

Symbolic Pedagogy and Moral Imagination in Traditional Children's Songs and Robert Frost's Poetry: A Comparative Cultural-Discursive Study

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Received: 07 March 2026; **Accepted:** 05 April 2026; **Published:** 01 May 2026

Abstract: This article examines how traditional children's songs and lyric-narrative poetry function as cultural instruments for moral instruction, emotional formation, and social continuity. Drawing on scholarship on Indonesian dolanan anak songs, Javanese and Balinese local wisdom, character education, pragmatics, folklore, discourse, symbolism, and Robert Frost's "The Death of the Hired Man," the study develops a comparative framework for understanding how verbal art transmits values across generations. The article is grounded in a qualitative, text-based, interpretive methodology that integrates hermeneutic reading, discourse analysis, symbolic analysis, and comparative literary-cultural interpretation. The central argument is that Indonesian children's songs and Frost's rural poetry, though emerging from very different linguistic, historical, and pedagogical environments, perform related ethical work. Both create condensed symbolic worlds through which communities teach belonging, responsibility, tolerance, memory, labor, care, and human limitation. Traditional children's songs operate through repetition, play, musicality, and culturally embedded imagery, making them especially effective for early moral learning and communal identity formation. Frost's poetry, particularly "The Death of the Hired Man," works through dramatic dialogue, ambiguity, and symbolic rural settings to provoke mature ethical reflection on home, work, obligation, forgiveness, and dignity. The study further argues that in an era of accelerating digitalization and rising screen exposure among children and adolescents, these forms of cultural expression acquire renewed importance as humane, dialogic, and memory-bearing alternatives to fragmented media consumption. The findings indicate that symbolic discourse in both traditions is pedagogically dense: it shapes perception not by abstract instruction alone but by emotionally charged, culturally meaningful scenes. The article contributes to comparative literary studies, ethnopedagogy, and moral education research by showing that traditional song and literary poetry should be treated not as separate domains of folklore and high literature, but as parallel systems of value transmission. Their continued revitalization is therefore not merely a matter of preservation, but of educational and civic necessity.

Keywords: Symbolic pedagogy, children's songs, Robert Frost, moral education, folklore, discourse, local wisdom.

Introduction: Literary expression and traditional song have long functioned as more than aesthetic artifacts. Across societies, they have served as repositories of memory, tools of instruction, forms of emotional regulation, and subtle mechanisms through which communities teach the meanings of good conduct, social responsibility, and human belonging. Oral tradition and literary poetry differ in medium,

audience, and institutional status, yet both often perform overlapping cultural work. They shape how individuals imagine selfhood, interpret relationships, and recognize the values that hold communities together. This article investigates that shared function by bringing into dialogue two bodies of material that are rarely studied together: Indonesian traditional children's songs, particularly dolanan anak, and Robert

Frost's lyric-narrative poetry, especially "The Death of the Hired Man."

The decision to place these traditions in conversation emerges from a broader concern with the cultural and educational consequences of modern transformation. Several contemporary studies on Indonesian children's songs emphasize that traditional repertoires are not merely playful verbal forms but carriers of educational values, social codes, and local philosophical wisdom (Astuti et al., 2024; Hartiningsih et al., 2015; Wadiyo et al., 2021). These songs teach through rhythm, repetition, and participation. They cultivate memory, emotional intimacy, moral sensitivity, and communal belonging during the earliest stages of life. Their transmission, however, is increasingly threatened by the decline of oral practices, the reduced presence of community-based play, and the expansion of digital entertainment environments that displace embodied cultural learning (Astuti et al., 2024; Muppalla et al., 2023; Schmidt-Persson et al., 2024). The problem is not only the loss of songs as cultural artifacts; it is the weakening of a pedagogical ecology in which language, melody, movement, and value once formed an integrated whole.

A related, though differently inflected, issue appears in the study of literary poetry. Robert Frost has often been read as a poet of rural life, symbolic density, philosophical tension, and moral complexity (Parini, 1993; Li, 2010; Fu, 2013). "The Death of the Hired Man," in particular, has attracted sustained attention because it stages a deeply human conflict around responsibility, hospitality, work, failure, forgiveness, and the meaning of home (Hopkins, 1954; Mehta, 2018; Aurangzeb & Amir, 2020). Frost's poetry is not pedagogical in the straightforward sense in which children's songs may be, yet it is profoundly instructive. It does not usually command or preach. Instead, it invites readers into morally charged scenes where competing principles must be weighed in human terms. Through dialogue, silence, symbol, and narrative restraint, Frost turns ordinary rural situations into meditations on ethical life (Frost, 1995a; Frost, 1995b; Rothman, 2013).

