

Preschool Educators' Perceptions on Values Education

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Abstract: This systematic review examines preschool educators' perceptions and implementation of Values Education (VE), emphasizing its critical role in moral and ethical development during early childhood. Following PRISMA guidelines, the review synthesizes findings from Scopus, ERIC ProQuest, Web of Science, and PsycINFO, covering studies published between 2000 and 2024. While educators recognize the importance of VE in shaping children's character and promoting ethical behavior, several inconsistencies exist in its application. Successful VE programs often include explicit curriculum integration, teacher role modeling, and structured classroom activities. This review underscores the need for professional development initiatives to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver VE effectively, and emphasizes fostering a supportive preschool environment to enhance VE practices. Furthermore, the review emphasizes that a systematic approach to VE can positively impact children's intellectual, emotional, and social development, fostering ethically responsible individuals ready to engage actively in society.

Keywords: systematic review; preschool educator perceptions; Values Education; character development; moral education



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1. Introduction

Values Education (VE), often referred to as character education, has historical roots in ancient philosophical thought, with figures like Socrates and Aristotle emphasizing moral virtue as essential for both personal and societal development. Values such as justice, courage, and self-discipline were central to these philosophical discussions, laying the foundation for modern educational ethics (Berkowitz, 2011). Similarly, religious texts like the Bible, Quran, and Bhagavad Gita highlight values such as compassion, duty, and truth, demonstrating their universality across different cultures (Halstead & Taylor, 2010). These religious and philosophical teachings have profoundly shaped educational frameworks, promoting the development of ethical and responsible citizens (Cheng, 2004). In contemporary education, VE remains critical not only for individual moral development but also for societal well-being. Schools function as microcosms of society, where future citizens are shaped, making the role of educators vital in balancing academic learning with students' ethical and social development. While some philosophers argue that values are innate and rooted in empathy and justice (Monroe et al., 2009), others maintain that values must be explicitly taught through structured educational programs (Yenen & Ulucan, 2021).

Religious texts, including the Bible, Quran, and Bhagavad Gita, also underscore the significance of values such as compassion, duty, and truth, further illustrating the universality of moral principles across cultures and civilizations. These religious teachings

have historically played a significant role in shaping educational frameworks around the world, emphasizing the development of ethical and responsible citizens.

Apart from religious texts, philosophical approaches, such as Kantian and Aristotelian ethics, provide valuable secular frameworks for enhancing VE in contemporary contexts. Kantian ethics emphasizes moral sensitivity, focusing on the ability to recognize morally salient features, organize relevant information, and apply sound judgment and action. This approach encourages empathy, perspective-taking, and critical thinking as essential components of moral education (Formosa, 2021). In contrast, Aristotelian ethics centers on the cultivation of virtues and the practice of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, which involves deliberation and decision-making (Curren, 2016). Curren (2016) also highlights how Aristotelian virtue ethics supports character education by integrating moral habits with intellectual virtues, such as practical reasoning.

In the modern context, VE is recognized as a vital part of education, not only for individual moral development but also for the well-being of society. Schools are viewed as microcosms of society, where future citizens are shaped. In this environment, educators face the challenge of balancing the academic curriculum with the responsibility of cultivating students' ethical and social development. While some philosophers argue that values are innate—rooted in natural human empathy and a sense of justice (Monroe et al., 2009)—others contend that values must be explicitly taught through structured educational programs (Yenen & Ulucan, 2021).

Given the diverse cultural, social, and religious contexts in which education occurs, defining and implementing VE remains a challenge. This systematic review addresses these challenges by exploring the key questions: What are values? What is Values Education? Why is VE important, and how can it be effectively implemented in early childhood education?

1.1. Values and Values Education (The 'What')

The definition of values has been widely debated by scholars, with Tan and Wong (2010) defining values as guiding principles for determining what is right or wrong, good or bad, and fair or unjust. These principles influence not only individual behavior but also collective decision-making in societies. Lickona (2004) adds that values are not only abstract concepts, but they also manifest in concrete behaviors. For example, values such as respect, honesty, and empathy are observed through actions like kindness, cooperation, and integrity. This behavioral aspect of values is crucial because it links ethical understanding with real-world applications. Similarly, Halstead and Taylor (2010) and Schwartz (2010) argue that values guide decision-making and moral reasoning, shaping how individuals relate to others and navigate complex social situations.

Values Education (VE), as understood in educational contexts, refers to the intentional efforts by schools to instill ethical principles in students. Berkowitz (2011) defines VE as an educational process designed to foster ethical and prosocial behaviors in students by providing a structured curriculum and a supportive learning environment. This definition emphasizes that VE is not only about teaching values in isolation but also about embedding them into the everyday life of the school. Halstead and Taylor (2010) offer a broader definition of VE as the development of attitudes, beliefs, and qualities in students, suggesting that VE is as much about personal growth as it is about moral instruction. VE helps students form their moral understanding by encouraging critical reflection and fostering personal virtues such as empathy, fairness, and self-discipline.

In summary, VE is a multifaceted educational practice that encompasses a wide array of pedagogical approaches, all aimed at nurturing students' ethical understanding and moral behavior. While its exact definition may vary depending on cultural, social,

and religious contexts, the core goal remains the same: to prepare students to become responsible, ethical members of society.

