more comprehensive approaches to assessment—P1 and P2—were also in leadership positions, suggesting that institutional roles may influence the emphasis placed on moral and social dimensions of learning.

6.2.1.7 Emphasis on Academic (Literacy and Numeracy) Teaching

A clear pattern emerged across the interviews, with an increasing prioritisation of academic learning for children aged 5 to 6. Participants described a shift from thematic or play-based learning toward structured instruction in reading, writing, and numeracy. P1 noted that “once they are five years old, it’s more academic,” and described how children who needed extra support would receive one-on-one sessions in literacy. While P1 also mentioned extracurricular options, such as football, ballet, and taekwondo, these were offered after school hours and framed as optional, suggesting they were not as central to the curriculum as academic development. T2 reinforced this view by stating, “By the time they come to me, they would already [have] learned how to read, write, count,” indicating that academic readiness was expected.

T1 similarly described their primary goal as ensuring children could “read, write, and count”. Collectively, these examples illustrate how academic preparation is often

emphasised in the preschool years, particularly for older children. This mirrors findings by Tee and Md Nor (2018), who noted that preschool environments in Malaysia often prioritise academic outcomes in ways that contradict the principles of developmentally appropriate practice and the intentions of the national preschool curriculum.

6.2.1.8 Group and Social Activities

While participants highlighted the importance of socialisation in children's moral learning, two participants, T1 and T2, described incorporating structured group activities into the daily routine. As previously discussed, T1 used educational games in group settings as transitional activities between lessons, creating opportunities for peer interaction and cooperation. Briefly mentioned but not to be dismissed, T2 stated, "During playtime…snack time, everybody will come together. There was no mention of mixed-age group activities or interactions by the other two participants.

These practices suggest that while group and social activities provide natural opportunities for moral learning, they are not consistently utilised as intentional teaching moments. The absence of structured moral goals within these settings indicates that moral development in group contexts may be occurring implicitly, rather than through planned pedagogy. This aligns with research suggesting that peer interaction is a powerful context for moral learning (Killen & Smetana, 2023), yet without intentional guidance, the potential of such moments may go underutilised.

6.2.1.9 Moral versus Religion

The Malaysian preschool curriculum (KSPK) distinguishes between Islamic education for Muslim children and moral education for non-Muslim children. When asked about how they approached moral development in classrooms with children from different religious or cultural backgrounds, participants shared varying accounts of their practices.

P2 stated that "it is all the same values," indicating that she does not differentiate their approach based on the child's religious or cultural background. Similarly, T2 explained that they used "moral, the universal way of saying you have to be a good person", when teaching values. In both P1 and P2 workplaces, the majority of the children are Muslims.

P1 noted that “the non-Muslims, they learn about moral,” and described using storytelling as a method to teach these values. However, the participant did not specify the ratio of Muslim to non-Muslim children in their workplace during the interview.

6.2.2 Classroom Management

6.2.2.1 Dedicated Learning Area

Participants have shared various ways in which the physical spaces are set as dedicated areas. P1 shared, “For children, they have their classroom.” Similarly, T1 stated, “most of the time, it is fixed, [the children] in the classroom.” T1 added, “because if it is in the hall, they will be disturbed, because that is where we would place the smaller children, including those with special needs, because there, there are more things.” This may indicate that the classrooms are mostly equipped with academic materials and are primarily structured for academic instruction.

However, there are also signs of flexibility. P1 goes on further to share that even in classrooms, children are intentionally placed according to their learning style,

> “So, for example, if you are very visual, I will put you at the most front because you need to see it. If you are kinaesthetic, there is no [dedicated] space for you, but you can move around, that is fine for me.”

This reflects an attempt to accommodate individual learning preferences, in line with the developmentally appropriate practice which encourages adapting the environment to support carried developmental needs (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Meanwhile, P2 explained that children are separated into physical classrooms according to their age. Additionally, they also shared that there is a dedicated reading corner, as well as a ‘calm corner’. This aligns with Lynch’s (2017) concept that true withdrawal environments require both spatial and temporal dimensions. By giving children space and permission to step away when overwhelmed, these practices support emotional regulation, a foundational aspect of moral development (Eisenberg, 2000).

6.2.2.2 Setting Clear Rules

Setting rules are part of classroom management strategies. Two participants have shown their practice of setting clear rules. P1 stated, “you have rules in the classroom that visual and also remind them verbally what is your rule.” Similarly, T1 expressed their appreciation for “golden rules”, such as “walking feet” and “indoor voice.” P2, expressed rules as basic ‘dos and don’ts’, also pointing out that different rules apply for special needs children.

Participants’ emphasis on setting clear classroom rules reflects a foundational classroom management strategy that supports both behavioural expectations and moral development. The visual and verbal reinforcement of rules aligns with developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), which encourages the use of consistent, clear expectations to guide behaviour (Coople & Berdekamp, 2009). Furthermore, such practices provide the structure within which children can understand community norms and internalise shared values, a cornerstone of moral socialisation (Thornberg, 2008). The tailored approach to rules for special needs children underscores an inclusive practice that reflects a moral sensitivity to individual differences, which is essential in ethical education (Campbell, 2003).

6.2.2.3 Time-Outs

From the interview, there is evidence that two participants practice time out, T1 and P2. T1 explicitly used the word ‘time-out’. They gave an example that they would tell a child, “Whether you are happy or not, you have to follow the rules. If not, time out. You can just stand out [stand aside].” P2 did not explain it as ‘time-out’ but gave children a time to themselves at the ‘calm corner’. They added that although it is a sort of punishment, if teachers do not use the word punishment, the children would not know.

The use of time-outs serves as behaviour regulation strategy grounded in behaviourist traditions. These practices may reflect an emphasis on control over moral reasoning. However, P2’s comment on avoiding the term “punishment” suggests a conscious attempt to frame the consequence positively, aligning with research urging the need for non-punitive, reflective behaviour interventions that preserve teacher-child relationships and foster moral agency (Haidar & Meadan, 2024).

6.2.2.4 Routines

Previously, we found that participants highlighted having routines as a way to create a structured environment for the children. Two participants showed evidence that they do practice routines in the classroom. P1 shared that they "have a routine that you stick [to] for the whole year." T1 shared their daily schedule for the children, not failing to note that while they have a planned schedule, they often have to adapt it to changes, "because children, sometimes they come in late."

Structured routines provide predictability and emotional security for young children, which are essential for moral learning. From a constructivist lens, consistent routines allow children to anticipate outcomes, develop self-regulation, and practice socially appropriate behaviours (Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, the moral dimension is embedded in routines through repeated opportunities to act responsibly, consider others' needs, and experience the consequences of their actions within a social framework (Killen & Smetana, 2023)

6.2.2.5 Teacher-to-Student Ratio

Only one participant talked about the teacher-to-student ratio. P1 expressed, "we want our teacher also to always be present to our students. So, there is a reason why our ratio is smaller, yeah."

Smaller ratios allow teachers to observe, engage, and respond more effectively to individual moral learning moments (National Associateion for the Education of Young Children, 2009). This practice aligns with vidence showing that increase adult-child interaction supports emotional coaching and the development of empathy and prosocial behaviour (Hamre & Pianta, 2006).

