

Effects of Teachers' Moral Lesson Activities on Students' Behaviors in Early Childhood Education Classrooms

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Abstract

Through the lens of Vygotsky zone of proximal development theory, the study aims to find the effects of teachers' moral lesson activities on students' behaviors in early childhood education classrooms. Based on the two major hypothesis, 1. There is a significant effect of teachers' moral lesson activities on students' behaviors and 2. There is a significant difference in teachers' views in relation to their gender, age, qualification, and experience, the study adopted descriptive research design. Data for the study were collected via online survey forms from 320 early childhood education teachers through a self-developed questionnaire in the District of Charsadda, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The collected data were analyzed with the help of SmartPLS4 to find structural and measurement models. There results indicated that there is a significant effect of teachers' moral lesson activities on students' behaviors and there is no significant difference in teachers' views in relation to their gender, age, qualification, and experience.

Key words: *Early childhood education, Moral lesson activities, Students' behaviors, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan*

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Introduction

Moral interaction is an essential event in the learning process that occurs between instructors and students, either formally or informally (Alam, 2022). The ability and determination of teachers have an impact on student learning and behavior in early childhood education classes (Madani, 2019). Teachers' sensitive replies to bereaved children can function with superior modifications to conventional growth chances (Abraham-Steele & Edmonds, 2021). Educators also provide children with alternative models of adult authority and, like parents, may mold a child's ability to control their sentiments and understand the personal signals of others (Gross & Cassidy, 2019). According to Kong and Yasmin (2022), educators, like guardians, assist children in investigating their existing conditions while also playing an important role in developing their language and behaviors capacities to explore their own convictions. Teaching moral lesson to young children is a difficult job since they influence information in the minds of pupils, same as growing a tree, it requires exceptional care from seed to tree (Inoue, 2020). In a classroom, children develop various mental capacities and behaviors (Kokkalia et al., 2019). Their development and grooming are fully dependent on skilled teachers' activities inside classrooms (Kwong et al., 2018). Several studies have been conducted to determine the influence of moral instructional activities on students' abilities and behaviors (Jeynes, 2019). Teachers' practical training in moral lessons and student behavior improvement is desperately needed (Kim et al., 2019). For good curricular outcomes, these moral lesson practices should be incorporated in instructions. Teachers must be aware of pupils' innate mental abilities as well as their participation in social interactions (Grigoropoulos, 2020).

Importance of Teachers' Moral Lesson Activities and Students' Behavioral Development

In early childhood education classrooms, teachers' moral lesson and students' behavioral development are very important (Burroughs, 2018). Early childhood is an essential period for making good character, and moral lesson activities provide opportunities for children to learn about morality, values, and respecting others. Moral lesson shapes children's perception of right and wrong (Watini, 2020). Moral lesson activities frequently feature collaborative and cooperative educational experiences, which promote the acquisition of social skills in preschoolers (Anastasiadis et al., 2018). During such endeavors, kids learn to speak successfully, collaborate with others, and build compassion and respect for their peers. These abilities are essential for developing strong connections and managing relationships with others during their life (Brown & Palincsar, 2018). Moral lessons give a framework for youngsters to

successfully comprehend and regulate their emotions (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). According to Yeager (2017), these exercises may be used by teachers to develop contemplation and self-control, assisting children in recognizing their emotions. These exercises contribute in the development of mental capacity to deal with future issues. Moral lesson activities assist students in developing their moral decision-making abilities, allowing them to speak carefully about issues of ethics and arrive at educated judgements (Bleazby, 2020). Teachers may educate students to examine diverse views, develop a sense of justice, and grasp the impacts of their decisions via conversations, tales, and games that involve role-playing (Huynh et al., 2020). This promotes the development of moral judgement and decision-making skills (Rashid & Qaisar, 2017). Good behavioral counselling tactics are frequently used by teachers that include moral education exercises into their classes (Meindl et al., 2018). Teachers may foster a friendly and courteous environment in the classroom by encouraging positive behaviors and emphasizing ethical standards. Students learn to grasp the teacher's expectations and limitations, which leads to increased determination, self-control, and responsible behavior (Korpershoek et al., 2016). Moral teachings gained in kindergarten classes can have a long-term influence on the character of children (Tymms et al., 2018). These views and values serve as an ethical framework for their behaviors and decisions as they grow older. Teachers help to shape trustworthy and honest persons who can positively contribute to their environments by establishing fundamental values such as truthfulness, honesty, tenderness, and fairness (Barnes, 2019).

