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Infusing Moral Values in EFL Classrooms: A Case Study in Vietnamese High Schools

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ABSTRACT

Moral education plays an important role in students' overall growth, helping them develop not only knowledge, but also good character, values, and social responsibility. However, its integration into subjects has not received much attention in public high schools in Vietnam. This study thus aimed to examine how three EFL teachers' perceptions and strategies in three different Vietnamese high schools integrated moral values into their lessons using a combination of classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of teaching materials in a qualitative case study. The findings revealed that while all three teachers expressed positive perceptions of embedding moral values in EFL teaching, their levels of understanding and ways of implementation varied. For pedagogical implications, the findings highlight that integrating moral values into EFL teaching requires intentional teacher preparation, careful lesson planning within time constraints, and the use of interactive, student-centered activities that embed moral content alongside EFL learning. Moreover, a supportive curriculum, textbook design, targeted teacher training, classroom practices, and school-wide reinforcement are essential to ensure that moral values are consistently and meaningfully integrated into EFL instruction.

Keywords: EFL teachers; moral integration; moral values; perception; strategies

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Introduction

Moral education refers to the intentional effort of schools and teachers to foster students' ability to live ethically and harmoniously with others (Sanderse, 2024). It is understood as an educational process through which moral and social norms are continued, constructed, and transformed (Chen et al., 2023). Within schools, moral education has always been a crucial component of student development. In recent years, its importance has been further emphasized as education increasingly aims not only at academic knowledge, but also at the development of moral values and good character (OECD, 2025; UNESCO, 2023). Researchers have shown that moral education can be part of different school subjects, including English (Aghni et al., 2020; Authors, 2025; Ferková & Zacharová, 2023; Mollahosseini et al., 2025; Nguyen, 2018; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Qoyyimah, 2016). In Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh's ideology strongly influences education. He believed that talent and morality must go together because talent without virtue is harmful, while virtue without talent makes success difficult (Ngo & Cao, 2021). For this reason, Vietnam's national education policy – very much like that of almost any sovereign nation in the world – explicitly promotes comprehensive human development as a central objective of contemporary educational reform (MoET, 2018a).

In the context of globalization, while Vietnam pursues industrialization, modernization, and international integration, global changes and external influences have challenged the nation's socialist orientation and weakened young people's revolutionary spirit (Nguyen, 2021; Vo, 2017). Globalization offers chances, but also spreads values that sometimes conflict with Vietnamese culture, making it hard to protect national moral values. Consequently, many students tend to adopt individualistic lifestyles that neglect morality, social responsibility, and community expectations (Pham, 2024). Alarming, school violence among high school students has been increasingly reported (Nguyen, 2025). In practice, moral education is often marginalized in schools due to a stronger emphasis on academic knowledge and career-oriented skills (Bui & Nguyen, 2021). Moreover, many teachers lack adequate training in moral education (Nguyen, 2024) or institutional support (Keles, 2025). The expectation to integrate moral education into EFL teaching without sufficient preparation may also contribute to increased workload and teacher burnout (Kermanshahi & Pishghadam, 2022). These factors make moral education in schools more difficult. To address this, urgent efforts are needed to preserve and strengthen traditional moral values, which serve as essential foundations for a humanistic and compassionate life (Vo, 2017; Vu & Nguyen, 2020).

As such, integrating moral values into lessons is considered essential, as it ensures that education nurtures students' character development alongside their academic growth (OECD, 2025; UNESCO, 2023). Teachers, therefore, play a pivotal role in shaping how these values are transmitted in classrooms, making it essential to understand both their perceptions and their actual practices. In the context of the current study, moral education refers to the process of instilling core moral values such as patriotism, compassion, honesty, responsibility, and diligence in students who are expected to "behave in accordance with moral standards and legal regulations, possess life skills and personal resilience to study and work effectively, and be ready to fulfill civic responsibilities in building, protecting the country, and engaging with the world" (MoET, 2018a, p. 24). It is formally mandated by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training and embedded in the national curriculum across subjects, including EFL. Nevertheless, despite this policy emphasis and the needs of school-based contexts, little is known about how moral values are meaningfully incorporated into English language teaching in practice. Addressing this gap is essential, as English lessons provide opportunities for moral education through authentic communication and cultural perspectives (Kurniawan & Bastomi, 2017; Shaaban, 2005). To this end, the present study adopted a qualitative case study approach to examine how EFL teachers in Vietnamese high schools integrated moral values into their teaching.