6.2.2.6 Utilising Peer Influence as a Strategy

Two participants shared a common strategy, that is, utilising peer influence as a way to get children in their classroom to change their behaviour. T1 would sometimes depend on the children being influenced to finish their tasks more quickly after seeing other children who have completed theirs move on to play. T2 stated, "…you try to diffuse it, using other kids in the class that are behaving." They added,

“If they don’t know how to dance, you ask another friend to show, ‘ah, shake shake.’ Because [when] teacher ask them to do [it], maybe they are scared, the don’t want to do. So, you ask her friend to show them. Then, they will do.”

The use of peer modelling and influence reflects a strategic understanding of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). Children often emulate behaviours observed in peers, especially when those behaviours are reinforced through social recognition or positive outcomes. This approach not only supports classroom management but also cultivates an environment where moral norms are co-constructed and reinforced by the peer group. Such peer-mediated learning can be a powerful tool in early moral education, fostering both internalisation of values and community-oriented behaviours (Grusec, 2023).

Opposite to the findings under the subtheme ‘holistic assessment’, these two participants who discussed peer influence as a strategy were in teaching positions.

6.2.3 Teacher’s Role

The findings under this theme will include practices reported by participants that highlight the teacher’s role in children’s moral development.

6.2.3.1 Teacher as Facilitator

Participants demonstrated the use of scaffolding in their interactions with preschoolers, particularly by taking on the role of a facilitator to support children's learning and moral development. As P1 explained, “Children, once we guide them, they learn more, we ask them questions to do their own reflection.” They further state, when a child fights with their friend, “you observe how they relate to whatever you already teach them—the values, everything…So you get them to experience it, experience [it] themselves.” This highlights the teacher’s role as a facilitator who guides children in making sense of their actions, rather than acting as an enforcer who intervenes solely to correct behaviour. P2 shared the same idea that “teachers are there to guide children” by “helping the children to develop values.”

This practice aligns with Priede and Vigule’s (2016) claim that preschool learning is most meaningful when teachers act as facilitators, guiding rather than instructing, so that children can make sense of their actions and internalise values through reflective

activity. It also echoes Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding, where teachers, the more knowledgeable others, support children's development within their Zone of Proximal Development.

6.2.3.2 Lead by Example

One participant expressed the need to lead by example, T2. As stated during the interview, "So basically, everything is—we—you have to show by example." This was proven when they further shared an instance where a child was refusing to share a toy with a friend, saying "…because I do not want to snatch it away from her. It is not nice to do [it] like that." It showed how the participant is aware that their actions are also seen as an example by the children. This aligns with Lin et al. (2025), who highlight that successful values education programs often incorporate teacher role modelling as a key strategy for promoting moral development in preschoolers.

6.2.3.3 Creating a Safe Environment for Children

Providing a safe space for the children was discussed by all participants, and they did not refer to the physical space itself. For example, T2 expressed the importance of feeling safe, in order to learn,

> "You really need to understand them. When you understand them, then you need to learn how to communicate with them. Once you know how to communicate with them, then they feel—they feel safe with you. They feel that they can relate with you, then at that point you can actually teach them."

Additionally, P1 stated, "teacher need to put a positive attitude. If teacher do not have a positive attitude, children can feel it". It underscores how the affective climate established by the teacher can directly influence how children engage with values and regulate their behaviour. T1 shared the same value, "So when we see kids, it is like—we have to smile, [we] must pretend that nothing happened. Even when we had a big fight at home."

These practices reflect a classroom climate that supports Socio-emotional learning (SEL) development. While participants may not explicitly label their SEL strategies, their practices align with the framework's emphasis on cultivating emotionally responsive and trusting learning environments (Mandi et al., 2021). Among the

participants, only P2 described providing a dedicated physical space to support children in regulating their emotions.

6.2.3.4 Early Identification of Potential Issues

P1 highlighted the crucial role of teachers in identifying children who may require additional support: “Usually, what we do is, the teacher will identify those children who needed extra help.” It is important to note that this response was given in the context of deciding which children should attend an after-school enrichment class, which primarily focuses on academic skills and not moral development.

While the participant referred specifically to identifying children for academic support, this practice reflects a broader pedagogical awareness of individual differences. In early childhood, the early identification of developmental needs is foundational for tailored guidance and support. Research suggests that early intervention not only supports cognitive development but also plays a crucial role in shaping social behaviours, emotional regulation, and moral understanding (Denham et al., 2012).

6.2.3.5 Having A Problem-Solving Approach

Participants expressed the critical role of teachers in adopting a problem-solving approach when addressing moral issues in the classroom. When asked about what shaped their current beliefs and understanding of morality, P2 shared that they “started hitting the books” after observing ongoing injustices in the world. In another instance, P1 described a challenging situation involving a child with divorced parents. The other children struggled to understand why their classmate only had a mother at home. In response, P1 said, “So I need to do my research on how we want to share with the children that the relationship will end, we will go our separate way, but we will still [be] in a positive environment.” Similarly, T2 also described engaging in reflective thinking when confronted with difficult situations, “Hmm, why did plan A not work? Plan A is not working, let’s go with plan B.”

The participants’ responses reflect teachers’ use of reflective problem-solving to handle moral and emotional challenges in the classroom. Whether researching sensitive topics or adjusting approaches, they demonstrated flexibility and initiative.

Such practices align with the idea of teachers as reflective practitioners who adapt thoughtfully to complex, real-life situations (Larrivee, 2000; Schön, 1983).

6.2.3.6 Approaching Sensitive Topics with Care

Throughout the interviews, participants shared several instances where they were faced with sensitive or potentially controversial topics. For example, P1 recalled moments when children brought up rainbows and their association with the LGBT community, as well as discussions about the situation in Palestine. Rather than dismissing these topics, P2 described approaching them with caution and sensitivity, ensuring the conversation remained appropriate for the children's developmental stage and refraining from expressing personal views. This practice resonated with Elm & Nordqvist (2019) who emphasise that preschool teachers must recognise the developmental stages of their students and respond in ways that are both informative and understandable, helping children make sense of the world around them.

In addition to navigating sensitive topics with children, some participants also highlighted the delicacy required in communicating with parents. As T2 stated, "Whenever you tell a parent about a problem with the child, be sure to give them the solution." Highlighting the need to carefully plan the discussions with parents. Sharing insights and strategies between families and teachers allows for consistency in addressing complex matters (Francis et al., 2022).

6.2.3.7 Qualification-Based Role/Tasks

Two participants, both of whom were teachers, reported the practice of qualification-based role assignments in their workplace. In relation to moral learning, T1 shared that their colleague, who speaks Chinese, was tasked with teaching moral education because it was the children's mother tongue. Meanwhile, T2 explained,

> "We had a teacher there who is very good with children—special needs children. So she could very—bring them out, really guide them. So, when you have a teacher that is specially trained like that, so it is good to have teacher like that, you know?"

This practice was not explicitly mentioned by participants in leadership positions.

6.2.4 Interactions and Relationships

This theme explores the practices participants described in their interactions with children, as well as their relationships with colleagues and parents.