1.2. Importance of Values Education (The ‘Why’)

Values Education plays a critical role in the holistic development of children, equipping them with the tools to navigate the ethical and moral complexities of the modern world. VE fosters intellectual growth by encouraging critical thinking and ethical decision-making. When students are taught to think critically about current issues—such as climate change, economic inequality, and social justice—they learn to apply ethical principles in real-world contexts. This intellectual engagement not only enhances students’ academic abilities but also prepares them for future challenges as responsible, informed citizens. Ethically, VE lays the foundation for socially responsible behavior. It helps students develop a moral compass that guides their actions in various social settings, from the classroom to their communities. Research has shown that the absence of ethical guidance can lead to shallow and fragmented learning (Iyer, 2013), where academic knowledge is disconnected from real-life applications. Without a strong ethical foundation, students may struggle to find meaning and purpose in their education, resulting in disengagement and apathy. Thus, VE ensures that education is not merely about the acquisition of knowledge but also about cultivating wisdom, empathy, and ethical judgment. Spiritually, VE contributes to the holistic development of students, helping them connect with deeper existential questions about purpose, meaning, and the nature of the good life. Bhat (2018) argues that VE encourages students to reflect on their place in the world, fostering virtues such as humility, compassion, and self-discipline. Exposure to religious and philosophical traditions can help students develop a deeper understanding of their moral responsibilities toward others and the environment.

Character development is another critical aspect of VE. By incorporating values such as responsibility, unity, peace, respect, tolerance, and humility into the curriculum, preschools help students cultivate the qualities necessary for effective leadership, collaboration, and communication. Iyer (2013) notes that students who internalize these values exhibit higher levels of self-confidence, emotional intelligence, and social cohesion. Research suggests that having a strong moral character not only improves student relationships but also fosters a sense of community and mutual support within the school (Sankar, 2004; Suyatno et al., 2019). Moreover, character education prepares students for the inevitable challenges of life, equipping them with the skills to make difficult decisions with integrity and compassion.

On a societal level, VE helps create a nurturing and positive environment that promotes social cohesion and empathy. Nesbitt and Henderson (2003) argue that students who are taught values such as care for others, loyalty, and fidelity are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors, which benefit their families, schools, and communities. Cummings et al. (2001) highlight that VE also fosters environmental stewardship, encouraging students to take responsibility for the natural world and act in ways that promote sustainability. By instilling these values, VE contributes to the broader goals of social and environmental responsibility, preparing students to become active participants in their communities and society.

1.3. Roles of Teachers and Preschools (The ‘Who’)

Teachers are pivotal in the successful implementation of VE. They are not just instructors but role models who demonstrate values through their actions, interactions, and relationships with students. Carr and Landon (1998) assert that VE is the “soul” of teaching, meaning that the teacher’s role in shaping the values of students is integral to the educational process. Lovat (2010) echoes this sentiment, emphasizing that teachers play a

crucial role in students' moral development, not only by teaching values explicitly but also by embodying them in their everyday interactions.

However, teachers' personal values and priorities can significantly impact how VE is delivered. Cubukcu (2012) highlights the distinction between "high values" (such as loyalty, self-discipline, and perseverance) and values related to social justice, collaboration, and empathy. Depending on their personal beliefs, teachers may emphasize different aspects of VE, leading to variations in how students experience Values Education. This divergence can sometimes create inconsistencies in the application of VE, making it difficult to achieve a standardized approach across different classrooms and preschools. Therefore, professional development programs that focus on aligning teachers' personal values with the broader goals of VE are essential for creating a consistent and effective VE program.

In addition to personal values, teaching styles play a crucial role in how VE is implemented. Explicit teaching involves structured lessons where values are explicitly discussed, and students engage in activities that promote reflection on moral dilemmas and ethical principles. Arweck et al. (2005) found that explicit VE strategies are particularly effective in helping students identify and internalize values such as respect, fairness, and responsibility. Through discussions, role-playing, and project-based learning, teachers can create opportunities for students to apply these values in real-life situations.

On the other hand, implicit teaching refers to the ways in which values are communicated through the hidden curriculum. Thornberg (2008) suggests that implicit teaching occurs when teachers model values through their behavior, such as showing kindness, patience, and respect in their interactions with students. Implicit teaching is often more subtle than explicit instruction, but it is no less important. When students observe teachers practicing the values they are trying to impart, they are more likely to internalize these principles and incorporate them into their own behavior.

1.4. Rationale for This Review (The 'When' and Perceptions Affecting the 'How')

Research demonstrates that early childhood is a critical period for moral and social development, as children are particularly receptive to learning values during this stage of life. Walker et al. (2012) stress the importance of instilling values in early childhood because these formative years shape a child's character and future behavior. Preschool education, which typically covers the age range from birth to seven years, is marked by rapid development in cognitive, emotional, social, and moral domains (Sapsaglam, 2016). During this period, children begin to form an understanding of right and wrong, empathy, fairness, and cooperation, laying the foundation for their moral compass.

To support this development, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) emphasizes developmentally appropriate practices (DAPs), which align educational strategies with the specific needs of different age groups. For infants and toddlers (birth to 3 years), nurturing relationships and opportunities for exploration are critical. Preschool-aged children (3 to 5 years) thrive in environments that encourage active learning through play and social engagement. For children aged 5 to 8 years, educational practices focus on fostering critical thinking, self-regulation, and cooperative problem-solving through meaningful and culturally relevant experiences (NAEYC, 2009a, 2009b).

