



PRESERVING PERSUASIVE MORAL MESSAGES IN CHILDREN LITERATURE

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Abstract

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana pesan moral persuasif dipertahankan dan disampaikan dalam sastra anak. Meskipun cerita anak telah lama berfungsi sebagai sarana pendidikan moral, perhatian terhadap strategi naratif khusus yang mendukung unsur moral persuasif di dalamnya masih sangat terbatas. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan analisis tekstual kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis cerita-cerita anak terpilih untuk mengidentifikasi tema-tema moral yang berulang serta teknik persuasif yang digunakan untuk menyampaikannya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa nilai-nilai moral seperti kejujuran, kebaikan, kerja sama, tanggung jawab, dan ketekunan dapat dikomunikasikan secara efektif melalui pemodelan karakter, penceritaan berbasis konsekuensi, dan narasi yang melibatkan emosi. Strategi-strategi ini memungkinkan pembaca muda menginternalisasi pelajaran moral sambil tetap terlibat dengan cerita. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa mempertahankan unsur moral persuasif dalam sastra anak sangat penting untuk mendukung pendidikan moral dan transmisi nilai-nilai budaya antargenerasi.

Kata kunci: sastra anak, pesan moral, persuasi

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Abstract. This study examines how persuasive moral messages are preserved and communicated in children's literature. Although children's stories have long served as vehicles for moral education, little attention has been given to the specific narrative strategies that sustain persuasive moral elements within them. Using a qualitative textual analysis approach, this study analyzes selected children's stories to identify recurring moral themes and the persuasive techniques used to convey them. The findings reveal that moral values such as honesty, kindness, cooperation, responsibility, and perseverance are effectively communicated through character modeling, consequence-based storytelling, and emotionally engaging narratives. These strategies enable young readers to internalize moral lessons while remaining engaged with the story. This study concludes that preserving persuasive moral elements in children's literature is essential for supporting moral education and cultural value transmission across generations.

Keywords: children's literature, moral messages, persuasion

Introduction

Children's literature has long been recognized as an important component of early education and childhood development. Beyond providing entertainment, children's stories function as meaningful educational tools that introduce young readers to language, imagination, culture, and social values (Akkaya et al., 2021; Ramadhani et al., 2025). Through simple yet engaging narratives, children explore complex ideas about human behavior, relationships, and moral choices. In early childhood, literature becomes a powerful medium for understanding the world. Stories allow children to encounter situations that illustrate kindness, honesty, responsibility, empathy, and cooperation, thereby shaping early perceptions of right and wrong .

One fundamental role of children's literature is the transmission of social and moral values. Traditional folktales, fairy tales, and modern stories frequently contain messages that encourage positive behavior. These messages are often embedded within character actions, conflict outcomes, and the consequences experienced by protagonists or antagonists (Kayadibi & Açık, 2021; Riza et al., 2026). For example, characters demonstrating honesty are often rewarded, while those acting selfishly face negative consequences. Through such patterns, children learn that moral behavior is socially valued. This storytelling process serves as a subtle yet effective educational strategy for understanding ethical norms (Johnson, 2023; Lewin, 2020) .

Stories also act as persuasive tools that influence children's attitudes and beliefs. Unlike rigid moral instruction, narratives persuade readers by allowing emotional connections with characters (Bayraktar, 2021; Kim & Hachey, 2021). When children identify with characters, they are more likely to internalize the lessons presented. Persuasion occurs through relatable characters, emotional engagement, and clear consequences for actions . These elements guide readers toward recognizing moral significance without explicit instruction. Furthermore, persuasive moral messages rely on narrative structures such as simple language and symbolic characters to ensure lessons are accessible and memorable (Bayraktar, 2021; Kim & Hachey, 2021) .

However, contemporary developments in children's publishing have introduced new challenges to preserving these moral messages. Modern literature increasingly emphasizes creativity, humor, and visual appeal to capture attention (Akkaya et al., 2021; Ramadhani et al., 2025). While these elements are important for engagement, they may sometimes overshadow traditional moral dimensions. In many contemporary texts, moral lessons are presented implicitly rather than explicitly (Johnson, 2023; Lewin, 2020). Although implicit messages can encourage critical thinking, younger readers may struggle to interpret the ethical meaning without clear narrative guidance .