Literature Review

Moral education and its role in schooling

Moral education is often considered a part of broader values education, which focuses on cultivating individuals' principles, moral reasoning, and moral standards that guide behavior (Berkowitz, 2011; Lovat, 2017). While values education emphasizes general personal and social values, moral education specifically targets the development and internalization of moral norms that shape right and wrong behavior. Similarly, Chen et al. (2023) defined moral education as an educational process through which moral and social norms are maintained, constructed, and transformed. Practically, it is seen as the deliberate efforts of schools and teachers to help students live ethically and harmoniously with others (Sanderse, 2024). This involves both explicit instruction and implicit modeling, whereby teachers convey moral values and virtues through their actions and classroom interactions. In the Vietnamese educational context, however, moral education is defined more clearly and formally in national policy. The General Education Curriculum emphasizes the development of specific core moral values, such as patriotism, compassion, honesty, responsibility, and diligence. It aims to help students follow moral and legal rules, develop life skills and resilience, and fulfill their civic responsibilities (MoET, 2018a). Compared with broader international definitions, the Vietnamese approach to moral education places stronger emphasis on curriculum guidance and national educational goals.

In schools, moral education plays a central role in shaping students' character (Nguyen, 2024; Vu & Nguyen, 2020) and promoting virtues (Nucci, 2001). Its broader purpose extends beyond academic achievement, aiming to cultivate moral, compassionate, and socially responsible individuals (Berkowitz, 2011; Lovat et al., 2011). Similarly, moral education in schools seeks to prepare students to actively participate in society (Schuitema et al., 2008). In this regard, Lovat (2017) noted that in some contexts, such as Australia, moral education is deeply integrated into overall pedagogy and daily classroom practices. Likewise, Campbell (2008) emphasized that education is never free of values, as teachers inevitably transmit them both consciously and unconsciously. On the contrary, in Vietnam, as presented in the General Education Curriculum, civic education, including morality, is typically taught as a standalone subject with limited instructional time — approximately 45 minutes per week. It is compulsory for primary and lower secondary students (grades 1-9), but optional for high school students (grades 10-12) (MoET, 2018b). However, Vietnam's educational vision for 2045 emphasizes moral and character education as central to nurturing well-rounded, responsible citizens capable of contributing to both national development and global society (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2024). This strategic orientation underscores the need to raise teachers' awareness of the importance of integrating moral values across different subjects.

In reality, although the national curriculum requires teachers in Vietnamese high schools to integrate moral education into classroom instruction, this top-down approach has not fully addressed students' behavioural issues. Media reports continue to document cases of student fighting, school violence, and other forms of misconduct, raising concerns about safety and moral development in schools, particularly secondary students (Nguyen, 2025). Bui and Nguyen (2021) indicated that a lack of attention from schools and teachers contributes to violent and risky behaviours among high school students. These realities suggest a gap between curriculum intentions and everyday school practices, highlighting the need for more context-responsive and practice-based approaches to moral education.

The importance of embedding moral values in EFL instruction

Moral education is an essential part of schooling and should be embedded across all subjects, including EFL (Byram, 2008). In EFL classrooms, language learning naturally connects with character development and intercultural understanding, making them ideal contexts to promote values, ethics, and social responsibility (Kurniawan & Bastomi, 2017; Shaaban, 2005). Research has shown that integrating character education into language lessons fosters qualities such as respect, empathy, cooperation, and global awareness (Kim & Huh, 2025; Nucci, 1987). While values are often conveyed implicitly, deliberate use of texts, discussions, role-plays, and intercultural activities can enhance students' ethical understanding (Johnston, 2003). For example, Mollahosseini et al. (2025) found that value- and etiquette-based reading materials promoted learners' vocabulary acquisition and positive attitudes toward vocabulary learning, illustrating the potential of instructional materials to integrate moral values into EFL classrooms. Given the global and culturally diverse nature of EFL learning, teachers play a dual role in developing both language competence and students' moral awareness (Akbari & Tajik, 2012).