Given the importance of early childhood as a developmental window, it is essential that VE be implemented consistently and thoughtfully in preschool settings. However, the success of VE largely depends on how preschool educators perceive its importance and how equipped they feel to implement it. Mohamed and Sihes (2019) found that many preschool educators acknowledge the importance of VE but face significant challenges in delivering it effectively due to a lack of training and resources. This review aims to explore

preschool educators’ perceptions of VE, with the goal of identifying the key challenges they face and the pedagogical approaches they use.

1.5. Rationale for Keywords

The keywords selected for this systematic review—such as “Values Education”, “Moral Education”, “Character Education”, “Preschool”, and related terms—were chosen to comprehensively capture the multifaceted aspects of Values Education as applied in early childhood education. These terms align closely with the thematic focus of Alt and Dolev’s (2024) study, which shows the integration of social-emotional skills, VE, and 21st-century competencies in preschool settings. Their exploration of the ‘Preschool of the Future’ reform points to the critical role of VE in shaping children’s moral, social, and emotional development.

To address the focus on educators’ perceptions and implementation strategies, additional terms such as “Perceptions”, “Opinions”, “View”, and “Perspective” were included. This aligns with Alt and Dolev’s findings, which reveal gaps between educators’ attitudes and practical applications of VE. By incorporating these keywords, the search strategy ensures the inclusion of relevant studies that reflect both theoretical and practical dimensions of Values Education in preschool settings, thereby enhancing the comprehensiveness and relevance of this review.

2. Materials and Methods

This review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines Moher et al. (2009) to ensure a rigorous and replicable research process. PRISMA is widely used in systematic reviews across various fields, including education and psychology, to provide transparency in reporting and to facilitate the identification, selection, and synthesis of relevant studies (Table 1).

Table 1. The search string practiced for the systematic review process.

Criteria	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Keywords	Values education, moral education, character education, preschool, kindergarten, teacher, educator, opinion, view, perception, perspective	Primary School, High School, Secondary, Tertiary education, Administrator, citizenship education, Parents, Policy, whole school policy, specific subject area integrating VE
Time	2000–2024	Before 2000
Literature category	Journal articles	Blogs, unauthentic essays, preprints, editorials, book chapters, books, conference papers, and literature review papers, reports
Standard	Peer-reviewed, full-text	Not peer-reviewed, not full-text
Language	English only	Other languages

2.1. Databases and Search Strategy

Four databases were used for this review: Scopus, ERIC ProQuest, Web of Science, and PsycINFO (Table 2). These databases were selected for their comprehensive coverage of research in education, social sciences, and psychology, disciplines that are closely related to VE. The search terms included: “Values Education”, “Moral Education”, “Character Education”, “Preschool”, “Kindergarten”, “Pre-school”, “Teacher”, “Educator”, “Opinion”, “View”, “Perception”, and “Perspective”. The use of multiple databases and a broad search strategy ensured that a wide range of relevant studies was captured for analysis.

Table 2. The eligibility and exclusion criteria.

Database Used	Keywords	Remarks
ERIC ProQuest Lib	ANYWHERE ((“Values Education” OR “Moral Education” OR “Character Education”) AND (“Preschool” OR “kindergarten” OR “pre-school”) AND (“teacher” OR “educator”) AND (“opinion” OR “view” OR “perception” OR “perspective”))	Total searched—8 Journal—6 Others—2
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ((“Values Education” OR “Moral Education” OR “Character Education”) AND (“Preschool” OR “kindergarten” OR “pre-school”) AND (“teach-er” OR “educator”) AND (“opinion” OR “view” OR “perception” OR “perspective”))	Total searched—21 Articles—16 Others—5
Web of Science	All Fields ((“Values Education” OR “Moral Education” OR “Character Education”) AND (“Preschool” OR “kindergarten” OR “pre-school”) AND (“teach-er” OR “educator”) AND (“opinion” OR “view” OR “perception” OR “perspective”))	Total searched—10 Articles—6 Others—4
PsycINFO	ANYWHERE ((“Values Education” OR “Moral Education” OR “Character Ed-ucation”) AND (“Preschool” OR “kin-dergarten” OR “pre-school”) AND (“teacher” OR “educator”) AND (“opinion” OR “view” OR “perception” OR “perspective”))	Peer-reviewed—1 Journal—1 Others—0

2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for this review were as follows:

- Studies published between 2000 and 2024;
- Studies published in peer-reviewed academic journals;
- Studies that focused on educators’ perceptions of VE in preschool settings;
- Studies available in full text;
- Studies published in the English language.

The exclusion criteria were:

- Studies outside the preschool context;
- Studies that did not involve educators;
- Studies focused on VE in specific subject areas (e.g., citizenship education);
- Studies published in non-peer-reviewed outlets.

3. Data Analysis

3.1. Data Extraction and Analysis

A total of 40 articles were initially identified through the database searches. After removing duplicates and applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, eight studies were selected for in-depth analysis. The PRISMA four-phase flow diagram (Figure 1) was used to guide the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion process. Data were extracted by reading the abstracts and full articles, with content analysis applied to identify key themes related to teachers’ perceptions of VE, the challenges they face in its implementation, and the pedagogical strategies they employ (Table 3). Author 2 and Author 3 identified the importance, context, and methodologies to follow for conducting the systematic review.