6.2.4.1 Teachers' Influence

P2 highlighted the importance of tone and language, particularly when disciplining children. They stressed that how teachers explain and frame the 'calm corner' can shape how children perceive it, whether as a supportive space or a punishment. P2's reflection on how teachers present the calm corner highlights the importance of framing in shaping children's moral understanding. This aligns with Haidar and Meadan's (2024) argument that the way teachers respond to challenging behaviour can significantly affect behaviour recurrence and the quality of teacher-child relationships.

T2 focused on offering consistent positive reinforcement: "So, whatever she draws, you praise, you praise, and praise. Even though it is not nice. It is the effort that they put in." T2 also encouraged children's reluctant efforts with affirmations like "thank you for sharing," reinforcing moral and prosocial behaviours. This practice reflects a common strategy utilised by preschool teachers to encourage or promote appropriate behaviour (Floress & Jenkins, 2015).

Similarly, T1 used reassuring and supportive language, such as "Ooh, it's okay. [You] Can stand up. You are strong." However, T1 took a firmer stance when it came to enforcing classroom rules, stating: "The child does not follow the rules. So, [you] have to be strict with him. Say, 'rules are rules.'" T1's mix of supportive and firm language shows how teachers influence children's moral development by modelling empathy and setting clear behavioural expectations. This dual approach helps children understand both emotional responses and social rules, supporting the internalisation of moral values (Thornberg, 2008).

Overall, these approaches reflect the teacher's role not only as a behavioural guide but also as a moral role model, helping children internalise values through both supportive and structured communication.

6.2.4.2 Collaboration with Colleagues

In the interview with T2, they stated that they "observe other teachers" and that "sometimes it [is] learning from [what] you observe other teachers do," in response to a question about what shaped their practices in moral education. They also added that it was an intentional move where the principal would "put you under another senior teacher" to guide the new teachers. Additionally, T2 discussed helping other colleagues when they need assistance. T2 was the only participant who described collaborative professional learning and peer support as part of their experience in shaping moral education practices. The practice of peer mentoring has been found to benefit teachers in their professional development (Kupila & Karila, 2019).

6.2.4.3 Parent-Teacher Relationship

While this study focuses on preschool settings, it is important to acknowledge the role of parents as key stakeholders in children's learning and moral development. Participants highlighted various aspects of how the parent-teacher relationship functions.

One important function of the parent–teacher relationship is creating a space where concerns about a child's development or behaviour can be openly discussed. For instance, P2 shared that when a child does not meet developmental milestones, they would "discuss with the parents on how they can do this at home," indicating a collaborative approach to intervention. Similarly, T2 emphasised the importance of being solutions-focused when raising issues: "Whenever you tell a parent about a problem with the child, be sure to give them the solution." T1's experience of a parent requesting to review CCTV footage after their child was hurt at school further highlights that addressing concerns is not a one-way process. Parents, too, bring forward their own observations and seek accountability or clarification from educators.

The relationship also facilitates regular, bidirectional updates about the child. T2 described how parent–teacher meetings offer space for mutual sharing, "the parent will tell the teacher whatever the child has gone through, and then the teacher will also explain to the mother what the child has been doing." Likewise, P1 highlighted the informal yet meaningful exchanges during daily routines, such as drop-off and

pick-up. In the mornings, parents often “have a chat with the teachers, share their input, [and] their insight,” while in the afternoons, “teachers will share how’s their day.” Such mutual communication is vital, as effective engagement with parents fosters children’s early social development and enhances their connection to both home and school environments (Serpell & Mashburn, 2011).

Clear and honest communication emerged as another important feature. P1 noted,“We need to be genuine on whatever we are sharing. We don’t sugarcoat. But there is a positive way to share.” T2 echoed this by emphasising transparency and reassurance: “You must also tell the mom, ‘Okay, this is what we are going to do. We are going to help like this. How we are going to do it…’ then the mother will feel at ease.”

The practices described by participants reflect a collaborative model of parent-teacher relationship, in which ongoing, open communication fosters mutual trust and shared responsibility for children’s development. This aligns with family-centred practices in early childhood education (ECE), which emphasise parents as active partners in supporting not just academic, but also behavioural and moral growth (Epstein et al., 2002).

To summarise, the analysis for Research Question 2 presented practices that are not only directed towards moral education but also include those that are indirectly related to moral education practices.

6.3 Challenges

The third research question explores challenges faced by Malaysian ECE professionals that emerge in a conversation regarding preschoolers’ moral development. Four themes emerged, each with subthemes.

Table 8

Table 8 presents the main theme and subthemes that emerged in the data, answering Research Question 3: What challenges in supporting preschoolers’ moral development are expressed by Malaysian ECE professionals?

Themes	Subthemes
Attending to Special Needs Preschoolers	
School and Employers	Mismatch between current pedagogy and Future Demands
	Poor Management

Themes	Subthemes
Parents	Career Satisfaction
	Large Teacher-to-Student Ratio
	Parents' Cooperation
	Diverse Views and Opinions
	Parents' Expectations
	Parenting Styles

6.3.1 Attending to Special Needs Preschoolers

Participants have not explicitly expressed any challenges that come directly from their interactions with children except for one, and that is in relation to attending preschools with special needs. T1 expressed their preference for teaching in a typical classroom, rather than having to attend to and pay extra attention to those with special needs, "In the end, we don't know—how long can we actually cope? Suddenly, they come in with an outburst, and they'll hurt themselves… when they're unhappy or stressed. So, it's quite difficult to manage."

6.3.2 School and Employers

The second theme that emerged from the data was challenges related to the workplace, or their employers.

6.3.2.1 Mismatch Between Current Pedagogy and Future Demands

Participants have expressed their beliefs in the need for relevant pedagogy, and one participant shared a challenge they faced in this matter. T1 stated that the preschool's pedagogy approach does not match the preschoolers' future needs, "So it's quite difficult when you teach 6-year-olds, 5-year-olds, you still want [to use] hands-on [materials]. Because you have to introduce book terms, now." They further support their argument, saying, "If you want hands-on, you can send your child overseas, right?" implying that the local education system does not match the current pedagogical approach practised in preschool.

6.3.2.2 Poor Management

In addition to the mismatch pointed out by T1, they also commented on the poor management of the workplace, which created a challenge not only for this participant but also for their colleagues. This challenge was revealed when the participant was asked about parents' expectations. They shared, "Of course, they [parents] would ask the principal, but the principal would sometimes reply and sometimes don't", which led to the parent asking the teachers. Furthermore, they revealed, "Even we [teachers] do not know what to plan, to—because we wait for her [principal], then she didn't—we have to think of it ourselves", exposing the poor management of the workplace.

T1 also noted that the children were unaware of everyday celebrations such as Teacher's Day or Mother's Day, which they attributed in part to the hiring of untrained staff, some of whom were high school graduates with little or no background in early childhood education (ECE), "… and the teachers there do not have experience being a teacher. Maybe they just graduated from high school, and work is just work."

6.3.2.3 Career Satisfaction

T1 reported that while the current workplace is an "easy school", with little expectation put on them by the employer, they later realise that they feel "bored". They explained, "It is as if there are no outside activities. And then, the children are stuck in school. Even if they go out, it is the same environment." The inability to provide preschoolers a diverse environment, a limitation of the workplace, has lowered their career satisfaction.

