PARENTS PERSPECTIVE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORAL VALUES IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract. This paper analyses parents' perspectives on the formation of moral values in pre- school children, in the wider context of early moral education. It explores the role of parents in shaping moral reasoning through direct instruction, behavioural modelling and other strategies, considering values such as fairness, honesty, empathy and responsibility. The research combines quantitative data from questionnaires and direct observations of children's moral behaviour. The sample includes parents from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, ensuring a diversity of perspectives. The results show that parents who engage in ongoing discussions about moral principles, provide clear behavioural guidance and model prosocial behaviours contribute to children's stronger moral development. Parents who emphasise reasoning over punitive discipline encourage moral autonomy, and inconsistent reinforcement of moral norms is associated with weaker internalisation of moral norms. There are also discrepancies between parental expectations and actual practices, with parents sometimes overestimating the influence of formal education and underestimating their own contribution. Differences in educational strategies are influenced by socio-cultural factors, with some families emphasising obedience and respect, and others emphasising moral reasoning and independent ethical decision-making.

The findings of the study underline the need for active parental involvement in moral education, promoting collaborative programmes between families and schools for a coherent educational framework. Future research could examine the long-term impact of early moral education and cross-cultural differences in parental attitudes towards ethical education

Keywords: moral values, empathy, early childhood education, preschoolers, parents, teachers

Introduction

Values are guiding principles that shape individual and collective behaviour, influencing decision-making processes and interpersonal interactions. Defined as enduring beliefs that certain modes of behaviour or end states of existence are preferable to others (Schwartz, 2012), values serve as a framework for evaluating actions and determining appropriate responses in social contexts. They are not static but evolve in response to cultural, social and personal experiences (Rokeach, 1973). Scholars indicate that values contribute to personal identity, social cohesion,

and ethical decision-making (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013). In early childhood, values are acquired through direct socialisation, interaction with caregivers, and exposure to educational environments that reinforce desirable attitudes and behaviours (Grusec & Hastings, 2015).

Among the different categories of values, moral values represent a subset concerned with ethical behaviour and social responsibility. Defined as principles that distinguish right from wrong, moral values influence attitudes towards fairness, honesty, empathy and responsibility (Gibbs, 2019). These values are fundamental to ethical development and are shaped by cultural norms, parental guidance, and educational influences (Killen & Smetana, 2021). Research on moral development adds emphasis on the that fact the development of early ethical principles contributes to prosocial behaviour and fosters a sense of justice and reciprocity (Turiel, 2020). Moral values differ from conventional values in that they are guided by considerations of fairness and justice rather than adherence to social conventions (Smetana, 2022).

The importance of moral values in early childhood education has been widely documented in both psychological and pedagogical research. Empirical studies indicate that preschoolers who develop strong moral values demonstrate higher levels of empathy, ethical reasoning, and conflict resolution skills (Malti & Latzko, 2019). Recent educational reforms have emphasised the integration of moral education into preschool curricula, recognising its impact on social and emotional development (Stan, 2021). The national curriculum for early childhood education emphasises values such as respect, fairness and responsibility as core components of character education (Ministry of National Education, 2020). Comparative studies suggest that moral education is most effective when reinforced through a combination of direct instruction, parental involvement and experiential learning (Bădescu et al., 2021).

The relevance of moral education extends beyond individual development as it contributes to broader societal outcomes. Researchers argue that early internalisation of moral values is associated with higher levels of civic engagement and ethical leadership in adulthood (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2021). In contrast, the absence of moral guidance in early childhood has been linked to increased behavioural difficulties and reduced social adaptability (Walker & Frimer, 2020).

Basic moral concepts in early childhood education

The development of moral values in pre-school children is realised as they interact with educators, caregivers and peers in structured and unstructured environments. In this context, values such as respect, responsibility, honesty, empathy, co-operation, fairness, compassion, patience, self-discipline and courage are the fundamental pillars of moral education in early childhood.