Despite the importance of this topic, little attention has been paid to the specific narrative strategies that preserve persuasive moral elements in contemporary children's stories. Understanding how these messages are maintained is a vital area of academic inquiry (Muassomah et al., 2020; Nel et al., 2021).

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the narrative techniques that sustain moral values within modern children's literature. This research addresses the following question: How do contemporary children's stories utilize narrative strategies to maintain persuasive moral values amidst increasing demands for entertainment?

Method

This section outlines the qualitative research design used to examine the preservation of persuasive moral messages in children's literature. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study because it focuses on understanding meanings, interpretations, and patterns within textual data. By examining literary texts in detail, this analysis enables the identification of underlying themes, narrative strategies, and moral messages embedded within the stories.

The data corpus for this study consists of selected children's stories chosen for their popularity and clear moral messages. These texts were selected because they explicitly present moral values through character actions, plot development, and story resolution. This made them suitable for analyzing how persuasive moral messages are constructed and maintained in children's literature.

Specifically, this research applies textual analysis and discourse analysis as the primary analytical approaches. Textual analysis focuses on examining the content of the selected stories, including plot development, character actions, and narrative outcomes that convey moral lessons. This approach allows the identification of how moral values, such as honesty, kindness, and responsibility, are represented and conveyed to young readers.

Results and Discussion

Children Literature and Moral Development

Children's literature has long been recognized as an important educational tool that contributes to the intellectual, emotional, and moral development of young readers. Through storytelling, children are introduced to ideas, experiences, and values that help them understand the social world around them (Kayadibi & Aık, 2021; Riza et al., 2026). Stories allow children to encounter different situations and characters, enabling them to reflect on behavior, relationships, and decision-making in ways that are both engaging and meaningful. Because children often learn through observation and imagination, literature provides a safe and accessible space for exploring moral concepts.

One of the key educational functions of storytelling is its ability to convey lessons indirectly. Unlike formal instruction, which often relies on explicit explanations and rules, stories present moral values through narrative experiences. When children read or listen to stories, they observe how characters behave, how conflicts arise, and how problems are resolved (Bayraktar, 2021; Kim & Hachey, 2021). These narrative elements help children recognize the consequences of actions and the importance of ethical choices. As a result, storytelling becomes an effective method for teaching moral values without appearing overly instructional or didactic.

Children's literature also serves as a medium for character formation. Through repeated exposure to stories that emphasize positive behavior, children gradually develop an understanding of values such as honesty, kindness, and responsibility. Characters in children's stories often act as role models whose actions demonstrate desirable qualities (Muassomah et al., 2020; Nel et al., 2021). When young readers identify with these characters, they are more likely to internalize the values presented in the narrative. In this way, literature helps shape children's attitudes and encourages them to adopt behaviors that align with socially accepted moral standards.

Furthermore, narratives influence children's moral learning by encouraging empathy and perspective-taking. Stories often present situations in which characters experience challenges, emotions, and conflicts. By following these experiences, children learn to understand the feelings and motivations of others (Kayadibi & Aık, 2021; Riza et al., 2026). This process helps develop emotional intelligence and moral awareness. Consequently, children's literature plays a significant role in supporting the development of ethical understanding and responsible behavior in early childhood.

Moral Messages in Children's Stories

Moral messages are central components of many children's stories, serving as guiding principles that help young readers distinguish between right and wrong. These messages are often embedded in the actions of characters, the progression of the plot, and the resolution of conflicts (Kayadibi & Açıık, 2021; Riza et al., 2026). Rather than presenting moral lessons in a direct or instructional manner, children's literature typically conveys these values through narrative experiences that allow readers to observe and interpret the outcomes of characters' decisions.

One of the most common moral values presented in children's stories is honesty. Stories frequently portray situations in which characters face the choice between telling the truth or being dishonest. Through narrative consequences, children learn that honesty leads to trust and positive outcomes, while dishonesty may result in difficulties or misunderstandings. Such representations help reinforce the importance of truthfulness in everyday interactions (Muassomah et al., 2020; Nel et al., 2021).