In Vietnam, this integrated approach aligns with national educational goals and the needs of school-based contexts. The General Education Curriculum emphasizes that EFL teachers need to foster key moral values such as patriotism, compassion, honesty, responsibility, and diligence through their teaching, alongside developing students' communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills (MoET, 2018c). This policy reflects Vietnam's commitment to comprehensive human development as well as the global recognition of language education as a platform for cultivating moral and socially responsible individuals. If effectively implemented, such an approach may help address problems of school violence and students' behavioral issues.

Theoretical perspectives on the integration of moral values in education

Moral integration in education has been informed by several major theoretical perspectives. The cognitive-developmental perspective emphasises the progression of moral reasoning through engagement with moral dilemmas and reflective moral discourse (Carpendale, 2000). Sociocultural and constructivist approaches view morality as socially mediated and co-constructed through interaction, positioning teachers as mediators who scaffold students' moral understanding during classroom activities (Nucci, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978). Virtue ethics and character education highlight the cultivation of virtues and the teacher's role as a moral exemplar (Aristotle, 2011; Lickona, 2001). Care ethics underscores the relational dimension of moral learning (Noddings, 2015), while the hidden curriculum, conceptualized by Bernstein (1996, as cited in Singh, 1997) as part of regulative discourse, draws attention to implicit moral messages embedded in everyday routines, norms, and teacher-student power relations. Humanistic and values-clarification models further focus on learner-centredness and respect for individuals' lived experience, helping students articulate personal values through reflection and dialogue (Raths et al., 1966, as cited in Harrison, 1976; Veugelers, 2003).

In addition to Western traditions, Eastern perspectives on moral education offer a long-standing foundation for understanding the holistic development of learners. Confucian moral philosophy emphasises the cultivation of virtues such as benevolence, righteousness, respect, and filial piety, positioning teachers as moral exemplars who educate not only through instruction but through personal conduct and relational harmony (Nguyen et al., 2025; You et al., 2018). In Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh's moral ideology further shapes contemporary moral education by emphasising the cultivation of moral qualities alongside intellectual development, while also highlighting education's role in promoting the well-being of individuals and society (Tran, 2024). He particularly emphasised learning by example, encouraging teachers and learners to embody moral behaviour in daily practice.

For the purpose of this study, Bernstein's (1996, as cited in Singh, 1997) theory of pedagogic discourse and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory were adopted. First, from a sociocultural-constructivist perspective, the classroom serves as a key social environment where students acquire not only academic skills, but also values, attitudes, and social norms through engagement with teachers, peers, and learning tasks. In EFL classrooms, where communication, dialogue, and cultural exposure are central, the potential for integrating moral values is particularly strong (Byram, 2008; Johnston, 2003; Shaaban, 2005). Through carefully designed activities, EFL teachers can create opportunities for students to develop both linguistic competence and moral awareness. Furthermore, Bernstein's (1996) theory indicated that the integration of moral values is not limited to formal lessons, but is also conveyed through the ways knowledge is framed, controlled, and communicated by teachers. The implicit moral dimension of teaching is particularly evident in EFL instruction, where classroom talk, texts, and interactions convey cultural and moral meanings beyond linguistic content. By viewing EFL teachers as mediators who shape and are shaped by classroom interactions, both theories provided a valuable lens for understanding how moral education occurs both explicitly and implicitly in EFL teaching.

In general, although previous studies have examined moral value integration in EFL contexts, research on teachers' perceptions and classroom practices in Vietnamese high schools remains limited. To address this gap, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do EFL teachers perceive the integration of moral values into their lessons?
2. What strategies do they employ to embed moral values into classroom instruction?

Method

Research design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate how moral values are integrated into EFL teaching in Vietnamese high schools. The case study approach was selected because it enables an in-depth examination of complex social phenomena within real-life contexts (Patnaik & Pandey, 2019).