Author 1 further conducted data extraction, quality assessment, and analysis that is shared in the Section 4.

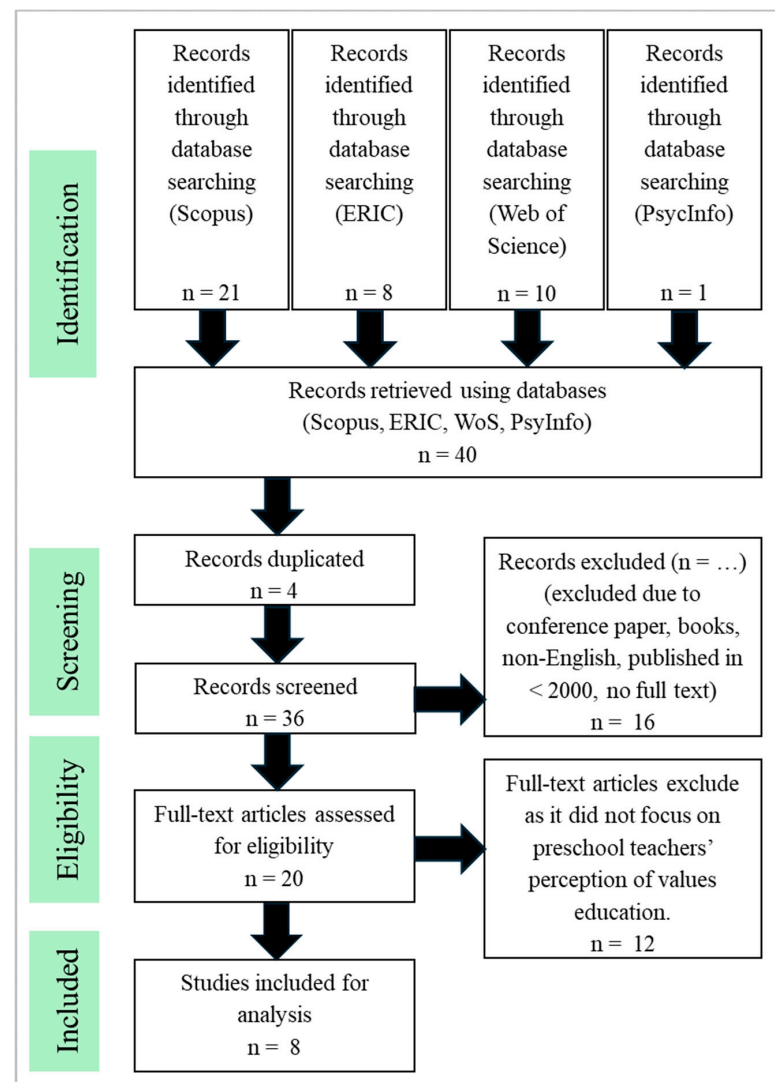


Figure 1. Flow chart of process from identification to final results.

Table 3. Summary of the findings.

No. of Articles	Author(s)/Countries/Year	Study Design	Roles of VE	Challenges	Pedagogical Strategies
1	Yenen and Ulucan (2021), Turkey and USA	Qualitative	Y	Y	Y
2	Puroila et al. (2016), Nordic countries	Qualitative	Y		
3	Yau (2007), China	Qualitative			Y
4	Halimah et al. (2020), Indonesia	Qualitative			Y
5	Puroila and Haho (2017), Finland	Qualitative	Y	Y	
6	Alt and Dolev (2024), Israel		Y	Y	
7	Sigurdardottir et al. (2019), Nordic	Qualitative			Y
8	Türkoğlu (2019), Turkey	Qualitative	Y		Y

3.2. Results and Findings

The systematic review identified three central themes related to preschool educators' perceptions of VE: (1) teachers' perceptions of the role of VE in early childhood settings, (2) challenges faced by educators in implementing VE, and (3) pedagogical approaches and strategies used by educators to teach VE. Each of these themes is further explored in the following sections.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Globalized Terminologies and Methodologies

The studies demonstrate joint efforts to ensure clarity and alignment in the terminology used across different cultural and educational contexts. In the Nordic context, terms such as "care", "respect", and "discipline" were explicitly defined and uniformly applied across studies. This reflects shared cultural and educational values that are embedded in national curricula (Puroila et al., 2016; Sigurdardottir et al., 2019). Similarly, Finnish studies introduced and consistently applied the concept of "moral functioning" to describe the interplay between educators' values and actions in early childhood education (Puroila & Haho, 2017).

In Indonesia, terms like "storytelling-mediated character development" were explicitly linked to cultural practices, ensuring that character education through storytelling remained culturally relevant and pedagogically consistent (Halimah et al., 2020). Israel's "Preschool of the Future" reform employed standardized terms such as "21st-century skills" and "social-emotional learning" to align educational goals with global trends while maintaining coherence across preschools (Alt & Dolev, 2024). Similarly, studies in China differentiated between "moral", "social-conventional", and "personal rules" using domain theory, ensuring precision in categorizing teacher and student interactions (Yau, 2007). Comparative research between Turkey and the U.S. used consistent definitions of "national values" and "universal values", allowing for cross-cultural analysis despite differences in practice (Yenen & Ulucan, 2021).

