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Humanizing Early Childhood Education: Teacher's Perspectives on Financial Policies and Institutional Support

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ABSTRACT

Humanizing education is widely discussed in early childhood education regardless private institutions or public preschool. It grounded in the theory of psychologist of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers to acknowledge teachers as a human being and emphasize being empathy, be cognitively to behave yet maintaining good relationships with others. This study aims to explore how preschool teachers from private institutions and government schools interpret the concept of humanizing education using a case study design to explore an in-depth understanding in the context of financial policy and institutional management. Data collected revealed four key themes: (1) funding for professional development, (2) budgets for emotional well-being, (3) teachers-friendly salary policies, and (4) humane financial and leave regulations. Ultimately, the findings show that supportive financial policies not only enhance teachers' professional growth but also foster emotional resilience and stronger collegial relationships. These results highlight the need for balanced financial management and teacher well-being as a practical pathway to sustaining humanizing education in early childhood settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is an important foundation in shaping children's character, social skills, and academic readiness in the future. In this process, ECE teachers play a central role not only as learning facilitators, but also as emotional companions who understand the needs of children's development as a whole. Therefore, humanistic ECE institutional management, which places teachers as whole human beings with professional, emotional, and social needs, is very crucial. One of the important aspects of the humanistic approach to education is how institutions manage financial policies related to the professional development of teachers and their general well-being.

However, in practice, there are still striking differences between government and private ECE institutions in allocating budgets for teachers' professional development and their work welfare. Some schools have adequate support systems, such as regular training, health insurance, and humane leave policies, while others limit spending for budget efficiency. This reality raises important questions about the extent to which the principle of humanization is applied in the financial policies of ECE institutions, as well as how teachers interpret these policies in the context of their work.

Various recent studies confirm that professional development and teacher welfare are very important in improving the quality of early childhood education. Evidence -based initiatives, including mental health support programs and school -based interventions, are proven to contribute significantly to the resilience and quality of teacher teaching (Berger *et al.*, 2022). The practice of mindfulness also has a positive relationship with mental health and the welfare of early childhood education teachers (Corthorn *et al.*, 2024). In addition, the teacher's emotional intelligence plays an important role in increasing work involvement through mediation of emotional regulation strategies and self -efficacy (Yuan *et al.*, 2025).

In the context of professionalism, the challenges of preschool teachers in Selangor are mainly related to the limitations of uneven institutional resources and institutional support (Sharim *et al.*, 2023). Financial factors are also an important aspect in the sustainability of a private ECE center in Malaysia which has an impact on teacher welfare and service quality (Ngadni & Saminder Singh, 2024). Globally, there is still a gap between evidence and practice in the teacher professional development program, which shows the need for a more research -based policy (Popova *et al.*, 2022).

In addition, the subjective welfare of the teacher acts as an important mediator in fostering student creativity (Kurniawati *et al.*, 2021). High stress levels in ECE teachers during online learning also show the importance of emotional support from institutions (Purnomosidi, 2021). The relevance of the local context is seen in research that emphasizes learning strategies based on local wisdom and community support as a factor that strengthens the role of the teacher (Ahdad *et al.*, 2023). These findings as a whole confirm that the welfare and professional development of teachers is a fundamental factor for the success of early childhood education, as well as highlighting the need for more humanist and sustainable institutional policies. However, there has not been much research that specifically explores how ECE institutions, especially with government and private backgrounds, manage their financial policies related to teacher development, as well as how teachers themselves interpret these policies from a humanistic perspective. In other words, there is still a gap in understanding humanitarian-oriented financial policy practices, especially from the perspective of ECE teachers as direct actors in the field. Based on this background, this study aims to answer two main questions:

1. How do early childhood education institutions (government vs. private) structure their financial policies regarding teacher professional development, and what factors influence these budget allocation decisions?
2. What do early childhood education teachers consider to be the key characteristics of human-centered financial policies, and how do these perspectives vary between government and private institutional contexts?

This research has important significance, both theoretically and practically. In terms of theory, this study enriches the study of the humanistic approach in ECE institutional management, especially in the aspect of financial management that is often overlooked. Meanwhile, from a practical perspective, the findings of this study can be considered for policymakers at the institutional and government levels to formulate financial policies that are fairer, more sustainable, and in favor of the welfare of teachers as the main actors in early childhood education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher well-being has become the focus of global research because it is directly related to the quality of teaching and development of students. In Malaysia, various studies confirm that teacher welfare is not only influenced by psychological factors, but also social and economic conditions. Teacher welfare includes mental, physical, and social balance which is very important to maintain professional commitment (Zulkifli *et al.*, 2022). The job satisfaction factor and teacher-child relationship also acts as the main aspect that affects the stress level of preschool teachers (Jayaraja & Mohamed, 2024). In addition, psychosocial risks such as long working hours and job pressure contribute significantly to the mental health disorders of preschool service providers in Kuala Lumpur (Tham *et al.*, 2025).