Research setting and participants

The study was conducted in three public high schools located in a province in Vietnam, where English is a compulsory subject within the national curriculum and is taught across grade levels. At the schools, students receive EFL instruction for three periods per week, lasting 45 minutes each. These schools operate within the framework of the national general education curriculum, which focuses on both academic achievement and moral development. The schools are situated in typical provincial areas, reflecting the broader sociocultural environment of Vietnamese public high schools, where teachers are tasked with the dual responsibility of delivering language instruction and contributing to students' character development. Three EFL teachers were purposefully selected to participate in the study, representing diverse teaching experience and professional roles within their high schools (see Table 1 for details), allowing for "information-rich" cases (Patton, 2015, p. 46).

Table 1
Teacher Profiles

Teacher (Pseudonym)	Gender	Level of education	Year of teaching experience	Workplace	Additional information
Teacher A	Male	Bachelor degree	4th	A high school with about 800 students	His school is located in a town near the city
Teacher B	Male	Master’s degree, Head of the English Subject Group	25th	A gifted high school with about 900 students	His school is located in the city
Teacher C	Female	Bachelor degree	17 th	A high school with about 600 students (mostly having ethnic minority backgrounds)	Her school is located in a remote town far from the city.

Ethical considerations

This study adhered strictly to ethical research standards to protect the rights, privacy, and well-being of all participants. Before data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participating teachers. The purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty were clearly explained. To safeguard participants’ identities and confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in all research records and reports. In addition, formal consent to conduct the study was obtained from the principal of each school, ensuring institutional approval and cooperation. All data were securely stored, with access restricted to the researchers to maintain participant privacy.

Researcher positionality

The researchers adopted a non-participant, outside observer role throughout the study (Creswell, 2016). This approach enabled objective observation of teaching practices and classroom interactions without direct involvement or interference, thereby reducing the risk of the researcher influencing participants’ behavior (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). In this capacity, the researchers sought to document authentic classroom practices and gain insights into how EFL teachers naturally integrated moral values into their lessons. Maintaining this observational distance helped enhance the trustworthiness of the qualitative research (Stahl & King, 2020).

Data collection

Data for this study were collected over a one-month period, from November 15 to December 20, 2024, allowing flexibility and convenience for participating teachers. Multiple methods were employed to obtain comprehensive data, including classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and teaching material analysis.

3.5.1. Classroom observations

Three lessons in total were observed (see Table 2). Each teacher was observed during one English lesson to explore how moral values were integrated into classroom practices and interactions. In this regard, the researcher asked for permission to audio-record the lesson to ensure the teacher's comfortable feelings while teaching. During the lesson, one of the researchers sat unobtrusively in a corner, observing and taking notes on how moral values were incorporated at each stage of the lesson.

Table 2
Observed Lessons

Teacher (Pseudonym)	English Textbook used	Period (45 minutes)
Teacher A	Bright (Grade 11)	Unit 4: Preserving World Heritage - Lesson: Unit Opener (Page 43)
Teacher B	i-Learn Smart World (Grade 10)	Unit 9: Travel and Tourism - Lesson: Listening & Speaking (pp. 80-81)
Teacher C	Bright (Grade 12)	Unit 4: Cultural Diversity - Lesson: Unit 4c Listening (Page 48)

3.5.2. Semi-structured interviews

Following the classroom observations, semi-structured interviews of approximately 45 minutes were conducted with each teacher both before and after the lesson to explore their perceptions and experience in integrating moral values into English teaching. To help the teachers accurately recall classroom events, they listened to the audio recording before answering the questions below.

Before the observation:

- What are the main objectives of the lesson, regarding moral values?
- What are you going to do to meet the objectives?
- What made you decide to do those activities?

After the observation:

- How are you feeling about the lesson as a whole?
- Do you think the objectives regarding moral values are achieved?
- What was good about the lesson?
- What made the things go well?
- What didn't go so well?

- What made things not go well?
- What did you learn from the lesson?
- If you had to do the same thing again, what would you do differently?

3.5.3. Teaching materials

Relevant teaching materials, including lesson plans, textbooks, and student handouts (in Teacher B's lesson), were collected and analyzed to examine the extent to which moral values were embedded in instructional content. All teachers also used PowerPoint slides to support their teaching, which facilitated the presentation of lesson activities.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to examine data from classroom observations, interviews, and teaching materials. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, the process included familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, and identifying recurring themes related to the integration of moral values in EFL teaching. These themes were reviewed, refined, and clearly defined to ensure they accurately reflected patterns in teachers' perceptions and practices in line with the research questions.