To ensure methodological consistency, the studies employed robust frameworks tailored to their respective contexts. Nordic research relied on a shared socio-cultural framework and Habermas's theory of communicative action, providing a unified lens to analyze how values were communicated and enacted in preschool settings (Puroila et al., 2016; Sigurdardottir et al., 2019). Finnish studies used narrative approaches to holistically integrate educators' experiences with cultural and contextual factors, maintaining consistency in exploring values through real-life narratives (Puroila & Haho, 2017).

Participatory action research in Indonesia ensured a structured and iterative process for integrating storytelling as a pedagogical tool, allowing for the consistent application of character education methods (Halimah et al., 2020). In Israel, quantitative surveys and constructivist strategies were used to align pedagogical practices with the objectives of the "Preschool of the Future" reform, ensuring a systematic approach to implementation (Alt & Dolev, 2024).

Studies conducted in China employed domain-specific theoretical frameworks to analyze teacher-student interactions, ensuring clarity and reproducibility in the categorization of responses to moral and social-conventional transgressions (Yau, 2007). Comparative research between Turkey and the U.S. utilized semi-structured interviews and content analysis to understand VE practices, employing similar methods in both contexts to ensure comparability and consistency (Yenen & Ulucan, 2021).

4.2. Teachers' Perceptions of VE's Role

Preschool educators' perceptions of VE are shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, social, and institutional factors. Teachers generally view VE as a critical component of early childhood education, recognizing that values are essential for children's social and emotional development. However, teachers' perceptions of the exact role of VE vary significantly depending on their cultural background and the educational context in which they work. For example, in cultures where collectivism and social harmony are emphasized, such as in China, VE is viewed as a means of fostering cooperation, empathy, and respect for others. Yau (2007) found that Chinese preschool teachers prioritize helping children learn to get along with others, ensuring they are well-liked by their peers and able to participate harmoniously in group activities. This reflects the broader cultural emphasis on maintaining social harmony and avoiding conflict. In contrast, Turkish educators tend to emphasize character development and the cultivation of traits necessary for responsible citizenship, such as honesty, responsibility, and loyalty (Türkoğlu, 2019). These priorities align with the broader social goals of fostering a cohesive and morally grounded society (Yenen & Ulucan, 2021).

Educators' perceptions of VE are also influenced by their understanding of how children learn values. Yau (2007) argues that values are not simply transmitted from teacher to student through direct instruction but are actively constructed by children through their interactions with peers, teachers, and the broader social environment. This view aligns with social learning theory, which posits that children learn moral concepts through direct experiences and the observation of moral behaviors in others. Similarly, Nordic educators adopt a socio-cultural perspective, viewing children as active participants in co-constructing values through everyday interactions and reflective dialogs (Sigurdardottir et al., 2019). This perspective aligns with social learning theory, which posits that children learn moral concepts through direct experiences and the observation of moral behaviors in others. Halimah et al. (2020) further support this idea, demonstrating how storytelling in Indonesian preschools fosters character education through collaborative and interactive learning environments.

Another key aspect of educators' perceptions of VE is the role of socio-emotional development. Sigurdardottir et al. (2019) found that preschool educators in the Nordic countries view VE as a means of promoting emotional regulation, empathy, and resilience. Teachers in these countries often prioritize social-emotional learning (SEL) over cognitive skills, reflecting a broader shift toward promoting holistic development in early childhood education. Likewise, the Israeli "Preschool of the Future" reform highlights the integration of SEL alongside 21st-century skills to prepare children for dynamic and uncertain futures (Alt & Dolev, 2024). Pre-pandemic educational practices often prioritized cognitive skills; post-pandemic perspectives have increasingly emphasized integrating social-emotional learning and values to address the broader developmental needs of children in an unpredictable and complex world. This shift has been particularly pronounced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which emphasized the need for strong social-emotional foundations to support children's mental health and adaptability in times of crisis (Colao et al., 2020).

Despite the general consensus on the importance of VE, some educators express discomfort with the explicit teaching of values. Puroila et al. (2016) found that while preschool teachers often avoid using the term "values" explicitly in their teaching, their actions and pedagogical decisions are deeply informed by underlying value systems. Educators often embody values such as care, discipline, and competence in their everyday interactions with students, but they may struggle to articulate these concepts in formal discussions or curriculum planning. This aligns with Hansen's (2004) observation that VE is often holistic and embodied in educators' actions, emotions, and relationships, making

it difficult to define in purely cognitive or theoretical terms. Along similar lines, Finnish educators emphasize moral functioning, where values are intertwined with daily actions and contextual decisions, rather than being abstractly defined (Puroila & Haho, 2017).

In summary, preschool teachers perceive VE as a key component of early childhood education, with a strong emphasis on social-emotional learning and character development. However, the ways in which educators understand and implement VE vary across cultural contexts and individual teaching styles. While some educators view VE as a structured component of the curriculum, others see it as an integral part of the hidden curriculum conveyed through everyday interactions and implicit teaching methods.