Textbook related Moral Lesson and Students' Behaviors

Textbooks can have narratives or tales that highlight ethical problems or demonstrate good ethical principles. These stories allow children to ponder on choices regarding ethics, examine the implications of acts, and improve their ethical reasoning capabilities (Tan et al., 2018). According to Birhan et al. (2021), content in textbooks can develop ethical standards such as honesty, respect, justice, and accountability. This topic may be integrated into a variety of disciplines, enabling students to gain an understanding of these principles in a variety of circumstances. According to Alderson and Morrow (2020, p. 37), real-life examples that emphasize ethical concerns or ethical choice-making can be included in textbooks. This method assists students in analyzing and discussing these events, helping them to examine many points of view and gain a greater knowledge of moral ideas. Sections or practices in textbooks can support healthy behavior and growth in personality. This might include recognizing good role models, offering rules for courteous and responsible behavior, and motivating pupils to set individual growth in morality objectives (Mukherji & Albon, 2022, p. 19).

The Role of Teachers' Personality in the Development of Young Children Behaviors

According to Sisson et al. (2017), teachers are the positive role models for their pupils, and their conduct and mindset may have a significant impact on children's behavior. Children are more inclined to copy desirable traits such as understanding, respect, empathy, and justice when teachers model them. Damaging or improper behavior from instructors, on the other hand, might have an adverse impact on pupils' behavior (Fees et al., 2009). The personality traits and mental tendencies of teachers can influence the psychological environment in the educational setting. Teachers that are kind, approachable, and enthusiastic foster a good and supportive atmosphere (Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021). This, in consequence, develops an awareness of belonging among kids and promotes positive behavior. Teachers who are chilly, irritable, or incompatible, on the other hand, can give rise to an unfavorable psychological climate, which may lead to disruptive or negative behaviors (Holland, 2019). Educators' personalities influence their communication techniques, which in turn influence students' behavior and social abilities (Bambaeroo & Shokrpour, 2017). Teachers with outstanding interpersonal abilities such as active listening, clear directions, and polite discussion, foster a learning atmosphere in where pupils are felt important and appreciated (Nduku, 2019). This enables pupils to express themselves responsibly and fosters pleasant connections. Teachers with weak communication skills, on the other hand, may fail to create connection with kids and may have difficulties in properly regulating behavior (Diaz et al., 2017). Instructors' characteristics have an impact on how they handle managing classrooms and punishment. Positive behavior management tactics that emphasize reward, support and clear requirements are used by teachers who are receptive, compassionate, and tough yet fair (Smith & Whitley, 2022). Such techniques can encourage students' good behavior, self-regulation, and intrinsic drive. Teachers who are dictatorial, inconsistent, or punishing in their approach, on the other hand, may unintentionally lead to disruptive or rebellious behavior in pupils (Jennings, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

The study's theoretical framework is Vygotsky's theory of learning and development. The Zone of Proximal Development is described as "the distance between the actual developmental level as measured by independent problem solving and the degree of potential development as measured by problem solving under adult supervision or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978, p. 86). To enhance young people's moral growth, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal growth (ZPD)

theory is used to teachers' moral lesson activities in early childhood education classes. The ZPD corresponds to the set of tasks or abilities that a child can complete with the help and supervision of a more competent adult, for instance a teacher. Throughout moral lesson planning, teachers can utilize the ZPD to give relevant degrees of assistance and direction. They may establish developmentally appropriate moral ideas and beliefs for each kid and give scaffolding, which requires breaking down of complicated moral notions into smaller, accessible stages. This allows youngsters to participate in moral thinking and apply moral principles within the scope of their existing skills (Walqui, 2006). The ZPD emphasizes the value of social contact and cooperation in the learning process. Peer conversations and collaborative projects that help youngsters to learn from one another's viewpoints and experiences can be facilitated by teachers. Children can have a better knowledge of moral notions, discuss principles, and relate them to real-life circumstances by collaborating alongside (Turuk, 2008). Teachers may help students develop their moral reasoning skills by providing provocative inquiries, providing moral quandaries, and fostering intellectual curiosity. Teachers may help children analyze ethical issues, examine diverse viewpoints, and make informed moral judgements by involving them in dialogues about right and wrong. This guided moral thinking helps youngsters build their moral compass and broaden their comprehension of moral issues (Kuusisaari, 2014). Educators can progressively reduce responsibilities as the moral growth of kids progresses, permitting them to make more and more autonomous moral decisions. Teachers can give opportunity for students to practice implementing moral beliefs in a variety of situations, helping and criticism as required. This progressive discharge of accountability assists youngsters in developing confidence and self-reliance in their moral decisions (Kristjánsson, 2022).