Results

Based on data from classroom observations, teacher interviews, and analysis of teaching materials, the study identified two key findings: teachers' perceptions of integrating moral values into EFL instruction and the strategies they employed. These findings are presented in detail in the following sections.

Teachers' perceptions of integrating moral values

Recognizing the potential for moral integration in EFL teaching

Although the teachers had varying levels of teaching experience and worked in different high school settings, all three demonstrated a positive perception of the potential to integrate moral values into EFL lessons. Teacher A, with the least teaching experience, recognized that one of the lesson objectives was to foster students' moral character. However, he appeared not to fully understand that the attributive component in the lesson plan referred to the specific moral values intended to be conveyed through the lesson.

The objective is to develop students' knowledge, competencies, and character... Attributes are the objectives of the lesson. Honestly, I'm not quite sure. I just think that in this lesson, students are supposed to develop such competencies and moral qualities. (Teacher A)

Meanwhile, Teacher C believed that integrating moral values into EFL lessons was both feasible and effective. She stressed that students not only practiced English, but also learned to become more respectful and responsible individuals.

...it's very possible and effective to embed moral values into language lessons when they are integrated through meaningful content and interaction... create a more supportive classroom environment, where students not only practice English, but also learn how to be more respectful and responsible individuals. (Teacher C)

Similarly, Teacher B expressed the view that when the lesson topic was relevant and meaningful, it could support the development of students' communicative language skills while also nurturing empathy, environmental awareness, and critical thinking.

The topic of ethical tourism is timely and relevant, helping students to not only develop speaking skills, but also build empathy, environmental awareness, and critical thinking. (Teacher B)

Getting rid of the pressure from paperwork, focusing on quality

The objective of the General Education Curriculum in Vietnam emphasizes the development of students' core competencies and moral qualities (MoET, 2018), underscoring quality as the central goal of education in the current context. In response to this reform, teachers have made notable adjustments to their teaching practices. Specifically, both Teacher A and Teacher B relied on lesson plans from the textbook publisher with minimal modifications, placing greater emphasis on the effectiveness of classroom instruction and student learning activities.

Teacher C, meanwhile, made several adjustments to her lesson plan by modifying some textbook exercises. In the textbook, the first listening task focused on map labeling, while the second required students to predict and listen for information about coming-of-age traditions in different countries. She chose to omit the second listening activity and instead designed supplementary exercises to help students practice the first task more thoroughly. However, none of the classroom activities encouraged students to reflect on or express their viewpoints regarding the lesson content.

In contrast to Teacher C's case, Teachers A and B, the most and least experienced among the three, believed that lesson activities should not only focus on memorizing vocabulary or sentence structures, but also foster communication and reflection on moral values. For example, Teacher B stated that "*these tasks encourage them to reflect on moral values, not just memorize vocabulary or sentence structures.*"

Overall, all three teachers held positive perceptions of the potential for integrating moral values into EFL lessons, but how they implemented this integration in the classroom varied considerably.

Strategies for embedding moral values

Through the observed lessons of Teachers A, B, and C, it became evident that all three integrated moral values into their teaching through a variety of strategies, ranging from individual to group activities and from implicit to explicit approaches.

4.2.1. Group discussion

Both Teachers A and B organized group discussions in class. They assigned students a task or question to discuss in groups and then present their ideas to the whole class. In Extract 1, Teacher A ensured that students clearly understood the task and had a well-defined division of roles during group work. In this activity, students were expected to act responsibly by proposing actions to help preserve world heritage sites.

Teacher: I want you to discuss the question: "What do you think you can do to help preserve world heritage sites?" Do you understand the question?

Student: Yes.

Teacher: What does it mean? Can you repeat it for the class?

Student: It asks what people should do to protect world cultural heritage sites.

Teacher: That's right. Now I'd like you to work in groups. Earlier, I divided the class into six groups. Now it's time for your discussion.

Teacher: During the discussion, the group leader will manage the group, and the secretary will take notes of the ideas. You have 5 minutes. Let's start.'