4.3. Challenges Faced by Preschool Educators in Implementing VE

While preschool educators generally agree on the importance of VE, they face several challenges in implementing it effectively. These challenges arise from a combination of institutional constraints, cultural differences, family dynamics, and a lack of professional development opportunities.

One of the primary challenges identified by educators is the lack of alignment between home and school values. Many teachers report that their efforts to teach values such as empathy, responsibility, and respect are often undermined by the influence of family dynamics. Yenen and Ulucan (2021) highlight that some families do not prioritize or fully understand the importance of early childhood education, leading to inconsistent reinforcement of values between home and school. This misalignment can create confusion for children, who may receive conflicting messages about appropriate behavior and ethical principles.

Cultural differences also pose significant challenges for educators. In increasingly diverse classrooms, teachers often struggle to navigate the complex cultural norms and value systems that students bring from home. Thomas (2012) found that in multicultural preschool settings, educators face difficulties in balancing the values emphasized in the school curriculum with those held by students' families. For example, certain cultural groups may place a higher value on obedience and conformity, while others may emphasize individual autonomy and critical thinking. This cultural diversity can complicate the delivery of VE, as teachers must find ways to respect and integrate different value systems while maintaining a cohesive approach to moral education. For this systematic review, the Thomas (2012) article is not included as it focuses on the construction of early childhood teachers' professional identities and ethical practices rather than values, moral, or character education. It does not address educators' opinions or perceptions on teaching values, as specified in the search string. Additionally, its primary theoretical framework, poststructuralism, emphasizes professional relationships and identity construction, which is misaligned with the review's focus on Values Education in early childhood settings.

Another significant challenge is the heavy administrative workload that many preschool educators face. In many educational systems, teachers are burdened with procedural paperwork, assessments, and other administrative tasks, which leave them with little time or energy to focus on VE. Thomas (2012) notes that this issue is particularly prevalent in countries with highly centralized education systems, where teachers are required to adhere to prescriptive content and assessment methods. As a result, educators often struggle to find the time or flexibility to incorporate values-based learning into their daily lessons.

In addition to these challenges, educators also report difficulties in managing relationships with parents and colleagues. Teachers are often expected to engage parents as equal partners in their children's education, but this is not always possible. Alt and Dolev (2024) found that tensions often arise when family practices or political influences clash with the values promoted in the preschool. For example, educators may be concerned about the impact of unregulated media use at home, but they may be reluctant to address

this issue due to societal norms that discourage interference in family matters. Similarly, teachers may experience conflict with colleagues or administrators who do not share their commitment to VE or who prioritize other aspects of the curriculum, such as academic achievement or standardized testing.

Finally, many preschool educators report feeling ill-equipped to teach VE due to a lack of professional development opportunities. [Alt and Dolev \(2024\)](#) found that teachers in both Turkey and Israel felt inadequately prepared to help students develop 21st-century competencies, such as critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and collaboration. This gap in teacher training is particularly problematic because it limits educators' ability to develop effective pedagogical strategies for teaching values. Without adequate support and resources, teachers may struggle to create meaningful learning experiences that promote ethical development.

In summary, preschool educators face a range of challenges in their efforts to implement VE, including misalignment between home and preschool values, cultural diversity, administrative burdens, and a lack of professional development. Addressing these challenges will require more flexible curricula, stronger collaboration between preschools and families, and targeted professional development programs that equip educators with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively teach values.

4.4. Pedagogical Approaches and Strategies for Teaching VE

Preschool educators employ a variety of pedagogical approaches to teach values, with each method contributing uniquely to children's moral and social development. These approaches range from direct intervention to more playful, child-centered methods.

One approach used by educators is interventional pedagogy, where teachers guide children through the process of understanding and correcting misbehavior. [Yau \(2007\)](#) found that preschool teachers often employ indirect interventions, such as redirecting children's attention away from conflicts or using short commands to stop undesirable behavior. In these cases, the teacher's role is to de-escalate the situation without engaging in lengthy explanations or moral discussions. This approach is particularly effective in situations where quick resolution is needed to prevent further disruption.

In addition to direct interventions, preschool educators often use play-based learning to introduce and reinforce values. [Türkoğlu \(2019\)](#) found that both in-service and pre-service teachers frequently use play activities as a way to teach values, as these activities are seen as engaging, enjoyable, and developmentally appropriate for young children. Through play, children have the opportunity to explore ethical concepts, practice collaboration, and develop empathy. Drama and art activities are also commonly used to encourage children to express their feelings and reflect on moral dilemmas. Music and storytelling, particularly through the use of puppetry, are effective tools for teaching values such as friendship, kindness, and environmental care ([Halimah et al., 2020](#)).

Another key pedagogical strategy is the use of narrative pedagogy. [Halimah et al. \(2020\)](#) emphasize the effectiveness of storytelling in teaching values, particularly when combined with visual aids such as puppets. Storytelling allows children to engage with moral lessons in a meaningful and memorable way, fostering curiosity, creativity, and a deeper understanding of values ([Wiest, 1998](#)). Through storytelling, teachers can present ethical dilemmas that challenge children to think critically about how to resolve conflicts or make decisions based on fairness and empathy. This approach not only promotes the development of moral reasoning but also encourages children to reflect on their own behavior and the consequences of their actions.