The conceptual framework of the study is highlighted in figure 1 and 2.

Rationale of the Study

Teachers' activities of moral lesson for the development of students' good behaviors are extremely important in early childhood education classrooms. These exercises foster moral thinking, positive behaviors, and the development of a supportive and inclusive school atmosphere. In this respect the study has its importance in a developing country, Pakistan, where this stage of education is deprived of its due status both by policy makers and researchers.

Hypotheses of the Study

In the light of theoretical framework, the following two major hypotheses were followed in the study.

H1: There is a significant effect of teacher's moral lesson activities on students' behaviors in early childhood education classrooms.

H2: There is a significant difference in teachers' views in relation to their gender, age, qualification, and experience about moral lesson and students' behaviors in early childhood education classroom.

Methodology

Research Design

In this study, the descriptive research design is adopted to find the present status of teachers' moral lesson activities and its effects on students' behaviors in early childhood education classrooms. Because, descriptive design allows to present a clear and concise detail of the study with a comprehensive detail about variables, population and sample with the phenomena under investigation.

Sample and Data Collection

Sample of the study was (N = 320) early childhood education teachers in the district of Charsadda, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistan. Data were collected via online survey, google form through a self-developed four-point Likert Scale questionnaire. The four points of the questionnaire were (0 = Not at all, 1 = to some extent, 2 = often, 3 = very often). The questionnaire was consisted on the variables, textbook moral lesson, teacher's activities, culture-based activities as independent variable that cover information about teacher's moral lesson in early childhood education classrooms. While peer relation, sharing, resilience, and honesty cover information about students' personality as dependent variables.

Below table 1 highlights demographic information of the participants. Total number of the participants is 320 early childhood education teachers with (male =160) and (female =160). In the category of age, the highest number is (31-40 years = 159, 49.7%) of the whole sample size and the qualification is (Master = 181, 56.6%) as the highest qualification in the table. In terms of teaching experience, the highest number is (6-10 years = 145, 45.3%) of the whole sample size.

Table 1
Teachers' Demographic Information

Teacher Gender				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	160	50.0	50.0	50.0
Female	160	50.0	50.0	100.0
Age				
Below 30 years	76	23.8	23.8	23.8
31 to 40 years	159	49.7	49.7	73.4
41 to 50 years	61	19.1	19.1	92.5
51 to 60 years	24	7.5	7.5	100.0
Qualification				
Intermediate	30	9.4	9.4	9.4
Bachelor	56	17.5	17.5	26.9
Master	181	56.6	56.6	83.4
MPhil/PhD	53	16.6	16.6	100.0
Experience				
Below 5 Years	34	10.6	10.6	10.6
6-10 Years	145	45.3	45.3	55.9
11-15 Years	59	18.4	18.4	74.4
16-20 Years	59	18.4	18.4	92.8
Above 20 Years	23	7.2	7.2	100.0

Figure 1 below highlights all the variables and items, with outer loading values, used in measurement model in this study.