Although one tradition is often classified as folklore or children's culture and the other as canonical literary poetry, both reveal that verbal art can shape ethical consciousness by placing values inside memorable symbolic forms. Indonesian *dolanan anak* songs commonly embed lessons on cooperation, honesty, tolerance, patience, self-restraint, and cultural identity within games and melodic repetition (Hartiningsih et al., 2015; Sativa & Kasiyan, 2024; Gunada et al., 2025). Frost's poetry embeds reflections on dignity, obligation, mortality, and relational ethics within

dramatic conversations and rural images (Hopkins, 1954; Aurangzeb & Amir, 2020). In both cases, values are not conveyed as inert propositions but as lived meanings connected to setting, voice, rhythm, and symbol.

This article addresses a gap in current scholarship. Research on Indonesian children's songs has been rich in ethnopedagogical and character-education terms, while scholarship on Frost has concentrated on symbolism, philosophy, regionalism, and moral ambiguity. Yet little effort has been made to compare these traditions as parallel modes of value transmission. Such a comparison is worthwhile for several reasons. First, it broadens the field of comparative literature beyond narrow influence studies and allows comparison on the basis of function, discourse, and pedagogy. Second, it clarifies how moral formation occurs differently across life stages: in childhood through participatory song and in later reflective life through poetic dialogue and symbolic narrative. Third, it responds to current anxieties about digital distraction and weakened cultural continuity by recovering the educational power of orally grounded and textually nuanced forms of expression.

The theoretical foundations of this study draw from folklore, discourse, symbolism, pragmatics, and cultural pedagogy. Folklore studies remind us that traditional forms preserve a society's everyday philosophy, values, and collective imagination (Danandjaja, n.d.; Endrawsara, 2018). Ethnopedagogical scholarship demonstrates that local wisdom traditions remain vital for contemporary character education when interpreted as living systems rather than museum relics (Gunada et al., 2025; Sativa & Kasiyan, 2024). Pragmatics helps explain how utterances do social work beyond literal meaning, especially in dialogic forms where implied intention, social position, and context determine moral force (Leech, 1993; Purba, 2011). Discourse analysis further shows that language is embedded in social structure and cultural change, and that forms of speaking and singing help reproduce or transform shared social reality (Fairclough, 2023; Shi, 2010). Studies of symbolism in literature support the claim that compressed images, repeated objects, and spatial metaphors often carry moral and philosophical weight beyond their immediate referential role (Litcharts, 2025; Frost, 1995b).

The study also situates its concern within contemporary media conditions. Research on screen use among children and adolescents has linked excessive media exposure with developmental and mental health concerns, while also raising questions about displacement effects: what forms of interaction,

imagination, and socialization are weakened when screen consumption expands without cultural balance (Muppalla et al., 2023; Schmidt-Persson et al., 2024). The issue is not that all digitalization is inherently harmful. Astuti et al. (2024) importantly show that digitalization can support the preservation and dissemination of traditional songs when designed pedagogically. The challenge, therefore, is not simply to oppose tradition and technology, but to determine how cultural forms with proven pedagogical richness can be revitalized within new media ecologies without losing their communal and interpretive depth.

The central problem explored in this article is thus twofold. On the one hand, traditional song as a medium of early moral formation faces erosion in everyday life. On the other hand, literary interpretation in formal education often overlooks poetry's role in cultivating ethical imagination. By comparing dolanan anak songs and Frost's "The Death of the Hired Man," this article argues that symbolic discourse in both traditions creates morally instructive environments. These environments differ in form and audience, yet they converge in treating language as a social act that carries memory, binds community, and educates feeling. The study asks the following questions: How do traditional children's songs and Frost's poetry encode moral values through symbolic and discursive strategies? In what ways do these forms shape character, social understanding, and emotional reflection? What does their comparison reveal about the broader educational function of verbal art in a digitally mediated age?

The argument developed throughout this article is that traditional children's songs and Frost's rural poetry are linked by a shared pedagogical logic. Each condenses communal experience into memorable verbal patterns. Each uses symbol and voice to guide interpretation. Each turns ordinary life into an arena of ethical meaning. Yet they do so at different developmental levels and through different rhetorical intensities. The children's song operates through participation, repetition, and direct socialization; Frost's poem operates through ambiguity, dramatic conflict, and reflective tension. Together they offer a fuller model of moral education, one that begins in communal play and continues through lifelong interpretive engagement with language.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, text-based methodology grounded in comparative literary analysis, hermeneutics, discourse analysis, and ethnopedagogical reading. Because the purpose of the article is not to generate statistical findings or experimental measurement but to understand how

values are encoded and transmitted through verbal art, the method privileges depth of interpretation over quantification. The selected references provide the conceptual and textual foundation for a comparative examination of two clusters of material: Indonesian traditional children's songs, especially those discussed in scholarship on dolanan anak and local-wisdom pedagogy, and Robert Frost's poetic discourse, with emphasis on "The Death of the Hired Man."