6.3.2.4 Large Teacher-to-Student Ratio

Lastly, T1 exposed the challenge of having a large teacher-to-student ratio in a class setting. Comparing it to the Malaysian primary schools, T1 explained, "Parents would send, even in kindergarten, you would have 15 to 20 children [in a class]. It does not matter if they are 3- or 4-year-olds. Will all of them understand what you are teaching? I do not think so. Will all of them know their ABCs?" The statement reflects this participant's challenge in providing quality education for the children in a large teacher-to-student ratio.

Overall, challenges related to school and employees were only mentioned by T1.

6.3.3 Parents

Finally, participants have shared challenges that are related to the parents of the preschoolers.

6.3.3.1 Parents cooperation

When asked about the challenges of supporting children's moral development, T2 replied, "I think. It just would be—I suppose if you want to teach the child something, sometimes, if the parents are not cooperative…" hinting an existing challenge resulting from a lack of support from parents at home.

6.3.3.2 Diverse Views and Opinions

There are also instances where the participants expressed challenges that come from parents having different views and opinions. For example, P1 shared that from some parents' point of view, "Autism is a problem", which makes it difficult for the teachers to have a discussion with parents whose children are showing signs of the condition without leaving the parents feeling discouraged or even in denial of the situation. In a different interview, P2 said, "While we believe in what we teach and what we advocate, the parent might have different beliefs, values, and ideology", when asked about challenges in moral education.

6.3.3.3 Parents' Expectations

Parents' expectations evidently posed a challenge for participants, particularly when there was a mismatch between what parents and teachers believed were appropriate responsibilities or outcomes. T2 illustrated this when sharing an experience with a parent who expected teachers to fulfil basic caregiving tasks,

"There is this child. The mother always sends the boy early in the morning to school and asks the teacher to bathe and feed him—which she should have done at home. So here we are, trying to teach the child the basics of self-cleanliness and what they should do before coming to school. Of course, we'll help take care of the child, but we also want to teach them these basic responsibilities."

P1 described a more complex situation involving conflicting expectations between parents of the same child due to differing religious beliefs, “And when the mother wants the children to learn al-Fatihah, and the father says, ‘don’t even say the word’. So, it is very hard, it is a challenge for us.”

T1 also reflected on how parents’ expectations can place pressure on teachers. In one example, parents expressed a transactional view of education, “I pay. So, you [have to] do everything.” In another, T1 pointed out that while teachers may see progress in a child, parents might feel otherwise, “We feel that there is improvement, but parents may feel that it is not enough.” T1 further noted that some parents prioritised academic outcomes above other forms of learning, “They want both [academic and hands-on learning], but they want education [academic] more.”

6.3.3.4 Parenting Styles

Lastly, Parenting styles were also identified as a factor contributing to the challenges teachers face in supporting children’s learning and development. Participants noted that shifts in modern parenting approaches, often shaped by time constraints and changing values, affect how parents engage with their children and the school. T1 reflected, “Nowadays, many parents say, ‘I don’t want my child to go through the stress I did,’ so they let them play on the phone or watch TV. They’re tired, so they don’t want to push their children too much. Unlike before, when parents—like our mothers—had more time to be with us and guide us.”

To summarise, the analysis of 3 highlighted the challenges that practitioners experience in preschools, illustrating the complex environment in which preschool teachers operate.

7 Trustworthiness and Validity

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of this qualitative study, I followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with the data, including manual transcription and repeated listening to the recordings, which enabled deep familiarity with participants' responses. The use of in vivo and simultaneous coding helped to preserve participants' intended meanings and reflect the complexity of their perspectives. Transferability was addressed by providing rich, contextualised descriptions of the research setting, participants' roles, and thematic findings, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the results to other contexts. Dependability was maintained by documenting each step of the analytic process, including the development of a structured codebook and multiple rounds of coding and theme refinement. Confirmability was ensured through reflexive memo-writing throughout the analysis, which allowed me to examine my own assumptions and remain attentive to how they might influence the interpretation of the data. This practice became especially critical given my own professional background as a former early childhood education (ECE) practitioner. To manage potential bias, I engaged in bracketing (or Epochè), consciously setting aside my prior experiences and perspectives to remain focused on the participants' voices and meanings throughout the research process. It is important to note that while all these steps were taken to ensure maximum trustworthiness and validity, there is a chance that what is shared by the participant is not the whole truth.

8 Discussion

8.1 Summary of findings

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the beliefs, practices, and challenges faced by Malaysian early childhood education (ECE) professionals in the context of moral education. However, to fully grasp the implications of these findings, it is essential to interpret them in light of existing theories, cultural contexts, and practical realities. This discussion seeks to deepen the understanding of moral education in Malaysian preschools by critically examining the most significant findings in relation to each of the study's research questions:

1. What beliefs about preschoolers' moral development do Malaysian ECE professionals express?
2. What are the practices related preschoolers' moral development do Malaysian ECE professionals employ?
3. What challenges in supporting preschoolers' moral development are expressed by Malaysian ECE professionals?

8.1.1 Beliefs: Summary

The findings revealed that Malaysian early childhood education (ECE) professionals hold nuanced and multifaceted beliefs about the moral development of preschool children. At the core of these beliefs is a view of morality as the ability to distinguish right from wrong, often framed in behavioural terms and reflective of Kohlberg's (1977) pre-conventional stage, where authority figures define moral boundaries. Participants also placed strong emphasis on moral emotions—especially empathy, compassion, guilt, and love—as indispensable to early moral learning, echoing Hoffman's (2000) empathy-based theory and the broader moral-emotion framework of Tangney et al (2007). Their concept of fairness extended beyond resource sharing to include equal responsibility among children, reflecting a more reciprocal understanding of justice consistent with Social Domain Theory. Likewise, respect emerged as a deliberately taught value, despite its underrepresentation in empirical literature, highlighting the culturally situated nature of moral education. Religious values were seen both as a moral compass and a

source of communal cohesion, in line with McKay and Whitehouse's (2015) theory of religion's dual role in moral socialisation. Teachers also framed children's moral actions (e.g., helping, sharing, respecting others) as reflections of guided learning, consistent with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory and Stohr's (2012) view of manners as moral expressions.

In terms of pedagogical approaches, participants viewed moral development as something best cultivated through emotionally engaging, relational, and experience-based learning, rather than direct instruction or transmission of moral lessons. This included strategies such as storytelling, peer interaction, role modelling, and spontaneous discussions that arise from real-life classroom events. These approaches are consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, as well as social and emotional learning (SEL) frameworks. Many educators emphasised the importance of embedded moral learning within routines and informal moments, rather than separating moral education from daily practice.

Finally, educators linked the quality of moral teaching to their own professional preparation and qualifications. Most participants viewed formal credentials and specialised training—particularly in inclusive or values-based pedagogy—as prerequisites for delivering high-quality moral education. This belief resonates with Vygotsky's concept of the "more knowledgeable other", positioning the teacher as a moral guide. However, leaders also highlighted that qualifications alone are insufficient; effective moral instruction requires reflective practice, emotional regulation, and the ability to translate theory into meaningful, context-sensitive action—attributes consistent with Schön's (1983) reflective practitioner model. These perspectives suggest that teachers' professional identities shape not only what they teach about morality, but also how they enact moral education in everyday practice.