Extract 1 – (Teacher A)

Apart from Teacher A's case, Teacher B familiarized students with the IELTS speaking exam, a widely recognized test among English learners worldwide. In Extract 2, his instructions implicitly emphasized the importance of showing respect by listening attentively to their groupmates while they shared their ideas. In addition, the task content focused on ecotourism, a form of tourism that supports environmental protection.

Teacher: You are opening an eco-resort... In the IELTS speaking exam, there is a task like this. Is that clear to you?

Students: Yes.

Teacher: Ok. Sit in groups of two tables. One talks, the other three listen. One talks, the other three listen. One talks, the other three listen. Let's talk. 5 minutes, please. After 5 minutes, I will invite you to perform your IELTS speaking exam.

Extract 2 – (Teacher B)

Real-life input

During the lessons, all three teachers incorporated real-life input to gradually guide students toward a deeper understanding of the lesson content. The classroom interactions revealed that moral values were embedded within the language instruction.

Teacher: For example, imagine there is a place that was not well known at first - Like the Chen Kieu Pagoda near my house... But then it becomes famous and attracts many tourists. So, what do we need to do when there are many tourists?

Student: We need to be careful to preserve it.

Teacher: What does "manage" mean? It means "to control." And then what else should we do? What should we try to limit? We should limit the damage to those places...

Extract 3 – (Teacher A)

In Extract 3, Teacher A sought to help students connect the content of the listening task with the real-life example of Chen Kieu Pagoda near his home. This task allowed students to imagine what tourists should and should not do to preserve the heritage site. Similarly, in Extract 4, Teacher B asked students to translate the questions from the listening task into their native language to ensure their understanding of the context related to eco-vacations.

Teacher:What does modern vacation mean, Duyen? You don't know where it is, Duyen? What does "a modern vacation" mean in Vietnamese?

Student: Kỳ nghỉ biệ̣n đại

Teacher: Have a Bad effect on

Student: có ảnh hưởng xấu

Teacher: On the environment?

Student: lên môi trường

Teacher: why...Kỳ phượng?

Student: Dạ thầy [A polite form of address that demonstrates a student's respect for the teacher in Vietnamese], tại sao

Teacher: eco vacation

Student: dạ thầy, là khu nghỉ dưỡng sinh thái [yes, teacher, an eco-resort]

Teacher: Resort? But it says vacation...

Student: dạ, kì nghỉ [yes, vacation]

Extract 4 – (Teacher B)

In Extract 4, students used polite language to show respect for Teacher B when he asked them to explain the meaning of the questions. This was similar to Teacher C's case, in which she attempted to set the context for the listening task by asking students to give directions to a festival. Although these were simply ways of responding, they nevertheless reflected the value of respect in students' talk and interactions with their teachers.

In this vein, regarding authentic input, Teacher B designed a situational question for students to address during the lesson. He believed that this situation would help students reflect on moral values, develop critical thinking skills, and use the target language they had just learned to respond appropriately at the same time.

I have a situational question for you. You are on holiday at an eco resort. A group of tourists wants to take photos with wild animals kept in cages. The tour guide tells you that this activity is popular, but it may hurt the animals...what would you do, would you join the activity? Why or why not? Think about how animals should be treated in tourism. (Teacher B)

Propagating

One direct strategy for integrating moral values into a lesson is to explicitly convey them to students at appropriate moments during teaching. Immediately after a student's response about how to preserve heritage, Teacher A emphasized that every individual should recognize its importance to pass it on to future generations.

First, we must have a sense of awareness. And second, there must be government responsibility. In general, individuals must be aware first, and only then does the responsibility fall on the government... The most important thing is that we must be conscious of preservation so that heritage sites can be passed down to future generations. (Teacher A)

Teacher A also reinforced this point after the listening section, which focused on inappropriate behaviors when visiting certain places.

We've seen some cases where people visit certain places, like islands, and even though it's prohibited to cause damage, some still take rocks... those have been preserved... taking them may be against the rules. (Teacher A)

Similarly, after the students presented their solutions to the situation, Teacher B shared his own response. Through this, he aimed to help students derive values related to protecting wild animals and preserving natural habitats.