Kindness is another value widely emphasized in children's literature. Characters who show compassion and generosity toward others are often portrayed as admirable and respected. Acts of kindness, such as helping friends, sharing resources, or supporting those in need, are frequently highlighted as positive behaviors that strengthen relationships and create harmony within communities.

Responsibility is also commonly depicted through characters who learn to take ownership of their actions and duties. Stories may illustrate how fulfilling responsibilities, such as completing tasks, caring for others, or admitting mistakes, leads to personal growth and positive outcomes. Through these narratives, children are encouraged to understand the importance of accountability (Bayraktar, 2021; Kim & Hachey, 2021).

In addition to individual values, children's stories often promote cooperation and empathy. Cooperation is demonstrated through teamwork and collaborative problem-solving, emphasizing the importance of working together to achieve common goals. Empathy, on the other hand, is fostered when characters learn to understand and respect the feelings of others. These values are typically embedded in storylines where characters overcome challenges by supporting one another (Muassomah et al., 2020; Nel et al., 2021). By presenting these moral values through engaging narratives, children's literature effectively communicates ethical lessons while maintaining the imaginative and enjoyable qualities that make stories appealing to young readers.

Persuasion in Narrative Discourse

Persuasion plays an important role in literature, particularly in narratives designed for young audiences. In the context of storytelling, persuasion refers to the ability of a narrative to

influence readers' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Bayraktar, 2021; Kim & Hachey, 2021). Rather than relying on direct instruction, persuasive narratives guide readers toward particular moral interpretations through the structure of the story, the actions of characters, and the emotional experiences created within the narrative. This approach is especially effective for children, as stories allow them to learn moral lessons in a natural and engaging way.

One of the primary persuasive techniques used in children's literature is the use of role models. Characters often demonstrate behaviors that represent moral ideals, such as honesty, bravery, kindness, and responsibility (Johnson, 2023; Lewin, 2020). When children identify with these characters, they are more likely to adopt similar attitudes and behaviors. The presence of positive role models allows readers to observe the benefits of moral actions and encourages them to emulate those behaviors in their own lives.

Emotional engagement is another important persuasive strategy in storytelling. Narratives often create emotional connections between readers and characters by presenting relatable experiences, challenges, and feelings. When children empathize with characters, they become more invested in the story and more receptive to its moral messages (Leland et al., 2021; You, 2021). Emotional involvement helps strengthen the persuasive impact of the narrative because readers are more likely to remember and reflect on lessons that are associated with strong emotional experiences.

Cause-and-effect storytelling also plays a significant role in persuasive narratives. In many children's stories, characters' actions lead to clear consequences that reinforce moral values (Muassomah et al., 2020; Nel et al., 2021). For instance, acts of kindness may lead to friendship and happiness, while selfish behavior may result in conflict or regret. By illustrating these relationships between actions and outcomes, stories help children understand the importance of making ethical choices.

Narratives within Morality Continuations

This study examines how persuasive moral messages are preserved in children's literature by applying several complementary theoretical perspectives. The analysis integrates Narrative Persuasion Theory and Moral Development Theory. These frameworks provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding how stories influence children's attitudes and behaviors, how moral understanding develops during childhood, and how language and narrative structures contribute to the communication of moral messages. By combining these theoretical perspectives, the study is able to analyze both the content of moral values and the persuasive strategies embedded within children's narratives (Johnson, 2023; Lewin, 2020).

Narrative persuasion theory provides an important framework for understanding how stories influence readers' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Unlike direct persuasion, which

relies on explicit arguments or instructions, narrative persuasion occurs when individuals become emotionally and cognitively involved in a story (Leland et al., 2021; You, 2021). Through this process of engagement, readers are more likely to internalize the messages presented within the narrative. In the context of children's literature, narrative persuasion plays a crucial role in shaping young readers' understanding of moral values.