8.1.2 Practices

The findings from this study illustrate that early childhood educators in Malaysia adopt a broad spectrum of pedagogical practices to support children's moral development, many of which are embedded within the routines and relational dynamics of the classroom. These practices range from intentional scaffolding—such as storytelling, guided reflection, and modelling—to more indirect strategies, including the use of visual aids, classroom routines, emotional coaching, and peer

influence. Rather than relying on a standardised or explicit moral curriculum, educators tended to implement responsive and context-based approaches, adapting their methods according to children's needs, interests, and behaviours.

Teachers also employed materials-mediated practices, such as books, educational games, and visual prompts, though moral education was not always the primary intention behind their use. While some participants highlighted the use of structured group activities and the establishment of classroom rules, others prioritised responsive and emotionally attuned practices, such as supporting children in managing emotional outbursts, encouraging peer empathy, or addressing children's spontaneous questions about global issues.

Significantly, participants demonstrated contingency-based strategies, using consequences to link children's behaviours with outcomes, though primarily focused on individual responsibility. The study also revealed important institutional and relational influences, such as teacher qualifications, leadership roles, collaboration with colleagues, and engagement with parents, all of which shaped how moral learning was supported in practice. These diverse, overlapping strategies reflect an underlying belief in the situated, relational, and developmental nature of moral education, resonating with sociocultural and constructivist perspectives on early childhood learning.

8.1.3 Challenges

The findings revealed that early childhood educators encounter a range of challenges in their efforts to support children's moral development, spanning individual, institutional, and relational domains. While direct challenges arising from interactions with children were minimal, one participant explicitly expressed difficulty in managing preschoolers with special needs, citing emotional outbursts and the pressure of maintaining classroom order as key concerns. More substantial challenges were described in relation to workplace structures, particularly around mismatches between current pedagogical practices and perceived future demands, poor institutional management, and a lack of career satisfaction. These issues were compounded by inadequate teacher preparation, untrained staff, and large teacher-to-student ratios, all of which were seen to hinder meaningful engagement with children on both academic and moral levels.

Another prominent area of difficulty involved collaborations with parents, where participants reported challenges due to a lack of parental cooperation, divergent values, and unrealistic or conflicting expectations. Teachers noted that some parents maintained transactional attitudes toward education, prioritised academic achievement over holistic development, or had inconsistent caregiving routines that undermined moral learning. In some cases, tensions between parents, such as differing religious expectations, further complicate teachers' roles in guiding children's moral development. Finally, participants highlighted how contemporary parenting styles, shaped by time constraints and societal changes, often reduced parents' active involvement in their child's moral growth, increasing the burden on educators to fill this gap.

Collectively, these challenges underscore the complex and often conflicting pressures that early childhood professionals must navigate in fostering moral development, revealing the need for more coordinated institutional support, clearer communication channels with families, and a stronger emphasis on professional development within the field.

8.2 Reflections

8.2.1 Beliefs

While the participants' beliefs about moral development reflect a deep concern for children's emotional and social growth, several underlying complexities and ambiguities warrant further reflection.

One notable finding is the participants' expanded concept of fairness. Unlike much of the early childhood moral development literature, which focuses predominantly on fairness as a resource distribution, educators in this study also emphasised equal responsibility and accountability among children. This suggests a more reciprocal conception of fairness, one that values both giving and receiving. Such a perspective invites a broader understanding of justice in early childhood education, one that moves beyond material equality to encompass shared moral obligations within the peer group.

Another important but underexplored belief concerns gratitude. Some participants described gratitude not only as a response to direct help but as a generalised moral

disposition, the capacity to feel grateful simply because one values moral behaviour itself. This aligns with the work of Eskens (2024) and Yu et al. (2002), who argue that gratitude can operate independently of immediate benefit or personal gain. However, as Zhu et al. (2020) caution, gratitude may also lead to moral bias, such as justifying immoral behaviour in order to repay or protect benefactors. This dual nature of gratitude suggests that while it may function as a prosocial motivator, it also has the potential to conflict with impartial moral reasoning. This nuance is rarely addressed in early childhood pedagogy.

The role of respect in moral development also emerged as significant. Despite its centrality in many cultural and educational contexts, respect is rarely studied as a distinct construct in moral development literature, possibly due to its broad and culturally contingent nature. Researchers have often favoured more concrete constructs such as fairness or helping. However, the participants in this study consistently identified respect as a teachable and observable moral value, suggesting that it deserves more explicit attention in future research, especially in multicultural settings where respect may carry varied meanings and implications.

Religious beliefs were also shown to influence educators' moral perspectives and practices in diverse ways. While some participants used religion as a foundational source of moral principles, others referred to it more implicitly, using values such as compassion and responsibility without invoking specific religious frameworks. This variation reflects how religion can function both as an explicit moral guide and as a cultural backdrop that shapes values more subtly, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of how personal belief systems inform professional practice in secular and multi-faith educational settings.

A related area requiring further clarity is the educators' reference to discipline. The term was used by participants without elaboration, leaving it unclear whether they referred to disciplining a child or fostering internal discipline and self-regulation. This distinction is important, as research shows that the effects of discipline on children vary greatly depending on the caregiver's approach (Grusec, 2023). Future research should investigate how educators define and implement discipline in moral learning contexts, particularly in light of the ongoing debates surrounding punitive versus developmental approaches.

Many participants viewed themselves as moral role models, emphasising the importance of modelling positive behaviour. However, few, if any, acknowledged the modelling of moral imperfection, for instance, admitting their own mistakes or demonstrating how to make amends. As Johansson (2002) argues, being a moral exemplar involves not only modelling ideal behaviour but also acknowledging moral fallibility. This raises important questions about whether children are being shown a complete, authentic picture of moral development, including processes of reflection, accountability, and repair.

Beyond beliefs about children, the findings also raise critical questions about how adult relationships within the school setting, particularly among colleagues, influence children's moral learning. Although this was not a focus of participant responses, the broader ecological context of preschool environments suggests that modelling respectful, empathetic relationships between staff may indirectly shape children's own social behaviours and moral understanding. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which emphasises the interconnectedness of children's developmental contexts.

Educators' beliefs about children's emotional sensitivity were also revealing. Several participants recognised the concept of emotion contagion, describing how children pick up on adults' emotional states. This belief implicitly affirms the view that children possess early capacities for empathy, supporting the idea that emotional responsiveness can be cultivated from a young age. However, this also highlights the importance of teachers' emotional regulation—an area that has been shown to be influenced by workplace conditions. As Jeon and Ardeleanu (2020) found, positive work climates and support from families were associated with a greater use of reappraisal strategies among teachers, enabling them to manage their emotions more constructively in challenging classroom situations.

Another subtle but meaningful finding concerns how teachers position themselves in relation to children. Some described their role in maternal terms, seeing themselves as nurturing figures, while others adopted a more formal, instructional identity. Interestingly, those who aligned with a motherly identity tended to describe more emotionally responsive and flexible moral approaches, while those who identified strictly as teachers favoured more structured and disciplinary methods. This

difference suggests that professional identity plays a role in shaping pedagogical style, particularly in relation to moral instruction.