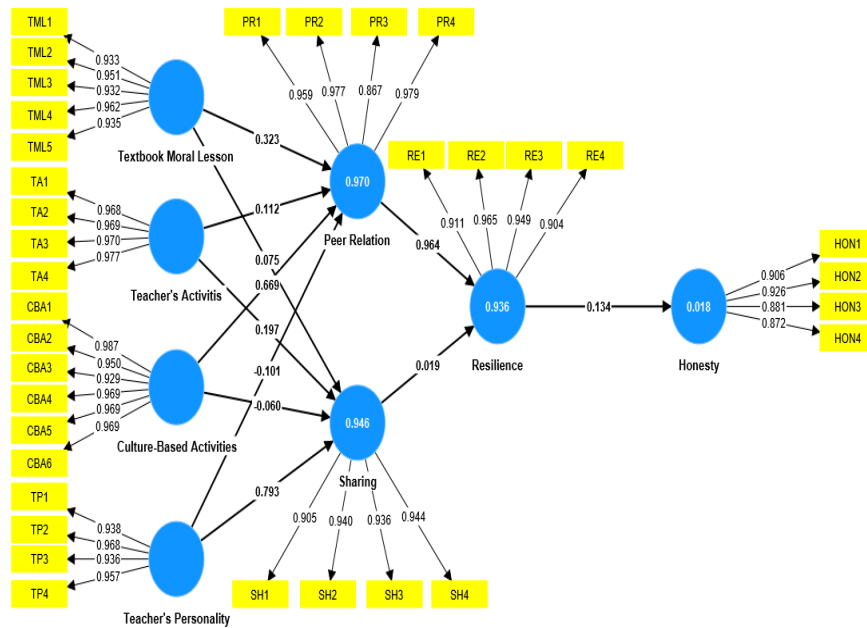


Figure 1 Variables in Measurement Model

Results

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS 4 was applied for the analysis of the data. Table 2 highlights measurement model results for the internal consistency with factor loading, Cronbach's alpha, rho_a, rho_c, Average Variance Extraction (AVE), mean, SD, and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). The indicator reliability is achieved with (factor loading > 0.867) at minimum level. Alpha reliability is (alpha > .919) at the minimum level. For each construct the reliability indices are (rho_a > 0.929) at the minimum level. While the value of (AVE > 0.804) at the minimum level. The collinearity of items is highlighted via (VIF > 1.130) at the minimum level.

Table 2
Measurement Model

Factors (Indicators)	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_a	rho_c	AVE	Mean	SD	VIF
Culture-based Activities		0.984	0.984	0.987	0.926			
Explain cultural aspects (CBA1)	0.987					2.209	0.594	2.795
Express humanity (CBA2)	0.950					2.15	0.654	3.832
Explain honesty (CBA3)	0.929					2.272	0.616	3.590
Explain social constitutions (CBA4)	0.969					2.203	0.586	2.048
Explain truth (CBA5)	0.969					2.231	0.599	2.395
Explain teamwork (CBA6)	0.969					2.222	0.59	3.144
Honesty		0.919	0.929	0.942	0.804			
Speaking truth (HON1)	0.906					2.138	0.512	3.316
Respecting teachers (HON2)	0.926					2.112	0.506	3.323
Sincere with fellows (HON3)	0.881					2.144	0.523	2.882
Obedient (HON4)	0.872					2.119	0.498	2.411
Peer Relation		0.960	0.965	0.972	0.896			
Importance to their peers (PR1)	0.959					2.212	0.606	3.354
Respect one another (PR2)	0.977					2.219	0.593	2.141
Using soft language (PR3)	0.867					2.263	0.685	2.683
Supporting one another (PR4)	0.979					2.200	0.6	2.561
Resilience		0.950	0.951	0.964	0.870			
Following class rules (RE1)	0.911					2.281	0.629	3.878
Following time (RE2)	0.965					2.228	0.598	2.508
Doing homework (RE3)	0.949					2.253	0.56	3.532
Active in activities (RE4)	0.904					2.244	0.649	3.491
Sharing		0.949	0.950	0.963	0.867			
Sharing books (SH1)	0.905					1.950	0.589	3.347

Sharing food (SH2)	0.940					2.100	0.539	2.945
Sharing places (SH3)	0.936					2.000	0.548	3.763
Sharing items (SH4)	0.944					2.087	0.499	1.201
Teacher's Activities		0.980	0.980	0.985	0.943			
Explaining ML (TA1)	0.968					2.050	0.573	1.817
Making ML activity (TA2)	0.969					2.059	0.597	1.846
Asking about right and wrong (TA3)	0.970					2.109	0.534	2.751
Using pictures for ML (TA4)	0.977					2.100	0.539	2.148
Textbook Moral Lesson		0.964	0.965	0.974	0.902			
Textbook contains ML (TML1)	0.933					2.144	0.65	3.154
Students understand ML (TML2)	0.951					2.153	0.651	2.813
Interesting ML (TML3)	0.932					2.163	0.651	2.130
Social life related ML (TML4)	0.962					2.222	0.61	1.488
Explain good and bad (TML5)	0.935					2.141	0.583	1.338
Teacher's Personality		0.969	0.969	0.976	0.889			
Work with justice (TP1)	0.938					2.00	0.548	2.755
Following time (TP2)	0.968					2.075	0.494	3.636
Taking each student's care (TP3)	0.936					2.091	0.482	1.148
Using soft language (TP4)	0.957					2.075	0.488	1.649

ML stands for Moral Lesson

Table 3 highlights the discriminant validity via Fornell-Larcker Criterion which shows the validity as greater than all others in its rows and column (Hair et al., 2017) as highlighted in the table.