In addition to the psychological aspects, the spiritual dimension and the meaning of life are also an effective intervention strategy. The concept of workplace spirituality and the meaning of life is proven to be able to improve the psychological welfare of private preschool teachers (Shuen & Zhooriyati, 2021). On the other hand, financial welfare has a close relationship with job satisfaction. Financial stability is one of the main predictors of teacher job satisfaction under the Malaysian Ministry of Education (Ismail & Rahim, 2021). In line with the findings in Sri Lanka which shows that the economic burden and mental pressure also influence the government school teachers (Senevirathne *et al.*, 2025).

International studies also confirm the importance of institutional support and public policy in improving teacher welfare. Flexible policies and social support during Pandemi Covid-19 have proven to be able to improve teacher welfare (Billaudeau *et al.*, 2022). In addition, factors at the school level, such as the quality of leadership and organizational culture, also affect the subjective welfare of international teachers in Hong Kong (Harrison & Kai Hou, 2023). Furthermore, the need for systematic intervention to reduce burnout in teachers is also emphasized in scoping reviews (Avola *et al.*, 2025).

In the context of ECE (Early Childhood Education), emotional demands and relationships with students' families also add to the workload. "Emotional Labor" is a challenge as well as an opportunity in supporting the welfare of early childhood educators (Dickerson *et al.*, 2024). In addition, salary factors and task descriptions are also important variables, where mismatch between workloads and compensation can reduce teacher motivation (Gonzales *et al.*, 2024). Theoretically, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs remains relevant as a framework for understanding the needs of teacher-coated teachers, ranging from basic financial needs to self-actualization (Dar & Sakthivel, 2022).

Efforts to improve the professionalism of teachers also play a role in welfare. The global gap between evidence of research and practices of teacher professional development, so that evidence-based training programs are needed to support mental health and job satisfaction (Popova et al., 2022). Similar findings were also revealed which through a systematic review highlights the importance of national policy support in maintaining the mental health of educators (Munusamy et al., 2024).

3. METHODOLOGY

Case study is an appropriate approach when research aims to explore the questions "How" and "why" because it allows researchers to understand phenomena in depth through various data sources in the context of real life (Råbu & Binder, 2025; Sibbald et al., 2021). Therefore, this study uses a qualitative case study approach because it is able to provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon through various perspectives (Miller et al., 2023).

This research examines the experience of three teachers-one from government agencies and two from private institutions-in the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE) who have a long experience as a kindergarten teacher. The goal is to explore their life experiences and responses that can provide a better understanding of the concept of Humanizing Education in ECE institutions.

Purposive sampling technique is used to select participants who are consciously chosen because they really experience the phenomenon under study (Campbell et al., 2020). Three participants came from kindergarten in Selangor recruited through an acquaintance network. Interviews are conducted through voice messages and written text using the WhatsApp application because of time constraints, approaches that have been recognized effectively for long-distance qualitative research (Abedi, 2025; Bueno-Roldán & Röder, 2024; Desai et al., 2024).

Validity and reliability are important aspects related to the accuracy and consistency of data collection and interpretation (Lim, 2025). Reliability - or dependability-referring to the consistency of the instrument from time to time and in various conditions. Validity - or credibility - shows the extent to which the instrument measures what should be measured. To ensure reliability, this study uses variations of questions to check the consistency of respondents' answers, as well as applying structured checking processes to verify findings (Lloyd et al., 2024; McKim, 2023). This strategy helps explore the respondent's perspective in depth and increase the validity of the data obtained.

4. RESULT

Four themes were found when researcher analyzed the research data in accordance with the research question "What perceptions in humanizing education concept of early childhood within preschool management profile as experiences by both government and private teachers?" Themes are: (1) funding for teachers' professional development, (2) budget for teachers' emotional wellbeing or healing programs, (3) human-centered salary salaries policies and (4) humanizing financial policies and leave regulations. Each theme will be illustrated below with the transcript from the interviewee.

4.1 Funding for Teachers' Professional Development

When asked does the school allocates a specific budget for teachers' professional development, such as workshops, seminars or training and how does this budget determine,

the private teachers expressed the same that their organization does not have a dedicated budget allocation for teacher's professional development as well as government teachers asserted that budget allocation was determined by ministry. Yet, they all agree that organization or school encouraged teachers in attending training sessions, workshops or seminars primarily regarding effective teaching and learning. The fee of the training was free among these teachers.