Finally, while participants identified a number of practical tools and materials used in their practice, such as books, visuals, and storytelling, these were not explicitly linked to moral education. This may imply that such resources are underutilised in their full moral potential. Whether this is due to time constraints, a lack of training, or the perceived lower priority of moral education remains unclear, but it raises important questions about how practitioners are supported in integrating moral learning into broader pedagogical activities.

8.2.2 Practices

While the findings highlight the diverse, responsive, and largely relational nature of moral education practices in early childhood settings, several critical insights emerge when examining how these practices are enacted, prioritised, and supported.

First, the study uncovered divergent pedagogical orientations among educators, particularly between those who view teaching as primarily academic and those who embrace a more holistic, child-centred approach. While many participants expressed a preference for nurturing the whole child, including moral and social-emotional development, their classroom practices often reflected a strong emphasis on academic readiness. For example, one participant (T1) focused heavily on book-based instruction and cognitive outcomes, treating moral and prosocial experiences as incidental or secondary to the main educational goals. This contrast points to a deeper tension. Even among those who claim to value child-centred education, the prioritisation of academic preparation, shaped by systemic expectations and the structure of formal schooling, may lead to a disconnect between educational beliefs and day-to-day practice. As a result, moral education is at risk of being sidelined, despite its fundamental role in supporting children's overall development.

The study also highlights the undervaluing of informal and social learning contexts, particularly in relation to group and transitional activities. These everyday moments are rich with opportunities for moral learning, such as negotiation, turn-taking, and empathy-building. Yet they appear to be under-planned and underutilised. This may reflect an implicit assumption that children will develop prosocial behaviours

independently, without the need for intentional scaffolding. Such assumptions overlook the importance of guided participation in moral learning and suggest a need for greater professional awareness of how unstructured time can be transformed into meaningful moral experiences.

A further concern relates to the use of contingency-based learning, where consequences are used to reinforce moral behaviour. While this approach can promote personal responsibility, it may also reflect a narrow focus on individual outcomes rather than encouraging children to consider how their actions affect others or contribute to a shared moral community. This raises the question of whether moral education is being framed primarily as compliance, rather than as ethical reasoning and the development of empathy.

Another key finding involves the integration, or lack thereof, of new instructional media. Although digital and multimedia tools offer unique opportunities for presenting moral dilemmas and promoting discussion (Shih, 2022), only one participant mentioned using such media, and even then, not in the context of moral education. This suggests that educators may be missing opportunities to engage children in morally rich dialogue through the use of interactive and developmentally appropriate technologies.

The role of diversity in moral learning also emerged as an area of reflection. While participants highlighted diversity as a core moral value, their classrooms were typically structured around age-based groupings, which may limit children's exposure to a broader range of perspectives and relational dynamics. This raises a pedagogical question about how much and what kind of diversity is appropriate and beneficial in preschool settings—and how to balance structure with heterogeneity in ways that support moral growth.

Several reflections also emerged around professional collaboration and collective moral practice. Despite moral education being a central theme of early childhood teaching, only one participant explicitly mentioned working with colleagues in this area. This suggests that moral pedagogy is often constructed individually, with limited space for shared reflection or coordinated approaches. Such individualisation may lead to inconsistencies in practice and missed opportunities for professional

learning. Encouraging a more collaborative culture of moral reflection within ECE centres could enhance both consistency and confidence among practitioners.

The teacher-parent relationship was viewed not merely as a logistical necessity but as a vital component of the child's moral ecosystem. When parents and teachers maintain consistent moral expectations, children experience greater coherence in their value systems. However, this level of partnership appeared aspirational in many cases, revealing a need for stronger home–school connections that prioritise shared moral goals.

Significant institutional tensions were also revealed, particularly between leadership and classroom staff. While participants in leadership roles (P1 and P2) described holistic assessment frameworks that included moral and emotional dimensions, teachers (T1 and T2) did not mention using such assessments, or in some cases, rejected the idea entirely. This disconnect suggests a potential misalignment between institutional vision and classroom realities, possibly due to unclear communication, inadequate training, or role-based divisions of responsibility. Drawing on Spillane et al. (2001), this gap highlights how authority structures and role hierarchies influence the implementation of educational priorities. Without supportive structures that enable teachers to engage with and enact holistic frameworks, moral and social dimensions of learning risk remaining theoretical rather than practical.

This tension may also be shaped by professional identity and experience. The differences in beliefs and practices between teachers and leaders may reflect the developmental arc of educators' careers. As Mihaela and Alina-Oana (2015) note, pedagogical beliefs evolve through personal experiences, role shifts, and broader educational change. Recognising this dynamic could help institutions support teachers at different stages of professional development in aligning their practices with broader moral education goals.

Finally, the findings invite a rethinking of how children's moral contexts are conceptualised. Traditional models of culturally responsive pedagogy tend to focus on children's immediate physical and social environments. However, this study suggests that children's moral worlds are also shaped by indirect, cognitive exposures, such as media representations or global events like the conflict in Palestine. These exposures are not passive; they actively inform children's moral reasoning and emotional

responses. This underscores the need for educators to be prepared to engage with complex, spontaneous inquiries and to recognise that moral learning emerges not only from lived experience but also from reflected, imagined, and mediated realities.

8.2.3 Challenges

One of the more striking challenges raised in this study is the mismatch between current preschool pedagogies and the expectations of formal schooling. While many early childhood programmes in Malaysia adopt holistic, child-centred approaches—such as Montessori, Reggio Emilia, or play-based models—these often stand in stark contrast to the rote learning and academic-focused structures of primary education. This disjuncture creates a pedagogical tension, where preschool teachers feel burdened by the responsibility of preparing children for a future learning environment that may not align with the values or approaches they currently uphold. It raises the urgent need for curriculum reform that ensures continuity and coherence across educational stages. Moreover, it draws attention to the shrinking variety of educational choices as children progress through the system. While preschools may offer diverse and flexible pedagogies, these options tend to narrow significantly in later stages, limiting long-term developmental alignment and possibly undermining the foundational work done in early childhood settings.

In addition, the repeated challenges involving parents point to a critical need for intervention and alignment between home and school. While existing research often positions parents as central to children's moral development, the findings of this study suggest that, in practice, the responsibility often falls disproportionately on teachers. This could be due, in part, to the research design, which centres on educators' perspectives—potentially leading them to unconsciously assume primary responsibility for children's moral growth. However, beneath this imbalance lies an important insight: teachers deeply care about children's moral development and are seeking greater support, understanding, and collaboration from parents. The findings suggest a desire for a more clearly defined partnership, where teachers are not the sole drivers of moral education, but rather co-constructors alongside families. Without such mutual commitment, the moral guidance children receive may become fragmented or inconsistent across home and school environments.

8.3 Limitations and Implications

The findings of this study offer several implications for early childhood moral education in Malaysia, particularly in relation to curriculum alignment, teacher practice, and the role of parents. These implications are not intended to be prescriptive, but rather to offer meaningful directions for policy development, institutional improvement, and pedagogical reflection. At the same time, it is important to recognise the study's limitations in order to frame its conclusions appropriately and identify areas for future research.