Table 3

Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Culture-Based Activities	Honesty	Peer Relation	Resilience	Sharing	Teacher's Activities	Teacher's Personality	Textbook Moral Lesson
Culture-Based Activities	0.978							

Honesty	0.512	0.92						
Peer Relation	0.681	0.11	0.974					
Resilience	0.971	0.13	0.967	0.959				
Sharing	0.144	0.89	0.146	0.159	0.96			
Teacher's Activities	0.093	0.81	0.124	0.152	0.88	0.971		
Teacher's Personality	0.140	0.82	0.140	0.144	0.56	0.868	0.950	
Textbook Moral Lesson	0.962	0.12	0.674	0.359	0.16	0.117	0.158	0.943

Figure 2 indicates all the items and indicators with outer loading and P values in the structural model of the study. The four moderators, teachers' gender, age, qualification, and experience are highlighted in the figure.

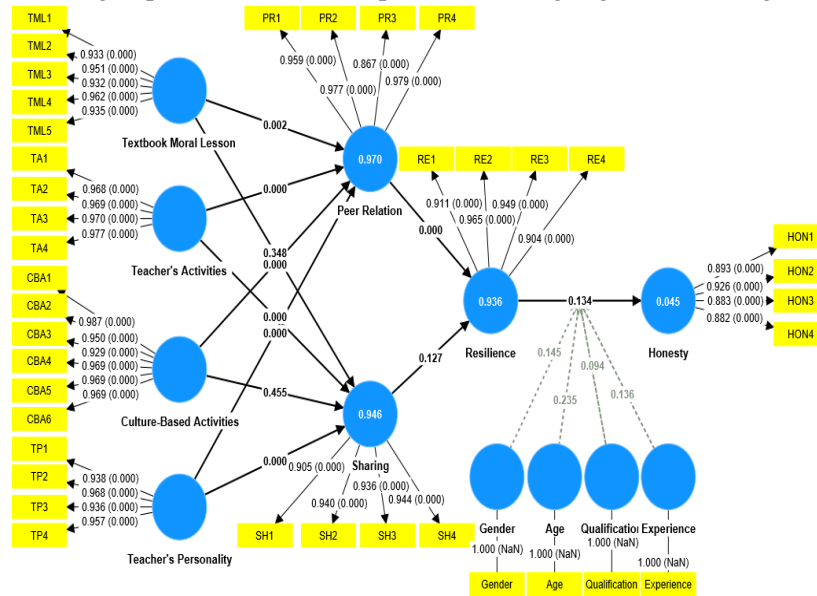


Figure 2: Structural Model with Gender, Age, Qualification, and Experience as Moderator

Figure 2 highlights the four moderators, teachers' gender, age, qualification, and experience to find differences in teachers' views in relation to their demographic information. There is no significant difference is indicated in table 5 as ($p > .05$) of all the moderators.