I would not join the activity because I think keeping wild animals in cages just for photos is wrong. These animals should live in their natural environment, not be used for entertainment. (Teacher B)

Providing language support

In EFL lessons, some students often struggle with limited vocabulary. To equip them with the necessary language for the lesson, Teachers A and C provided relevant vocabulary and phrases related to the listening task. Teacher B, in particular, prepared a handout containing a vocabulary list, examples, and structures to support students in completing their speaking task. He explained that *"I provided useful vocabulary and structures beforehand. Students worked in pairs or groups, which lowered anxiety and increased participation. Providing more pre-task vocabulary support is essential for abstract discussions."*

Notably, in the handout, Teacher B included words and examples that embedded moral values. For instance, the phrase *"enjoying staying in a natural environment without damaging/hurting it"* appeared four times, while *"modern vacations can have a negative effect on our environment"* was repeated twice. This suggests that, through supported language, students were also able to learn values related to protecting the natural environment from the impacts of modern vacations.

In this light, to address time constraints and increase students' exposure to the target language, Teacher A asked each student to prepare the discussion task before class, whereas Teacher B shared a handout of key words and useful structures via the Zalo group (a social networking platform) for students to review in advance. These actions reflected the teachers' responses to challenges they had previously encountered in the classroom, indicating a growing awareness of the importance of addressing moral dimensions more intentionally and explicitly in their teaching practices.

Caring and encouraging

The teachers demonstrated care and encouragement in their teaching, which provided a meaningful way to embed moral values. By acknowledging students' efforts, appreciating their participation, and fostering a supportive classroom environment, they modeled respect, empathy, and encouragement. For instance, Teacher A praised students for being well prepared and actively engaged in peer discussions, thereby reinforcing the values of responsibility and collaboration.

Teacher B, meanwhile, encouraged students with positive feedback and ensured everyone had the opportunity to participate by scheduling their turns, thereby reflecting fairness, patience, and inclusivity in his teaching. He commented, *"Thank you. Your talk is informative, and it answers all the questions and suggestions in the task... The others will perform your speaking next time."*

Teacher C expressed heartfelt encouragement, remarking that she wished every day could be as joyful and engaging. She awarded bonus marks to students who answered correctly, thereby reinforcing their efforts in a positive and supportive manner. Moreover, in Extract 5, she explicitly encouraged the class to respect their peers and appreciate the efforts each student made in their learning. These actions fostered students' motivation and strengthened their sense of belonging within the classroom community.

Teacher: So number 2—I guess it's a food court, right? So how about number 3? That one's a bit easier—can you guess? ... For number 3 here, what kind of area is this, with all the trees? ... This one represents us... Khang, how about you?

Student: Camping ground.

Teacher: What is a camping ground, boy? ... What is it?

Student: A place for camping.

Teacher: Ah, don't look down on him—he knows it... okay.

Extract 5 – (Teacher C)

Indeed, through their caring interactions, encouragement, and inclusive classroom practices, the teachers not only supported students' language development, but also implicitly fostered key moral values. Their thoughtful feedback, respect for student contributions, and efforts to create a positive learning environment illustrate how moral values can be naturally embedded in everyday instructional practices.

Discussion

The findings of the present study indicated that EFL teachers generally recognized the importance and feasibility of integrating moral values into their teaching, particularly under the guidance of the General Education Curriculum. This finding is consistent with the previous study in Indonesia, which reported teachers' intentional efforts to embed moral or character values through classroom activities such as group discussions and structured lesson stages (Aghni et al., 2020). Similarly, research in Slovakia showed that EFL teachers attempted to link lesson content with students' moral development despite limited institutional support (Ferková & Zacharová, 2023; Keles, 2025). Together, these similarities suggest that teachers across different contexts tend to view moral education as a relevant and achievable component of EFL teaching.

