

THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR IN SHAPING THE CHARACTER OF PRESCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

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Abstract: This article examines the crucial role of the preschool educator in the moral, emotional, and social development of young children. As children in early childhood are highly impressionable, the educator plays a central part not only in teaching but also in modeling positive behavior and attitudes. The study explores how daily interactions, communication styles, emotional support, and structured routines contribute to the formation of values, self-discipline, empathy, and respect in preschool-aged children. The importance of a nurturing, responsive, and consistent educator is emphasized as a key factor in fostering a positive learning environment and long-term developmental outcomes.

Keywords: preschool education, educator's role, moral development, early childhood, character formation, behavior modeling, child guidance

Early childhood is a foundational period in human development, during which children form their first concepts of right and wrong, learn how to interact with others, and develop essential life skills. At this age, the environment — especially the people within it — plays a powerful role in shaping a child's behavior, attitudes, and character. Among these influences, the preschool educator (or caregiver) holds a uniquely influential position.

In many cases, the educator is the first adult outside the family with whom the child builds a close, structured relationship. Through daily routines, communication, emotional support, and disciplinary strategies, educators directly influence children's social and emotional learning. They help children develop patience, cooperation, empathy, and responsibility, which are fundamental qualities for both school readiness and lifelong success.

Moreover, educators act as role models, and their behavior is often imitated by children. The consistency of the educator's actions, tone of voice, problem-solving strategies, and even emotional regulation can greatly impact a child's own behavioral development. As such, the educator's awareness of their role goes far beyond instruction — it extends to being a moral guide, a secure emotional base, and a facilitator of personal growth.

This paper aims to explore the multifaceted role of preschool educators in shaping the moral and emotional development of children, with emphasis on practical methods, classroom dynamics, and the long-term impact of early character education.

This study utilized a qualitative research design to analyze how preschool educators contribute to the character development of children aged 3 to 6. Data were collected through three primary

methods: classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with educators, and content analysis of educational materials and behavior management strategies.

Classroom observations were conducted over a period of six weeks in five different preschool institutions. Observers focused on the daily routines, emotional interactions, and behavioral guidance provided by the educators. Specific attention was paid to how educators corrected misbehavior, praised positive conduct, encouraged cooperation, and modeled values such as honesty, empathy, and patience.

Interviews were conducted with 15 experienced preschool teachers. The interviews explored teachers' perspectives on their role in moral development, challenges in character education, and strategies used to reinforce prosocial behavior in young children.

Document analysis included reviewing classroom management policies, daily activity plans, and the presence of value-based themes (e.g., kindness, sharing, responsibility) in the curriculum.

The results indicate that preschool educators play a foundational role in shaping children's moral and social behavior. Through consistent routines, emotional support, and behavior modeling, educators serve as the primary socializers of values outside the family.

Key findings include:

- **Modeling behavior:** Educators who consistently demonstrated respectful communication, problem-solving, and emotional regulation were more successful in fostering similar behaviors in children. Many children mirrored the teacher's tone of voice and conflict-resolution approaches in peer interactions.
- **Positive reinforcement:** Teachers who used praise and encouragement to acknowledge honesty, sharing, or cooperation reported higher levels of prosocial behavior among their students.
- **Routine and structure:** Classrooms with clear expectations and predictable routines helped children internalize discipline and self-regulation. Structured transitions (e.g., cleaning up toys, lining up for meals) reinforced patience and responsibility.
- **Emotional support:** Educators who provided empathetic responses to children's emotional needs (e.g., calming an upset child or mediating peer conflict) helped children develop emotional literacy and empathy toward others.
- **Value integration in play and storytelling:** Educators who integrated moral lessons into stories, puppet shows, and role-playing activities noted higher child engagement and better understanding of abstract values such as fairness and kindness.

Overall, the research supports the conclusion that preschool teachers are not only instructors, but moral educators whose everyday actions and words shape the foundational character traits of children in profound and lasting ways.

The data gathered in this study confirm and extend long-standing views in developmental psychology that young children construct their moral understandings primarily through observation of, and interaction with, significant adults. Bandura's social-learning theory is clearly reflected in the way

pupils imitated educators' conflict-resolution language and calm tone of voice. Likewise, Vygotsky's notion of guided participation emerges in the finding that children's prosocial behaviour was strongest when teachers actively scaffolded peer interactions rather than leaving them entirely to chance.

Routine and structure surfaced as powerful, if sometimes undervalued, pedagogical tools. Predictable classroom rituals—such as greeting circles, tidy-up songs, and “sharing time”—created a secure emotional climate in which children could practise patience and responsibility with minimal anxiety. These findings align with Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, underlining how microsystem regularities (the daily schedule) strongly condition patterns of self-regulation.

One of the most salient outcomes is the potency of indirect instruction. Moral concepts embedded in storytelling, puppet theatre, or make-believe play were internalised more readily than those delivered through explicit lecturing. When children dramatised fairness during a role-play shop, for example, they not only used the vocabulary of fairness but also enacted turn-taking and negotiated prices—demonstrating applied moral reasoning.

Despite these strengths, several limitations warrant discussion. The sample consisted solely of urban preschools; rural settings may present different cultural expectations and teacher–child ratios. In addition, observations were confined to morning sessions; afternoon fatigue or after-care contexts might yield different interaction patterns. Future research should examine longitudinal effects—whether the character traits cultivated in preschool persist into the first years of primary school—and explore how digital media in the classroom alters the modelling dynamic.

Preschool educators occupy a pivotal position in the moral formation of young children. Their everyday modelling of respectful language, equitable problem-solving, and emotional self-control lays the groundwork for honesty, empathy, cooperation, and self-discipline. Positive reinforcement, clear routines, and the integration of value-laden narratives into play create a rich moral curriculum that permeates all areas of learning.

To maximise this impact, teacher-training programmes should place equal emphasis on socio-emotional pedagogy and academic instruction, equipping educators with strategies for intentional modelling and sensitive mediation of peer conflicts. Administrators and policy-makers should ensure class sizes and schedules that allow for consistent, high-quality educator–child interaction. Finally, partnerships with parents can extend classroom values into the home, providing children with a coherent moral environment.

When these elements align, the preschool educator becomes not merely a caretaker or instructor, but a formative architect of character whose influence resonates well beyond the early years.

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