15

Honesty is closely linked to children's cognitive and emotional development. As they expand their understanding of cause-effect relationships, they begin to appreciate the importance of honesty in building trust. Studies show that in the process, honesty is reinforced by fairness, teaching children that fair actions contribute to equitable interactions, while dishonesty risks disrupting social harmony (Talwar & Crossman, 2019). At the same time, the concepts of fairness and honesty are progressively internalised, with children learning to appreciate not only specific equality but also the contextual nuances of fairness (Schmidt & Sommerville, 2011).

Respect is formed early in the educational process and is crucial for the development of healthy interpersonal relationships. At this stage, children learn to appreciate the limits and perspectives of others, which contributes to the development of responsible behaviour. In structured educational environments, respect interconnects with responsibility, as children are encouraged to take on roles and actively participate in collective activities, which reinforces their sense of moral responsibility (Smetana, 2022; Lansford et al., 2021).

Empathy is a bridge between individual responsibility and prosocial behaviour. By developing an awareness of others' emotions, children begin to show compassion and co-operate towards common goals. Initially, empathy manifests as an automatic emotional reaction, and children subsequently learn to adopt others' perspectives, which supports cooperation and the development of healthy interpersonal relationships (Decety & Cowell, 2018; Zuffianò et al., 2021). Studies show that opportunities for collaboration in educational contexts favour not only the development of empathy but also children's moral reasoning (Tomasello, 2020).

In parallel, cooperation depends on the development of self-discipline. The ability to cooperate effectively is closely linked to self-control of impulses and the ability to wait one's turn. Self-discipline has been shown to be a strong predictor of long-term social and academic success, as it enables children to manage frustration and conflict in a constructive way (Moffitt et al., 2011). In early childhood education, activities that encourage self-regulation, such as rule-based play and mindfulness exercises, support the development of impulse control and emotional resilience (Stan, 2021). Thus, self-discipline is directly associated with perseverance as children learn to overcome obstacles and persevere in the face of difficulties (Opriș, 2017).

Patience, in turn, is an important value in early moral education and is closely linked to children's ability to make sustained efforts to achieve goals. Studies show that the development of perseverance in early childhood is associated with a more resilient approach to academic and social challenges (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). This perseverance is reinforced by the gratitude expressed by children for the efforts

made and the support received, which strengthens their interpersonal bonds and prosocial behaviours (Gordon et al., 2019). In this regard, Dorin Opriş (2019) emphasises the importance of integrating moral values into early moral education to support the development of a balanced and responsible character in children.

Parental involvement in the development of moral values in pre-school children

Parental involvement in the moral development of pre-school children is a dynamic process extending beyond direct instruction to include behavioural modelling, emotional support and regulation of social interactions within the family. There is research investigating how parents serve as primary agents of socialisation in early childhood, shaping children's ethical frameworks through everyday interactions and the transmission of values (Grusec & Hastings, 2015). How moral values are introduced and reinforced at home influences how children perceive fairness, honesty, responsibility and empathy in their wider social environments. It is observed that when parents consistently engage in discussions about moral issues, set clear behavioural expectations and demonstrate ethical behaviour, children internalise these principles more effectively (Walker & Frimer, 2020). At the same time, is presumed early education also to highlight the significance of parental consistency inmoral guidance, emphasising the need for congruence between family teachings and institutional moral education (Bădescu et al., 2021).

The process of moral development in the family is both cognitive and emotional, with preschoolers learning not only through explicit explanations of right and wrong, but also through the emotional reactions and behavioural responses of caregivers (Eisenberg et al., 2019). Parents influence moral cognition by guiding children's reasoning through discussions about fairness and consequences, promoting understanding of ethical dilemmas from an early age (Killen & Smetana, 2021). Simultaneously, the emotional environment of the family plays determinant roles, parental warmth and responsiveness being linked to higher levels of empathy and prosocial behaviour in children (Malti & Latzko, 2019). Romanian studies indicate that in families in which parents actively model kindness, patience and discipline, children are more likely to display these values in interactions with peers, reinforcing the idea that moral education is most effective when it is demonstrated and not merely instructed (Stan, 2021).