One of the key mechanisms of narrative persuasion is identification with characters. When children relate to the protagonist or other characters, they are more likely to adopt the attitudes and behaviors demonstrated in the story (Gasser et al., 2022; Russell, 2022). Characters who display positive moral qualities, such as kindness, honesty, and courage, can therefore serve as influential role models for young readers. Through identification, children learn how certain actions lead to positive outcomes, while negative behaviors may result in challenges or consequences.

Moral development theory provides insight into how children gradually acquire an understanding of ethical values and social norms. During childhood, individuals develop the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, evaluate the consequences of actions, and make moral decisions (Gasser et al., 2022; Russell, 2022). This process occurs through interactions with family members, teachers, peers, and cultural influences, including literature and storytelling. Children's literature therefore plays an important role in supporting moral development by presenting narratives that illustrate ethical behavior and moral dilemmas.

One influential perspective on moral development suggests that children progress through stages of moral understanding as they grow older. In early childhood, moral reasoning is often based on simple concepts such as obedience and punishment (Akkaya et al., 2021; Ramadhani et al., 2025). Young children tend to evaluate actions based on their immediate consequences rather than broader ethical principles. As children mature, they gradually begin to understand more complex ideas such as fairness, empathy, responsibility, and social cooperation.

Stories are particularly effective in supporting moral development because they present ethical situations in ways that are accessible and engaging for children. Through narrative experiences, children observe how characters respond to challenges and conflicts (Akkaya et al., 2021; Ramadhani et al., 2025). These situations often involve choices that require characters to consider the effects of their actions on others. By observing these decisions and their consequences, children can learn important moral lessons without direct instruction (Leland et al., 2021; You, 2021).

Another important aspect of moral development is the cultivation of empathy and perspective-taking. Stories often portray characters experiencing emotions such as happiness, sadness, fear, or disappointment. When children read about these experiences, they learn to

understand and relate to the feelings of others. This process helps develop empathy, which is a key component of moral reasoning and social interaction.

In the context of this study, moral development theory helps explain why moral messages in children's literature are structured in ways that align with children's cognitive and emotional abilities (Gasser et al., 2022; Russell, 2022). Simple language, clear consequences, and relatable characters are commonly used because they support children's developmental stages of moral understanding. By analyzing how stories present moral situations and character decisions, the research explores how literature contributes to the gradual development of ethical awareness in young readers.

Types of Moral Messages Found

The analysis of the selected children's literature texts reveals several recurring moral themes that are consistently presented through narrative events, character actions, and story resolutions (Gasser et al., 2022; Russell, 2022). These themes include honesty, kindness, cooperation, responsibility, and perseverance. Each of these values is communicated through the experiences of characters who encounter challenges and learn important lessons throughout the story.

One of the most prominent moral themes identified in the texts is honesty. In many stories, characters face situations where they must choose between telling the truth and hiding their mistakes (Gultom & Setyami, 2022; Wijaya et al., 2024). The narratives often demonstrate that honesty leads to trust, forgiveness, and positive outcomes. For instance, a character who initially hides a mistake may experience guilt or difficulties, but once they admit the truth, the problem is resolved and relationships are restored. Through such narrative patterns, young readers learn that honesty is a valuable trait that promotes trust and mutual respect.

Another significant theme found in the stories is kindness. Many narratives highlight the importance of caring for others and showing compassion toward friends, family members, or even strangers. Characters who help others in times of need are often portrayed as admirable and are frequently rewarded with friendship, appreciation, or personal satisfaction. These representations emphasize that kindness contributes to harmony and positive social relationships.

The value of cooperation is also strongly represented in the analyzed texts. Several stories present situations in which characters must work together to solve a problem or achieve a shared goal (Gultom & Setyami, 2022; Wijaya et al., 2024). For example, characters may collaborate to overcome obstacles, complete a difficult task, or help a friend in trouble. Through these cooperative efforts, the stories demonstrate that teamwork and mutual support can lead to successful outcomes.

Responsibility is another important moral theme conveyed in the narratives. Characters often learn that they must take responsibility for their actions and fulfill their duties. In many stories, a character initially neglects a responsibility or makes a careless decision, leading to negative consequences. However, by acknowledging their mistake and correcting their behavior, the character demonstrates personal growth and maturity. Moreover, the theme of perseverance appears frequently in the stories. Characters often encounter difficulties or failures while attempting to achieve a goal (Gultom & Setyami, 2022; Wijaya et al., 2024). Rather than giving up, they continue to try and eventually succeed through determination and effort. These narratives encourage young readers to understand the value of persistence and resilience when facing challenges.