8.3.1 Curriculum and Policy Reform

One of the central findings of this research highlights a disconnect between preschool pedagogical approaches and the expectations of formal primary education, particularly in terms of moral and holistic development. While early childhood centres often embrace play-based or child-centred philosophies, teachers report feeling pressure to prepare children for more academically rigid systems. This creates a pedagogical tension where moral and social learning, though valued, may be compromised in favour of academic readiness. This highlights the need for curriculum reform that ensures continuity across educational stages, where moral education remains an embedded and intentional component of children's learning trajectories.

Moreover, moral education is often viewed as a standalone area in many contexts, rather than as an integrated, cross-curricular concern. There is an opportunity for policymakers and institutions to revisit how moral learning is embedded into daily routines, play, storytelling, conflict resolution, and relationships, making it a living part of the learning environment, not a topic confined to a specific time or subject area.

8.3.2 Teacher Practice and Professional Development

The diversity of beliefs and practices revealed in this study underscores the importance of continuous professional development in moral education. Teachers would benefit from training that supports not only their knowledge of moral theory but also their confidence in addressing complex moral situations, guiding moral reasoning, and responding to children's spontaneous questions. In particular,

inclusive pedagogical approaches are needed to ensure that children with special needs are not left behind in moral learning due to a lack of preparedness or discomfort among teachers.

The findings also indicate a lack of collective professional dialogue on moral education. Teachers often rely on individual judgment and past experience rather than shared frameworks or peer collaboration. Institutions should consider creating spaces for professional conversations, co-reflection, and moral planning, allowing staff to develop a more unified and supported approach.

8.3.3 Parent-School Collaboration

This study makes clear that teachers face substantial challenges when parental support is limited or misaligned. Despite widespread acknowledgement that parents play a crucial role in moral development, many educators feel the burden of responsibility falls almost entirely on their shoulders. This highlights the need for more structured and proactive parent–school engagement strategies, including workshops, home–school communication protocols, and shared value-setting discussions. Teachers should be positioned not as the sole architects of children's moral growth but as partners in a broader ecosystem of care and moral socialisation.

8.3.4 Limitation

While the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the beliefs, practices, and challenges faced by early childhood education professionals in moral education, several limitations must be acknowledged.

First, the study was conducted from an exploratory and qualitative standpoint, involving a small number of participants. As such, the findings are not intended to be generalisable to the wider population of early childhood educators in Malaysia, but rather to offer depth and nuance in understanding specific experiences and perspectives.

Second, as a researcher with prior professional experience in early childhood education, my positionality may have influenced data collection and interpretation, despite conscious efforts to apply bracketing and reflexivity throughout the process. My familiarity with the field, while beneficial in building rapport with participants,

may have shaped which questions I pursued more deeply or how I interpreted certain responses.

Third, technical issues during data collection, particularly one instance of an unstable internet connection, affected the quality of one recorded interview. As a result, some nonverbal cues and subtleties of meaning may have been lost, limiting the depth of interpretation for that participant's contributions.

These limitations point to important considerations for future research, particularly the need for larger and more diverse participant groups, more robust data collection methods, and collaborative or participatory research designs that further minimise researcher bias and deepen contextual insight.

8.4 Suggestions for Future Studies

This study has opened several pathways for future inquiry into moral education in early childhood contexts, particularly within the Malaysian setting. While it offers initial insight into practitioners' beliefs, practices, and challenges, further research is needed to deepen and expand these understandings.

First, this study did not explicitly investigate the intentionality behind educators' practices related to moral education. While participants described various actions that support children's moral growth, the extent to which these were planned, consciously moral in nature, or aligned with specific pedagogical goals remains unclear. Future research could employ discourse analysis or narrative inquiry to examine how educators frame and discuss morality in their professional language. This could provide more precise insights into what teachers implicitly or explicitly count as "moral" and how those meanings are constructed within broader institutional or cultural discourses.

Second, future research should more directly examine moral education in inclusive settings, particularly regarding children with special needs. The current study revealed discomfort and uncertainty among some educators when supporting children with behavioural or emotional differences, suggesting a lack of confidence or training in this area. Investigating how inclusive moral pedagogies can be developed and implemented would offer valuable guidance for creating equitable moral learning environments for all children.

In addition, research could explore the impact of institutional leadership and organisational culture on the enactment of moral education. This study identified a potential disconnect between leadership visions and classroom realities. Further studies could investigate how leadership styles, staff hierarchies, and institutional expectations influence or constrain moral practice at the ground level.

Another vital area involves the voices of parents and families. Since this study focused on educators' perspectives, future research could include the views, values, and expectations of parents to better understand where tensions or alignments exist between home and school. A comparative study between educators' and parents' moral priorities could reveal where collaboration can be strengthened.

Finally, future studies may consider longitudinal or cross-stage research designs, tracking how moral values introduced in preschool are sustained or transformed as children enter primary and later schooling. This could help evaluate the long-term influence of early moral education and the role of curricular continuity in shaping children's moral development over time.

8.5 Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the beliefs, practices, and challenges faced by Malaysian early childhood education professionals in relation to moral education. Against a backdrop of increasing emphasis on moral development and education in early years curricula, this research aimed to better understand how moral education is interpreted and enacted by those working closest with young children in preschool settings.

The findings revealed that educators hold a multifaceted view of morality, encompassing not only behavioural expectations but also emotional, relational, and cultural dimensions. Their practices reflect both intentional and responsive strategies, grounded in daily routines, peer interactions, storytelling, and classroom management. While some educators positioned moral education as an embedded, ongoing process, others framed it as secondary to academic preparation, often in response to perceived pressures from parents or the primary education system.

Several challenges were also identified, particularly relating to institutional constraints, parental engagement, and the complexity of navigating diverse

expectations within and beyond the preschool. Notably, the study exposed a disconnect between leadership-level visions of holistic child development and classroom-level practices, raising concerns about consistency and implementation. Furthermore, educators emphasised the need for additional support in addressing moral development among children with special needs and in fostering collaborative relationships with their parents.

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing a context-specific perspective on moral education in Malaysian preschools, where cultural values, religious influences, and institutional structures intersect to shape educators' beliefs and actions. While the small, exploratory sample limits generalisability, the depth of qualitative insight provides a valuable foundation for further work.

Importantly, this research underscores that moral education cannot be confined to a fixed curriculum or a singular approach. It is a dynamic, relational process shaped by the evolving needs of children, the identities of educators, and the values of the broader community. As such, it requires thoughtful integration into daily pedagogical life, sustained support from leadership, and meaningful partnerships with families.