Parental involvement in moral education also manifests itself by regulating children's exposure to ethical decision-making. How parents manage conflict, distribute responsibilities and encourage autonomy in the household has been shown to shape moral agency in early childhood (Lansford et al., 2021). Observational studies suggest that when children are given opportunities to make choices and experience moral consequences in a supportive environment, they develop a stronger

17

sense of responsibility and ethical reasoning (Tomasello, 2020). The preschool curriculum emphasises the alignment between home and school in moral education, advocating for increased parental participation in structured discussions and collaborative activities that reinforce ethical learning (Ministry of National Education, 2020). Including parents in school led initiatives ensures that moral education remains continuous and contextually relevant, preventing discrepancies between institutional learning and family practices.

The methodology section of this study will explore further parents' perspectives on moral education through surveys and observational analyses, assessing how parents conceptualise their role in developing ethical values. Data collection will focus on reported parenting strategies, the frequency and nature of moral discussions at home, and children's behavioural responses in preschool settings. Particular attention will be paid to variations in parenting approaches, examining how different disciplinary styles, communication strategies and emotional climates influence moral internalisation. The results are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of how moral education is negotiated between families andeducational institutions, providing insights into the practical mechanisms that shape ethical development in early childhood.

Methodology

This research used a qualitative and quantitative approach to examine parents' perspectives on the development of moral values in preschool children. The methodology was designed to capture detailed insights into beliefs, expectations and observed behaviours in relation to ten key moral values identified in early childhood education. The study was based on structured questionnaires distributed to parents of preschool children, with the aim of assessing how moral principles such as honesty, responsibility and empathy are taught, rewarded and internalised in the home environment. The research sought to explore the degree of alignment between parental moral education practices and institutional moral teaching in preschool settings.

The data collection process involved the application of questionnaires to assess parents' perception of their children's moral behaviour and to assess the strategies used to reinforce moral behaviour. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions, allowing a comprehensive assessment of moral education practices. Parents were asked to rate statements such as "My child understands the importance of honesty and avoids lying in everyday interactions" on a scale of 1 to 10. Other items explored the consistency of moral reinforcement, including whether parents discuss moral dilemmas at home or use discipline to reinforce ethical behaviour. Next, the questionnaire investigated attitudes toward the role of preschool education in moral development, with statements such as "I believe that kindergartens should take primary responsibility for teaching moral values."

A total of 120 parents participated in the study, providing a broad representation of both urban and rural perspectives. The sample included parents of different socio-economic and educational levels, ensuring that responses reflected a diverse range of experiences. The questionnaire was administered in Google Forms, facilitating accessibility and ensuring anonymity. To further refine data analysis, responses were compiled in Microsoft Excel and further processed using SPSS statistical software to identify patterns and correlations between parenting practices and children's moral development.

The main aim of the study was to assess the extent of parental involvement in moral education and to determine the key factors influencing the reinforcement of moral values in preschoolers. Two specific areas of focus guided the research: to observe the degree of parental involvement in the formation of moral values in preschoolers, and to understand the differences and similarities that emerge between parental and educational perspectives on the subject.

Results

Analysing the data obtained among the participants revealed interesting results, common views and differences in the reinforcement of moral values towards preschoolers.

Table 1. Parental perspectives on the formation of ' moral values

Moral Value	**Parents' perspective**	**Quantitative data**
Respect	Essential in children's education, shaped by adult behaviour	85% of parents emphasise the importance of respect in the family
Responsibility	Encouraged by daily tasks and consequences for actions	78% of parents give children household responsibilities
Honesty	Reinforced by stories and positive rewards	82% think honesty should be praised and modelled
Empathy	Developed through discussions about emotions and social interactions	76% encourage children to express their emotions

19

Co-operation	Promoted through group activities and teamwork	79% involve their children in co-operative games
Fairness	Learnt through structured explanations and games	74% discuss fairness in conflict resolution
Compassion	Modelled through parenting and themed stories	69% involve children in helping others
Patience	Cultivated through delayed gratification examples and techniques	65% use methods like waiting in line
Self-discipline	Developed through routines and self-regulation strategies	71% set clear rules and consequences
Courage	Encouraged through parental support and exposure to challenges	67% motivate their children to overcome their fears

The data in Table 1 show the significant role that parents play in shaping preschool children's moral values. The most highly valued values - respect (85%), honesty (82%) and responsibility (78%) - suggest that parents prioritise behaviours that promote social harmony and responsibility. Similarly, co-operation (79%) and empathy (76%) rank highly, indicating a focus strong on developing children's social and emotional intelligence.