"MOE always provide meetings, trainings and workshops. It is compulsory for teachers to complete their 5 days meeting, seminar and workshop". (Government teacher A- excerpts from interview transcripts). "However, each term, we receive one training session focusing on key areas such as work management, effectively teaching children with special needs, and the application of AI in education". (Private teacher B- excerpts from interview transcripts). "In a year, we will go for four training regarding our syllabus, I would say. So, for each training, right, for each teacher, they have to pay 100 ringgits. Yeah, they have to pay 100 ringgits for each teacher and also for the STEM training". (Private teacher C- excerpts from interview transcripts)

4.2 Budget for Teachers' Emotional Wellbeing / Healing Programs

Teacher emotional wellbeing is important as it will directly affect the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning, ultimately students' achievement. There is a highlight in government sector that the school has prepared counsellors to help the teachers and students if they seek for any counselling session while private organization does not have this service. Regardless of government teachers or private teachers, the organization or school has outing plans for one-day trip for the purpose of building bonding time during term break or once a year. There is a difference between these two groups in terms of the expenses of the outing whereby government teachers use the funds that early invested by all teachers while private teachers were fully sponsored by the organization. Private teacher C mentioned they get compensation of 'ampau' and celebration meals during festive seasons. Moreover, private teacher B emphasizes that their organization has allocated budget for medical insurance to teachers but limit to certain amount while government teacher A and private teacher C's organization does not have this guarantee.

In addition, private teachers affirmed that organization does not have a budget for backup teachers while government teachers mentioned backup teacher will only be provided when approved by PIBG (parent-teacher association), otherwise need apply from PPD (District Education Office). "Besides, if we seek for any counselling, they will provide as well. Every year the school will plan for outing for teachers, like team building, and vacation". "The backup teacher will be provided with PIBG's approval if the PIBG willing to pay for that. Otherwise, we need to apply in PPD for backup teachers". (Government teacher A- excerpts from interview transcripts)

"At the end of each term, during the term break, teachers plan and participate in a one-day activity together. For instance, last term, we went to the Genting Highlands cable car and the Melaka Safari Zoo, both of which were fully sponsored by the school". "Yes, every teacher's insurance is covered by the school, but it is limited to a certain amount". (Private teacher B- excerpts from interview transcripts)

"Actually, my school doesn't provide any budget or program for teachers' emotional well-being. Yes, we have been outing once, which is last year. Other than that, every celebration like Raya or Deepavali, our bosses will bring us for a dinner". (Private teacher C- excerpts from interview transcripts).

4.3 Human-Centered Salary Policies

Payment structure for three teachers is varied whereby government teacher A has the benefit on getting paid based on their position while private teacher B get the pay monthly depending on the experience and educational levels while private teacher C's salary is paid on a per-day basis.

Furthermore, organizations of government teacher A and private teacher C have the flexibility to pay salaries in advance of major festival while private teacher B does not. Moreover, they all agreed that the school did not have a policy on financial support systems, but that government schools had a teacher fund, which could be used in advance to pay for emergencies with the permission of all teachers.

"The pay for civil staff is fixed on their grading. Civil staff are not paid according to how many hours they work. Its fix timing". "The salary for civil staffs will be paid in early about few days during festival time". "There is no emergency fund but, in my school, if there is any death we will borrow the teacher's fund to the needed teacher after getting permission from all teachers" (Government teacher A- excerpts from interview transcripts).

"My salary is paid monthly and is determined by my experience and educational background." Salaries are consistently disbursed between the 26th and 30th of every month" (Private teacher B- excerpts from interview transcripts).

"Our salary setup is actually per day basis". "So if the festival is on the 29th, they will pay us on the 28th or 27th if it's end of the month" (Private teacher C- excerpts from interview transcripts).

4.4 Humanizing Financial Policies & Leave Regulations

The three teachers had different views on how school finance policy reflects human-centered values. The government teacher mentioned that as long as teachers have financial needs, funds will be taken from the existing teacher fund. Private teacher B expressed that school values people-oriented values in providing counselling services and hiring doctors, while private teacher C's school places more emphasis on practical implementation than budgeting any financial.

In another question raised up different perspectives of organizations reached out to helping teachers as in PIBG plays important role in investing quality while sponsorship from NGO provide with student's extracurricular programs. Besides, organization private teacher B focuses on improving quality of teaching of educators by subscribing educational digital tools. Organization private teacher C has no support on reducing workload instead focus on manual work over spending any cents of money.

"The school is helping financially when needed. Besides, school will find for fund to celebrate the teachers (teacher's day)". "PIBG to renew the infrastructure in school to increase enrollment of students. And sometimes the school will find for NGO's sponsorship to have extra curricula" (Government teacher A- excerpts from interview transcripts).

"This is evident as the school offers counseling sessions through student affairs and also invites doctors". "The school provides teachers with various digital tools by subscribing to services like Gemini (Google AI for Education) and Canva Education" (Private teacher B- excerpts from interview transcripts).