Educators also rely on both explicit and implicit methods for teaching values. Explicit VE refers to formal lessons or curriculum-based instruction, where values such as care and

respect are clearly articulated. For example, [Sigurdardottir et al. \(2019\)](#) point to Iceland's national curriculum, which explicitly outlines core values such as democracy, human rights, and sustainability. In these cases, values are integrated into the curriculum and taught alongside academic subjects, ensuring that children are exposed to ethical concepts in a structured manner. By contrast, implicit VE operates through the hidden curriculum, where values are communicated more subtly through everyday interactions, routines, and teacher behaviors ([Halstead & Taylor, 2010](#)).

The balance between strategic and communicative actions also plays an important role in VE. [Sigurdardottir et al. \(2019\)](#) found that strategic actions, such as establishing clear rules and consequences for behavior, are often used in combination with communicative actions, which emphasize mutual understanding and dialog. For example, teachers may use strategic actions to set clear expectations for behavior, but they also engage in communicative actions by encouraging children to express their feelings, share their perspectives, and participate in resolving conflicts. This approach reflects a broader commitment to fostering democratic values in the classroom, where children learn to negotiate differences, respect diverse viewpoints, and collaborate in decision-making.

The interplay between explicit and implicit VE is essential for helping children internalize values. Explicit instruction provides clear guidelines and rules for behavior, while implicit methods allow children to observe and model values through the everyday behaviors of their teachers and peers. Research shows that children are more likely to internalize values when they are exposed to both forms of VE, as this dual approach reinforces ethical principles in multiple contexts ([Johansson & Einarsdottir, 2017](#)). For example, teachers may explicitly teach values such as kindness and fairness through structured lessons, but they also communicate these values implicitly by modeling empathy, patience, and respect in their daily interactions with students.

In conclusion, preschool educators use a variety of pedagogical strategies to teach values, ranging from direct interventions and play-based learning to storytelling and strategic actions. These approaches work together to create a holistic educational environment where children can develop moral and social values both explicitly through structured lessons and implicitly through everyday experiences. The diversity of these approaches allows educators to tailor their teaching to the needs of their students, fostering a deeper understanding of values that will guide children throughout their lives.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This systematic review highlights the critical role that preschool educators play in implementing VE and the various challenges they face in doing so. The findings underscore that while educators recognize the importance of VE in fostering children's moral, social, and emotional development, inconsistencies in its delivery arise due to differing personal values, cultural contexts, and a lack of comprehensive professional training. Additionally, the review reveals that preschool educators employ a wide range of pedagogical strategies to teach values, including explicit instruction, implicit modeling, narrative-based approaches, and play-based learning. However, these strategies are often influenced by institutional limitations, cultural diversity, and varying levels of support from families and preschool systems.

5.1. Key Recommendations

The findings from this systematic review emphasize several key recommendations for improving the implementation of Values Education (VE) in early childhood settings. First and foremost, there is an urgent need for strengthening professional development for preschool educators. Teachers must be equipped with the appropriate skills and knowledge

to effectively deliver VE. This professional development should focus on both explicit and implicit teaching methods. It is critical that educators understand how to embed values into everyday classroom activities, fostering a learning environment where moral and ethical principles are seamlessly integrated into all aspects of student engagement. Additionally, these training initiatives should encourage educators to critically reflect on their own values and teaching practices, helping them align personal beliefs with the broader institutional goals of VE.

Another essential recommendation is the promotion of a whole-school approach to VE. For VE to be truly effective, it must be integrated into all facets of school life, from classroom lessons to the school's overarching policies and daily routines. Administrators, teachers, and even students should work collaboratively to ensure that values are not only taught but practiced throughout the preschool environment. A preschool culture that consistently reinforces key values in everything from interactions between staff and students to preschool events will create a nurturing environment that supports the moral and social development of children. To achieve this, preschool administrators and policymakers must prioritize the inclusion of values in both the curriculum and in school-wide initiatives, ensuring that preschools have the resources and flexibility needed to successfully implement VE.

Moreover, fostering strong collaboration between preschools and families is critical for the success of VE programs. The alignment of preschool and home values is essential for reinforcing the moral lessons children learn in the classroom. Preschools should engage parents in ongoing discussions about the importance of values education and encourage them to support these lessons at home. Parental involvement could be enhanced through education programs that help families understand the role of VE in their children's development and offer practical strategies for reinforcing these values. This kind of home-school partnership will ensure that children receive consistent messages about the importance of values, both at preschool and at home.

The diversity of today's classrooms also necessitates culturally sensitive approaches to VE. Given that children from various cultural backgrounds may bring different sets of values and traditions, educators need to develop culturally responsive VE programs. These programs should allow for flexibility in the delivery of values, ensuring that they are relevant and meaningful to all students, regardless of their cultural background. To achieve this, teachers must be trained in cultural competence, which will enable them to navigate different value systems sensitively and respectfully. A culturally adaptable approach to VE will help create an inclusive learning environment where every student feels valued and respected.