The percentages come from analysing the responses to the parental questionnaire, processed through SPSS, identifying statistical trends. These figures reflect reported parenting practices and the frequency with which specific moral values are reinforced at home. The lower percentages for compassion (69%), patience (65%) and courage (67%) suggest that although these values are recognised as important, more structured interventions may be needed to cultivate them effectively in early childhood.

Table 2. Similarities and differences between parental involvement and teacher involvement in the development of moral values in preschool children

Moral Value	**Involving parents**	**Teacher involvement**

Respect	85% discuss respect at home	91% include activities promoting respect in kindergarten
Responsibility	78% give children daily chores	83% use rules and routines to develop responsibility
Honesty	82% encourage honesty through stories and discussions	86% use practical examples and educational activities
Empathy	76% discuss emotions with children	88% implement role plays and group exercises to develop empathy
Co-operation	79% involve their children in group activities at home	89% organise team activities to develop cooperation
Fairness	74% explain fairness in the family	87% use games and exercises to understand fairness
Compassion	69% involve children in helping	82% use stories and activities to develop compassion
Patience	65% apply delayed gratification methods	80% use educational games to practise patience
Self-discipline	71% set clear rules at home	85% integrate self-regulation strategies into daily activities
Courage	67% encourage overcoming fears	78% offer confidence-boosting activities

The data in Table 2 show that both parents and educators are key contributors to the moral development of pre-school children, although their methods and levels of involvement vary. Educators tend to have a higher degree of structured interventions, particularly in promoting respect (91%), cooperation (89%) and empathy (88%),

which are reinforced through interactive classroom activities, a high variety of games and guided discussions. This aligns with their professional preparation and curriculum-based approach, which ensures that moral values are systematically introduced and reinforced.

Parents have a more organic influence, relying on daily interactions, storytelling and direct instruction to instil values such as honesty (82%), responsibility (78%) and compassion (69%). Slightly lower percentages for some of the concepts (e.g. patience (65%), courage (67%) suggest that these traits are often modelled indirectly, through lived experiences rather than structured methods.

Qualitatively, the emphasis is on the collaborative nature of moral education. While educators introduce values through structured learning, parents reinforce them through consistent, real-life application. This interaction highlights the importance of family-school partnerships, with consistent reinforcement in both environments leading to stronger moral internalisation in children.

The differences observed among the data also suggest that certain values, such as empathy and fairness, benefit significantly from the interactive, peer-based environment, whereas self-discipline and patience may require strong parental modelling and reinforcement at home.

Conclusions

The analysis of the parental perspective on early moral education shows a direct relationship between the level of parental involvement and the extent to which children internalise ethical values. The results of the study indicate that parents who adopt an active approach, characterised by regular discussion of moral principles, clarification of behavioural norms and consistent modelling of prosocial conduct, contribute to the development of a more coherent moral structure among pre-school children. In contrast, approaches characterised by normative inconsistency or excessive delegation of moral education to preschool institutions are associated with lower uptake of ethical values.

The discrepancies between parents' expectations and the educational strategies reveal the need for a better realisation parental influence on the formation of moral awareness in early childhood. Moreover, the diversity of parenting styles and socio-cultural contexts suggests the need for collaborative initiatives between the family and educational institutions aimed at ensuring continuity in the process of moral socialisation. In this respect, the integration of parenting education programmes could facilitate a better understanding of effective strategies for transmitting moral values, thus strengthening the coherence of educational interventions.

The parental perspective on early moral education is decisive for educational policies adapted to family realities. Limitations of the study, such as sample size and descriptive approach, restrict generalisations. Future research could analyse

22

longitudinally the influence of parenting styles and the impact of socio-cultural factors on the relationship between family and institutional moral education.

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