"I don't think that my school policy reflects human-centered values because they are more to a practical thing. They don't really put in a value in budgeting or like in money sectors towards teachers". "I don't find any investment that my management have brought up to cut down our workload, they want us to do everything by ourselves. so that it won't cost the company much" (Private teacher C- excerpts from interview transcripts).

Finally, key characteristics of humanizing education stated by these three teachers emphasized the importance of supporting teachers rather than just profits of the organization. Teachers' perspectives emphasize the importance of outcome is sustainable and fair over short term gains. Moreover, an organization able to be ethically and responsibility is the key to financial policy and practices. As a result, interviewed teachers tend to embrace a people-first approach rather than any profits or benefits obtained from organizations.

"Ethical and Responsible Practice should Aligns with principles of ethics, justice, and social responsibility" (Government teacher A- excerpts from interview transcripts). "a human-centered financial policy values sustainability over short-term gains" (Private teacher B- excerpts from interview transcripts). "I think the key characteristic that my management can focus in is mainly the social well-being of the teachers" (Private teacher C- excerpts from interview transcripts).

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

The findings of this research reinforce the literature that teacher welfare is not only influenced by internal factors, but also external conditions such as institutional support, financial stability, and emotional demands. For example, the results of this study are in line with findings that confirm the importance of mental, physical, and social balance in maintaining teacher professional commitments (Zulkifli *et al.*, 2022). This shows that interventions to improve teacher welfare need to target various aspects, not just work stress.

Financial welfare also arises as an important factor that can explain the variation of teacher job satisfaction in this study. This finding is consistent with research that shows that financial stability is a predictor of teacher job satisfaction in Malaysia (Ismail & Rahim, 2021). Implications, educational policies need to pay attention to aspects of remuneration and financial support so that teachers can focus more on the quality of teaching. In a broader context this condition is also in line with the results of research that shows the relationship between economic burden and mental pressure on teachers in Sri Lanka (Senevirathne *et al.*, 2025).

In addition to economic factors, emotional workload is also an important concern. This discussion reinforces the findings that "Emotional Labor" in interaction with students' families can increase psychological pressure, although on the other hand it can also be an opportunity to strengthen welfare through relational support (Dickerson *et al.*, 2024). This indicates the need for training for teachers to manage emotional demands in ECE.

In terms of institutional support, the results of this study support the view that flexible policies and social support can improve teacher welfare, especially in a situation full of pressure (Billaudeau *et al.*, 2022). In addition, this finding is also consistent with research that emphasizes the role of school leadership and organizational culture in shaping the subjective welfare of teachers (Harrison & Kai Hou, 2023). Therefore, the practice of humanist and participatory school management needs to be adopted more broadly.

Theoretically, the results of this study show the relevance of Maslow's needs framework in explaining teacher welfare. The teacher will find it difficult to achieve self-actualization without meeting basic needs such as occupational security and financial stability (Dar & Sakthivel, 2022). Thus, the implications of this study confirms that teacher welfare policies must be holistic, ranging from providing financial support, improving the quality of the work environment, to psychosocial and spiritual interventions (Shuen & Zhooriyati, 2021).

In terms of practice, these results show that evidence -based professional development programs are needed to support teacher welfare. This is in line with research that highlights

the gap between evidence of research and practical teacher training globally (Popova et al., 2022). The implications, higher education institutions and ministries need to design teacher development programs that are not only focused on technical competencies, but also mental health and overall welfare.

6. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the concept of humanizing education in financial policies and management of preschool institutions has not been fully realised, both in government and private institutions. Although there are various efforts to support teachers through training, community activities, or providing incentives, the implementation is still limited and is very dependent on the internal policies of each institution. Teachers in government schools generally receive more structured support, especially in training and access to counseling services. However, limited budget allocation and flexibility of funding remains the main obstacle. Meanwhile, teachers in private institutions face welfare policy inequality; Some feel attention to the emotional aspects and professional development, but not a few who assess the organization is too cost-oriented and ignores the welfare of the teacher.

From the perspective of the teacher, human financial policy should place the welfare of teachers as a priority, prioritizing the principles of justice, sustainability, and social responsibility. The teacher should not be seen as a burden on costs, but as an individual who is worthy of being valued in full. Therefore, the management of early childhood education needs to be directed at a more ethical, just and centered system in order to create a healthy work environment while supporting the child's optimal learning process.

The limitation of this study lies in the scope of samples that are relatively limited to several regions and types of institutions, so that the findings may not fully represent the diversity of financial policies and teacher welfare in all national and international contexts. In addition, data collection methods that are mostly qualitative can cause bias perception, so quantitative or mixed-method research is needed to strengthen the generalization of the results.

Based on these findings and limitations, further research is recommended to: (1) expand geographical coverage and types of institutions, including cross-country comparisons, in order to get a more comprehensive picture; and (2) testing the effectiveness of policy intervention, such as psychosocial support programs or alternative remuneration models, so that policy recommendations can be more proof of based on evidence.

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