Table 4
Structural Model of the Study

	Original sample	Mean	SD	T value	P values
Culture-Based Activities -> Honesty	0.086	0.089	0.027	3.159	0.002
Culture-Based Activities -> Peer Relation	0.669	0.681	0.107	6.274	0.000
Culture-Based Activities -> Resilience	0.644	0.656	0.105	6.130	0.000
Culture-Based Activities -> Sharing	-0.060	-0.053	0.080	0.747	0.455
Peer Relation -> Honesty	0.129	0.132	0.035	3.715	0.000
Peer Relation -> Resilience	0.964	0.965	0.008	7.981	0.000
Resilience -> Honesty	0.134	0.137	0.036	3.695	0.000
Sharing -> Honesty	0.003	0.003	0.002	1.208	0.227
Sharing -> Resilience	0.019	0.019	0.012	1.525	0.127
Teacher's Activities -> Honesty	0.015	0.015	0.005	2.945	0.003
Teacher's Activities -> Peer Relation	0.112	0.111	0.020	5.513	0.000
Teacher's Activities -> Resilience	0.112	0.111	0.020	5.712	0.000
Teacher's Activities -> Sharing	0.197	0.198	0.043	4.535	0.000
Teacher's Personality -> Honesty	-0.011	-0.011	0.004	2.962	0.003
Teacher's Personality -> Peer Relation	-0.101	-0.101	0.019	5.328	0.000
Teacher's Personality -> Resilience	-0.083	-0.082	0.019	4.436	0.000
Teacher's Personality -> Sharing	0.793	0.792	0.042	8.824	0.000
Textbook Moral Lesson -> Honesty	0.042	0.041	0.018	2.289	0.022
Textbook Moral Lesson -> Peer Relation	0.323	0.311	0.106	3.053	0.002
Textbook Moral Lesson -> Resilience	0.312	0.301	0.101	3.105	0.002
Textbook Moral Lesson -> Sharing	0.075	0.069	0.018	0.939	0.348

In table 4, the structural model indicates significant effects as ($p < .05$) of almost all the variables on students' behaviors as highlighted via peer relation, sharing and honesty as dependent variables in the study. Only four items, culture-based activities, sharing effects on honesty and sharing effects on resilience, and textbook moral lesson effects on sharing are not showing significant effects as ($p > .05$) of these items.

Table 5

Differences in teachers' views in relation to their demographic information

	Original sample	Mean	SD	T value	P values
Experience x Resilience -> Honesty	0.082	0.084	0.055	1.490	0.136
Qualification x Resilience -> Honesty	0.071	0.073	0.043	1.674	0.094
Age x Resilience -> Honesty	0.061	0.064	0.051	1.187	0.235
Gender x Resilience -> Honesty	0.120	0.118	0.082	1.456	0.145

Discussion

The study highlighted the effects of teachers' moral lesson activities on students' behaviors in early childhood education classrooms in District Charsadda, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Table 1 highlighted demographic information of the participants in terms of gender, age, qualification, and experience. Table 2 highlighted via Measurement model about the construction of the tools and its acceptance through outer loading, alpha reliability, rho_a, and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). Table 3 indicated the acceptance of the items/ variables in the questionnaire via Fornell-Larcker Criterion. The detail in table 2 and 3 indicated that the items/variables used in the study were acceptable and according to the statistical rules of SmartPLS 4.

The structural model in table 4 highlighted the effects of independent variables, teachers' activities, culture-based activities, teachers' personality, and textbook moral lesson, on peer relation and sharing as dependent variables and characteristics of good character/behaviors in early years of education. Further, the effects of peer relation and sharing is indicated as highly significant on students' resilience as a characteristic of good behaviors. As also highlighted in figure 1 and table 4, there is a significant effect of students' resilience on honesty which signify the first hypothesis as accepted. Table 5 indicates differences in teachers' views in relation to their gender, age, qualification, and experience that are also highlighted in figure 2. The detail indicates no significant difference in teachers' views in relation to their demographic information. It rejects the second hypothesis about the significant difference in teachers' views in relation to their demographic information. The study is first in Pakistan to

indicate about teachers' activities for the moral development of young children in early childhood education classrooms. As already explained that early childhood education in Pakistan is passing through its developmental stages so there are no such studies conducted on the teachers' strategies for the young children's behavioral development.

Conclusion

This study depicted early childhood education in District Charsadda, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The teachers are focusing on telling moral stories for the development of young children's good behaviors in early childhood education classrooms. The teachers are telling moral stories from textbook, culture-based activities and adopting a personal character as a model for the students to be followed. These activities lead to sharing and peer relation as characteristics of a good behavior. The two, sharing and peer relation, lead to students' resilience and honesty which indicate as symbols of good behaviors in young children characters. The study highlighted a significant effect of teachers' moral lesson activities on students' behaviors in early childhood education classrooms. These activities are, culture-based, from the textbook, and teachers' presenting themselves are a model for the students. These activities lead to sharing stuff, positive peer-relation, resilience, and honesty as positive characteristics in young children's behaviors. The second hypothesis in the study was to find differences in teachers' views in relation to their demographic information. The study indicated no significant difference in teachers' views in relation to their gender, age, experience, and qualification. There are similar practices and effects in early childhood education classrooms.

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