Persuasive Narrative Strategies of Children's Literature

The analysis also reveals that children's literature employs several persuasive narrative strategies to communicate moral messages effectively. These strategies help guide readers toward understanding the ethical significance of events in the story and encourage them to adopt positive behaviors (Guroian, 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2023). Among the most prominent strategies identified are character modeling, consequence-based narratives, dialogue and narration, and emotional engagement.

One of the most influential persuasive strategies used in children's stories is character modeling. In many narratives, protagonists demonstrate positive moral qualities such as honesty, kindness, courage, and responsibility. These characters serve as role models for young readers by illustrating how moral behavior can lead to positive outcomes (Gasser et al., 2022; Russell, 2022). For example, a character who chooses to help a friend despite personal inconvenience may ultimately gain respect and friendship. By observing these actions, readers are encouraged to emulate similar behaviors in their own lives. Character modeling allows moral lessons to emerge naturally from the story rather than being delivered through direct instruction.

Another persuasive technique found in the narratives is the use of consequence-based storytelling. In this narrative structure, characters' actions lead to clear consequences that reinforce moral values (Gultom & Setyami, 2022; Wijaya et al., 2024). Positive behaviors such as kindness, honesty, and cooperation are often rewarded with successful outcomes, while negative behaviors such as selfishness or dishonesty may lead to conflict or regret. These cause-and-effect relationships help children understand the practical impact of moral decisions. By demonstrating the results of both positive and negative actions, stories encourage readers to consider the ethical implications of their choices (Muassomah et al., 2020; Nel et al., 2021).

Dialogue and narration also play an important role in reinforcing moral messages. Conversations between characters frequently highlight important lessons or guide readers toward interpreting events in a particular way (Guroian, 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2023). For instance, a character might explain why honesty is important or express gratitude toward someone who has helped them. Narration can also provide reflective commentary that clarifies the moral significance of the story's events. Through carefully constructed language, authors ensure that the intended moral message remains clear and accessible to young readers.

Another key persuasive element is emotional engagement. Children's stories often create situations that evoke empathy and emotional identification with the characters. When readers become emotionally invested in the narrative, they are more likely to understand and internalize the moral lessons presented (Guroian, 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2023). For example, when a character experiences sadness, fear, or disappointment as a result of their actions, readers may feel sympathy and reflect on the importance of making better choices. Similarly, moments of happiness and success can reinforce the positive impact of moral behavior.

Preservation of Moral Messages in Children's Literature

The findings of this study indicate that the preservation of moral messages in children's literature depends on several key narrative elements, including simple and clear language, relatable characters, structured plot development, and the repetition of moral themes (Gasser et al., 2022; Russell, 2022). These elements help ensure that the moral lessons embedded within the stories remain accessible, engaging, and memorable for young readers.

One important factor in preserving moral messages is the use of simple and clear language. Children's literature typically employs vocabulary and sentence structures that are appropriate for the cognitive and linguistic abilities of young readers. Clear language allows children to understand the events of the story and the motivations of the characters without confusion. When moral lessons are expressed in straightforward terms, children are more likely to recognize and internalize the intended values. This simplicity does not diminish the depth of the moral message; rather, it ensures that the message is communicated effectively.

Another significant element is the use of relatable characters. Characters who experience common emotions, challenges, and relationships allow children to see reflections of their own experiences within the story (Guroian, 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2023). When readers identify with characters who face moral dilemmas, they become more engaged with the narrative and more receptive to its lessons. Relatable protagonists help children imagine how they might respond in similar situations, making the moral messages more personally meaningful.

The preservation of moral messages is also supported by structured plot development. Many children's stories follow a clear narrative structure that includes the introduction of a problem, the development of conflict, and the resolution of the issue (Gultom & Setyami, 2022; Wijaya et al., 2024). Within this structure, characters often learn important lessons through their experiences. The progression of events helps highlight the connection between actions and consequences, reinforcing the moral message in a logical and memorable way.