In closing, this study affirms that early childhood educators are not merely instructors of content—they are moral agents, role models, and co-constructors of children's ethical worlds. To honour this role, we must continue to ask critical questions, examine underlying assumptions, and build systems that empower educators to engage in moral education not as an added responsibility, but as an essential and valued dimension of their professional practice.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Protocol

Questions	Background / Reference
Demographic	
Educational Background	Compulsory Teacher Qualification (Malaysian Qualification Agency, 2024).
Years of Experience	Beliefs are stable (Hoogland, 2015). Belief change can occur at any time during or following an experience (Boden & Berenbaum, 2010).
Religious Background	Objective moral law as source for morality (Beyers, 2023).
Type of preschool/Curriculum	Guides teachers' practices (KPM, 2017) Different preschool curricula in Malaysia (Education Destination Malaysia)
Children age group	Section 29A of the Education Act 1996 (Act 550): Compulsory admittance for 6-year-olds. Cognitive developmental theories difference in stages (Kohlberg, Piaget)
Preschool children demographics Religion Ethnicity Culture Special Needs	Islamic Education vs. Moral Education, the implementation these subjects depend on the number of students from Islamic/other religious backgrounds (KPM, 2017). Children with ASD may have less motivation to gage in prosocial behavior (Dunfield et al., 2019). Ingroup-outgroup morality (Killen & Smetana, 2023): Identification to certain group membership affects how people form moral judgements.
Daily Preparations & Routines	
What is your daily work schedule like? Can you walk me through your day? (What are the routine activities for the teachers (if there is any))	
What are your considerations when planning for teaching and learning activities? (What are your daily preparation and how do you prepare?)	National Preschool Curriculum Standard (KPM, 2017)
Classroom Practices	
How would you describe the learning environment of your workplace?	National Preschool Curriculum Standard (KPM, 2017)
What is/are the instructional methods that you employ?	National Preschool Curriculum Standard (KPM, 2017)
What is your classroom management method? Are there any routines or procedures? Any common rules for the children? How do you address misbehaviours?	Routines are the foundation of classroom management (Lester et al., 2017) Rules prevent challenging behaviors before they occur (Alter & Haydon, 2017)

Questions	Background / Reference
How do you assess learning objectives?	National Preschool Curriculum Standard (KPM, 2017)
Can you share about the involvement of parents and the local community with the school?	National Preschool Curriculum Standard (KPM, 2017)
Beliefs on Children's MD (R1)	
What do you think about when you hear the word 'morality'?	
How would you say children develop their morality at the preschool stage?	
What would you say has influenced or contributed to your belief and understanding of moral development?	
How has it developed over time? was it different before?	
Relating Beliefs to Practices (R2)	
Relating to your practices, how would you say these practices align with your beliefs?	
Instructional Methods	
Routines	
Rules	
Discipline Practice	
Involvement of Outside Parties	
Special Needs	
What are the challenges that you face in guiding children in their moral development?	
How does having children from different cultural and religious backgrounds affect your practice in encouraging the moral development of the children?	
Extra	
Is there anything else you would like to add?	

Appendix 2: Information Sheet

MALAYSIAN ECCE PROFESSIONALS' BELIEFS OF CHILDREN'S MORAL DEVELOPMENT AND ITS ROLE IN THEIR PRACTICES

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important to understand why the research is being conducted and what participation will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully, and feel free to ask questions if anything is unclear or if you would like more information.

WHO AM I AND WHAT THIS IS STUDY ABOUT

My name is Nadia Binti Kamal, and I am conducting this study as part of my thesis for the Changing Education Master's Program at the University of Helsinki. This study investigates the role of Malaysian ECCE professionals' beliefs about children's moral development in shaping their educational and care practices and interactions with children.

WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE

Participants in this study will take part in an interview, conducted online via Zoom. The date and time will be discussed as to what suits both the participant and the interviewer.

The interview will consist of four sections:

1. Demographics and Background
2. ECCE Professional's Practices
3. ECCE Professional's Beliefs about Moral Development
4. Relating Beliefs to Practices

The interview is expected to take approximately 45 mins to 1.5 hour.

WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE

This study seeks to gather the collective wisdom of educators to inform the development of evidence-based practices for fostering children's moral development. Your participation will provide critical data, allowing us to make well-informed decisions regarding interventions and teaching methods. Your insights will ensure that support strategies are relevant, effective, and tailored to the needs of children in contemporary educational environments.

You are invited to participate in this study if you meet the following criteria:

1. You are an Early Childhood Care & Education Professional
2. You are currently or have been engaged in the care and education of Malaysian children aged 3 to 6.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation, skip any question or withdraw at any time without any consequences.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF TAKING PART

As participants, you will answer questions about your beliefs and practices. This may prompt self-reflection and provide an opportunity for personal insight. Many participants find this process meaningful and thought-provoking. My intention is not to provoke or disturb you. However, some questions may evoke strong emotions or discomfort, especially if the topics are personal or sensitive.

Please be assured that your responses will be handled with respect and confidentiality. You may skip any question or withdraw from the study at any time. If you experience distress during or after the interview, I encourage you to seek support. I am happy to provide resources or referrals for assistance.

WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL

Your participation in this study will remain confidential. Your identity and responses will not be disclosed to anyone unless you choose to share them. However, if the researcher believes there is a serious risk of harm or danger to you or another person, or if a serious crime has been disclosed, confidentiality may need to be broken to report this to the relevant authorities.

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE BE RECORDED, STORED AND PROTECTED

The interview will be recorded, transcribed, and anonymized following the ethical guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

- All identifiable data will be encrypted and securely stored in an online folder at the University of Helsinki.
- Only my supervisors and I will have access to this data.
- Identifiable information will be removed from transcripts to protect anonymity. Transcripts and recordings will be stored separately for additional security.

You have the right to request access to your data, correction of inaccuracies, or, in some cases, deletion of your data under GDPR. If you have questions about data protection, you can contact me or the Data Protection Officer at the University of Helsinki.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The results of this study will be used in my thesis dissertation. Please note that the final version of the thesis may be made publicly available online. Results may end up in research articles for the scientific community.

HOW DO I TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY

You can contact me, Nadia, through email or WhatsApp to inform me of your interest in participating. We will then set up the date, time, and location that best suits both of us.

WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact me or my supervisor using the contact details provided below.

Researcher: Nadia Binti Kamal
Email: nadia.bintikamal@helsinki.fi
Contact no.: +60169226547
Thesis Supervisor: Professor Erika Löfström
Email: erika.lofstrom@helsinki.fi

THANK YOU

Appendix 3: Consent form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Research Title: ***MALAYSIAN ECCE PROFESSIONALS' BELIEFS OF CHILDREN'S MORAL DEVELOPMENT AND ITS ROLE IN THEIR PRACTICES***

I understand that participation in the study is voluntary and that I can pause or stop taking part in the study at any time without giving a reason, and there will be no negative consequences for me. The research materials collected about me up to the point of pausing or stopping may still be used in the study unless I request to retract all my statements.

By giving my consent, I accept that data and materials will be collected from me as described in the information sheet.

By giving my consent to participate in this study:

I consent to the use of the data and materials collected as direct quotations in the research results or publication in a way that I cannot be identified.
Yes ☐ No ☐

I consent to the use of the data and materials collected in future research.
Yes ☐ No ☐

I confirm that I have received the information sheet about the content of the study, how it will be conducted and what it means on my part, as well as the privacy notice. I have also had the opportunity to ask the researchers further questions. I have therefore been adequately informed about the content of the study, how it will be conducted and what it means for me, as well as about the processing of my personal data which are processed on the basis of public interest as set out in the law.

I have had sufficient time to consider my participation in the study. I have not been pressured or tempted to take part in the research.

Yes ☐

Signature of Participant

_____

NAME (capital letters):
Date:

If you have any questions or require further information, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor using the contact details provided below.

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Contact no.: +60 16 922 6547
Thesis Supervisor: Professor Erika Löfström
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