Lastly, there is a pressing need for increased flexibility in curriculum design. Rigid curricula and administrative demands often prevent educators from dedicating sufficient time to values-based learning. Policymakers should reconsider the current structure of early childhood education, allowing teachers more time and autonomy to focus on moral and ethical development. Reducing the emphasis on standardized testing and procedural tasks would allow educators to engage more deeply with VE and provide students with richer, more meaningful learning experiences. Furthermore, preschools should explore ways to integrate VE with social-emotional learning (SEL) frameworks. Both VE and SEL aim to foster empathy, emotional regulation, and healthy relationships among students. By integrating these two approaches, educators can ensure that children not only learn about values but also develop the emotional skills necessary to apply these values in real-world situations.

In summary, these key recommendations highlight the importance of professional development, a whole-school approach, strong collaboration between preschools and families, cultural sensitivity, flexible curricula, and the integration of VE with social-emotional learn-

ing. Implementing these strategies will help preschools create environments where values are not just taught in theory but are actively lived and experienced by students on a daily basis, ultimately shaping them into morally responsible and ethically conscious individuals.

5.2. Future Research Directions

The findings of this review also point to the need for further research in several key areas. One, future research should focus on the long-term effects of Values Education on children's development, particularly as they progress through different educational stages, from preschool to primary and secondary schooling. Such longitudinal studies could offer invaluable insights into how early exposure to values influences children's moral reasoning and behavioral patterns over time. By tracking students across multiple years, researchers may be able to observe whether the values instilled during early childhood remain consistent and if they continue to shape ethical decision-making and social interactions as the children mature. This type of research could also identify the factors that enhance or inhibit the long-term retention and application of values, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the enduring effects of VE on individual development.

While this review has predominantly focused on the perceptions of educators, it is equally important to examine how children themselves experience and internalize Values Education. Understanding children's perspectives could offer a unique and valuable angle on how effectively VE programs are being implemented. It would enable educators to grasp how children interpret the lessons they receive and how these interpretations influence their actions and moral choices. Furthermore, by investigating children's views, educators could identify gaps between the intended outcomes of VE and the children's actual experiences. This would allow teachers to refine their instructional strategies, making Values Education more engaging, relevant, and impactful for students. A child-centered approach to researching VE would, thus, complement educator-based studies, offering a more holistic understanding of its effectiveness.

Teaching VE entails significant emotional and moral labor, as educators are tasked with not only imparting ethical principles but also embodying these values in their daily interactions. This emotional burden can have profound effects on teachers' well-being, particularly when they face challenges such as cultural diversity, conflicting values between preschool and home, or institutional constraints. Future research should delve into the impact that this aspect of teaching has on educators' mental and emotional health. By examining how teachers manage the emotional and moral challenges inherent in teaching values, researchers could identify potential stressors and areas where teachers may need additional support. This line of inquiry could inform the development of teacher well-being programs, providing educators with the resources, training, and resilience needed to deliver VE effectively while maintaining their own emotional health. Understanding this relationship is crucial to ensuring that both educators and students benefit from a well-rounded approach to VE.

5.3. Context and Limitations

This systematic review has a particular context and few limitations in terms of the population, perspectives, and period of published literature covered. Non-peer-reviewed contents have been avoided to maintain the quality and reliability of the analysis presented. To present an up-to-date perspective, we considered the literature published between 2000 and 2024. The literature available before the 2000s may not be relevant since most countries/education boards revise their curriculum every 5–10 years. The systematic review considers only published literature that covers both the preschool context and involves educators. Specific subject areas within VE have not been explored, such as citizenship

education, to keep the perspective in a global context. Due to the inclusion and exclusion criteria followed, the filtered research articles fit the required themes.

5.4. Conclusions

VE is undeniably a cornerstone of early childhood education, playing a pivotal role in shaping children's moral, emotional, and social development. As schools are tasked with not only imparting academic knowledge but also cultivating ethically responsible citizens, VE becomes integral in forming the foundation for a well-rounded individual. This systematic review highlighted the critical role preschool educators play in implementing VE and the challenges they encounter in this process. Despite the general recognition of VE's importance, educators face considerable difficulties, including cultural diversity, inconsistencies in the alignment of preschool and home values, and a lack of comprehensive professional development. These factors contribute to inconsistencies in VE delivery across different educational contexts, resulting in variations in student outcomes.

The findings of this review emphasize that, while many educators are aware of the importance of VE, its successful implementation requires more than just awareness. It necessitates a structured and systemic approach that involves both explicit and implicit pedagogical strategies. Moreover, the success of VE depends on a supportive preschool environment, where administrators, teachers, and parents work together to reinforce shared values. Preschools must move toward a whole-school approach that incorporates VE into all aspects of learning, from formal curricula to extracurricular activities and daily social interactions.

In addition, the review underscores the need for targeted professional development to equip educators with the necessary skills to teach VE effectively. Providing educators with opportunities to engage in reflective practice, develop cultural competence, and align their personal values with institutional goals will be essential in overcoming the challenges identified. Professional development should also focus on building teachers' capacity to integrate VE into their everyday interactions with students, not only through structured lessons but also through modeling values in their behavior and creating a classroom culture that reflects those principles.

Ultimately, a more structured and supportive approach to VE will ensure that children grow into morally responsible, empathetic, and socially conscious individuals, capable of contributing positively to society. By addressing the gaps and challenges in VE's implementation, preschools can create environments where values are not just taught, but lived, fostering a generation that is both intellectually capable and ethically grounded. The future of VE lies in its ability to adapt to the needs of a diverse student population, making it a powerful tool for both personal and societal transformation.

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