At the same time, the present findings differ from earlier Vietnamese studies by Nguyen (2018) and Nguyen and Nguyen (2020), which described moral or values education as largely unstructured, spontaneous, and dependent on individual teachers' interpretations. In contrast, EFL teachers in the current study reported more intentional and curriculum-aligned practices, indicating a shift toward more systematic integration following the implementation of the General Education Curriculum. Nevertheless, notable variations were observed in how moral values were enacted in their classroom practices. Bernstein's (1996) theory of pedagogic discourse provides a useful lens for interpreting these differences, as EFL teachers' pedagogical choices influenced the extent of control, interaction, and reflection students experienced. For example, Teacher C adopted a more controlled approach that limited opportunities for moral reflection, whereas Teachers A and B employed more flexible practices that encouraged open discussion of moral issues. These differences highlight the influence of lesson design and pedagogical framing on the depth and clarity of moral integration in EFL classrooms.

Furthermore, consistent with previous studies (Aghni et al., 2020; Qoyyimah, 2016), EFL teachers in this study used strategies such as storytelling, role-play, and real-life scenarios to convey moral values. These practices align with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which views learning—including moral learning—as a socially mediated process. Through interactive and reflective activities, the teachers served as mediators who supported students in negotiating moral meanings related to empathy, environmental responsibility, and respect. Such interaction not only facilitates moral reasoning, but also supports language development (Byram, 2008; Johnston, 2003; Shaaban, 2005). Moreover, the teachers employed adaptive scaffolding strategies, including vocabulary handouts, visual prompts, digital materials, and authentic examples drawn from students' local context to connect lesson content with moral values. This finding complements Mollahossein et al. (2025), who demonstrated the potential of value- and etiquette-based instructional materials for integrating

moral values in EFL classrooms. These practices reflect sociocultural scaffolding, whereby teachers provide instructional tools and contextual support to help learners internalize moral values while developing their language skills.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by providing contextualised evidence on how moral values can be integrated into EFL teaching in a more intentional and curriculum-aligned manner. Rather than viewing moral education as incidental or solely dependent on individual teachers, the findings highlight the role of structured curriculum guidance, adaptive pedagogical practices, and sensitivity to classroom context in shaping moral integration. These insights have implications for both educational policy and EFL teacher professional development in relation to moral education.

Conclusion

This study examined EFL teachers' perceptions and classroom practices regarding the integration of moral values into EFL teaching at Vietnamese high schools, within the framework of the General Education Curriculum. The findings showed that all participating teachers acknowledged the importance of moral education and considered its integration into EFL lessons both relevant and feasible. They employed a range of implicit and explicit strategies, such as group discussions, real-life situations, value-oriented vocabulary support, and caring classroom interactions. However, there were differences in the depth and consistency of teachers' implementation, shaped by their individual understandings, experiences, and instructional choices.

Based on the findings, several pedagogical implications can be drawn for the effective integration of moral values into EFL teaching. First, the study highlights the need to equip teachers with the skills to embed moral values intentionally through lesson planning, task design, and classroom interaction. This calls for targeted professional development that addresses both language pedagogy and strategies for promoting moral reasoning, empathy, and social responsibility in EFL contexts. Second, moral values are most effectively conveyed through interactive, student-centered activities such as group discussions, real-life scenarios, and reflective tasks connected to students' experiences. Accordingly, curriculum designers and textbook developers should include contextually relevant moral content and provide clear pedagogical guidance. Within the time constraints of each lesson, EFL teachers should plan integrated activities carefully so that moral and language objectives are achieved simultaneously. In addition, fostering a supportive classroom environment in which EFL teachers model care, fairness, and respect is essential, as such implicit moral instruction complements explicit teaching. Finally, schools should reinforce moral themes from EFL lessons across subjects and school activities to extend moral learning beyond individual classrooms and support students' holistic development.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, it involved only three teachers in one province through purposive sampling, so the results do not fully represent classroom practices across different regions or school contexts in Vietnam. Second, it focused on teacher perceptions and classroom observations, but did not include students' perspectives, and the short data collection period may not capture changes across multiple lessons or units. Lastly, although the study addressed curriculum alignment, it did not explore institutional or systemic factors in depth, such as administrative support, school culture, or professional development opportunities. Therefore, future studies may include more teachers from different regions, add student perspectives, and use longer time frames to see changes over time. Future research may also examine school and system support, and compare countries or cultures to deepen insights into how different sociocultural and educational systems approach the integration of moral values in EFL teaching.

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