In addition, repetition of moral themes plays an important role in strengthening the persuasive impact of children's literature (Oktavia et al., 2024; Pulimeno et al., 2020). Moral ideas may appear multiple times throughout a story, either through repeated actions by characters or through recurring narrative patterns. This repetition helps reinforce the importance of the value being conveyed and allows children to recognize the moral lesson more easily. Together, these elements contribute to the long-term effectiveness of moral storytelling (Gultom & Setyami, 2022; Wijaya et al., 2024). By combining accessible language, engaging characters, well-structured narratives, and repeated themes, children's literature ensures that moral messages remain clear and influential. These strategies help maintain the educational function of stories while still preserving their imaginative and entertaining qualities.

Implications of Moral Messages in Children's Literature

The findings of this study highlight the important role that children's literature can play in supporting moral education. Stories that contain persuasive moral messages provide valuable opportunities for teachers to introduce ethical values in engaging and meaningful ways (Oktavia et al., 2024; Pulimeno et al., 2020). Instead of relying solely on direct instruction, educators can use narratives to encourage students to reflect on moral situations and discuss the consequences of characters' actions. This approach allows children to explore ethical ideas through imagination and empathy, making the learning process more interactive and memorable.

Teachers can also incorporate children's literature into classroom discussions, reading activities, and character education programs. By analyzing characters' decisions and the outcomes presented in stories, students can develop a deeper understanding of values such as honesty, kindness, responsibility, cooperation, and perseverance (Gultom & Setyami, 2022; Wijaya et al., 2024). In addition, storytelling can encourage critical thinking by allowing students to consider alternative choices that characters could have made and reflect on how these choices might have changed the outcome of the story. Furthermore, children's literature can help create a supportive learning environment where moral values are reinforced through shared reading experiences. Through guided discussions and reflective activities, teachers

can help students connect the moral lessons of stories with their own daily experiences and social interactions.

The findings of this study also provide important implications for authors and creators of children's literature. Authors should consider maintaining persuasive narrative structures that effectively communicate moral values while still creating engaging and imaginative stories (Oktavia et al., 2024; Pulimeno et al., 2020). The use of relatable characters, clear narrative development, and meaningful consequences can help ensure that moral lessons remain understandable and impactful for young readers. Authors may also benefit from carefully balancing entertainment and moral instruction. While creativity, humor, and visual appeal are essential elements of children's storytelling, these features should not overshadow the ethical messages embedded within the narrative. By integrating persuasive storytelling techniques such as character modeling, emotional engagement, and cause-and-effect narratives, authors can create stories that both entertain and guide young readers toward positive moral understanding.

Children's literature also plays an important role in preserving cultural values and traditions. Stories often reflect the beliefs, customs, and social norms of the communities in which they are created. Through narratives that emphasize cooperation, respect, kindness, and responsibility, children's literature can help transmit cultural values from one generation to the next. Culturally meaningful stories provide children with a sense of identity and belonging. When children encounter narratives that reflect their cultural backgrounds, they are more likely to connect with the characters and understand the moral lessons presented. At the same time, stories from different cultural contexts can promote tolerance and cross-cultural understanding by exposing young readers to diverse perspectives and experiences. Therefore, preserving persuasive moral messages in children's literature is not only important for moral education but also for maintaining cultural continuity and social harmony within communities (Oktavia et al., 2024; Pulimeno et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This study shows that persuasive moral messages in children's literature are preserved through narrative structures, character actions, emotional engagement, and clear cause-and-effect relationships. The analysis reveals that moral values such as honesty, kindness, cooperation, responsibility, and perseverance are consistently communicated through the experiences of characters and the progression of the story. These values help children understand moral concepts in ways that are concrete, engaging, and easy to internalize.

The findings also indicate that the effectiveness of moral messages depends on how naturally they are integrated into the narrative. Stories that balance entertainment with

meaningful moral content are more likely to capture children's attention and encourage empathy. In this sense, children's literature functions not only as a source of enjoyment but also as an important educational medium that supports moral learning, character formation, and the transmission of cultural values.

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