The first methodological principle of the study is textual centrality. The article treats songs, poems, and related scholarly discussions as meaning-bearing cultural texts. In this sense, "text" is understood broadly, not only as a written artifact but as a socially embedded verbal form. This approach aligns with discourse-oriented perspectives that view language as inseparable from social life and cultural change (Fairclough, 2023; Shi, 2010). A children's song is not merely a sequence of words with melody; it is a patterned communicative event linked to play, memory, embodiment, intergenerational interaction, and moral training. Likewise, Frost's poem is not treated merely as a self-contained literary object but as a dramatized discourse that stages social values, emotional conflict, and philosophical judgment.

The second principle is hermeneutic interpretation. Hermeneutics is especially appropriate when a study seeks to uncover layered meaning in traditional and literary texts whose significance exceeds literal statement. Sativa and Kasiyan (2024), for example, demonstrate how Javanese dolanan songs may contain philosophical and tolerance-oriented meanings that become visible only through careful interpretive engagement. The present study extends that logic by assuming that both children's songs and Frost's poetry are structured by symbolic compression. Their educational force often depends on resonance, connotation, and context rather than explicit instruction alone. Accordingly, the study reads motifs, situations, images, and speech acts as carriers of culturally sedimented values.

The third principle is comparative functionality. This article does not assume direct historical relation, influence, or formal equivalence between Indonesian children's songs and American rural poetry. Instead, comparison is conducted on the basis of function. The materials are compared because they participate in analogous cultural processes: the transmission of values, the construction of shared symbolic worlds, and the shaping of moral imagination. Comparative literature has increasingly moved beyond genealogical models toward relational analysis based on thematic, structural, and functional affinities. This study follows that trajectory. It asks not whether dolanan anak songs

and Frost's poetry are alike in origin, but whether they can illuminate one another as distinct embodiments of symbolic pedagogy.

The fourth principle is discourse-pragmatic sensitivity. The study pays close attention to the fact that language does not only describe values but performs social actions. Pragmatics, particularly as developed in studies of meaning in context, is useful here because many ethical meanings in both songs and poetry are implied rather than overtly declared (Leech, 1993; Purba, 2011). In children's songs, repetition, address, and play conventions can socialize cooperation, hierarchy, or solidarity. In Frost's poem, the dialogue between Mary and Warren reveals layered acts of persuasion, resistance, reinterpretation, and emotional positioning. The meaning of "home," for instance, is not fixed lexically but emerges through interpersonal conflict and negotiated definition (Frost, 1995a; Aurangzeb & Amir, 2020).

The corpus for analysis consists of the conceptual themes, textual examples, and interpretive claims represented in the provided reference set. The study does not invent a new archive outside those materials. Instead, it builds a synthetic argument from them. The Indonesian side of the corpus is informed by scholarship on *dolanan anak* preservation and digitalization (Astuti et al., 2024), revitalization for early childhood character formation (Hartiningsih et al., 2015), children's song composition in preschool education (Wadiyo et al., 2021), philosophical and tolerance values in Javanese song traditions (Sativa & Kasiyan, 2024), local-wisdom-based character education in Balinese ethnopedagogy (Gunada et al., 2025), and foundational discussions of Indonesian folklore and Javanese life philosophy (Danandjaja, n.d.; Endrawsara, 2018). The Frost side of the corpus centers on "The Death of the Hired Man" as included in *North of Boston* (Frost, 1995a), supplemented by Frost's own reflections on symbol (Frost, 1995b) and critical scholarship addressing moral, philosophical, and symbolic dimensions of his work (Hopkins, 1954; Mehta, 2018; Li, 2010; Fu, 2013; Parini, 1993; Rothman, 2013; Stanis, 2018).

The analytical procedure unfolds in four stages. First, the study identifies recurring value domains in the Indonesian scholarship, including communal belonging, tolerance, character education, local wisdom, play, preservation, and pedagogical adaptation under digital conditions. Second, it identifies corresponding value domains in Frost scholarship, including home, labor, dignity, forgiveness, moral ambiguity, symbolism, and the relation between individual experience and communal expectation. Third, it examines the discursive mechanisms through which these value

domains are encoded, such as repetition, symbolic imagery, dialogic tension, and culturally loaded vocabulary. Fourth, it synthesizes the findings into a comparative account of symbolic pedagogy.

A key aspect of the method is contextual reading. It would be reductive to extract isolated moral "messages" from songs or poems without attending to the cultural matrices from which they emerge. In the case of Indonesian children's songs, cultural context includes oral tradition, local philosophy, communal play, and the normative orientation of ethnopedagogy (Danandjaja, n.d.; Endrawsara, 2018; Gunada et al., 2025). In the case of Frost, context includes New England rurality, American poetic tradition, philosophical tension between transcendence and material reality, and the poet's own interest in symbol as suggestive rather than doctrinaire (Fu, 2013; Parini, 1993; Frost, 1995b). Contextualization is therefore not ancillary but central to interpretation. It prevents universalizing moral claims detached from historical life while still allowing for cross-cultural comparison.

The methodology is also informed by a pedagogical orientation. The article is not only interested in meaning but in how meaning teaches. This perspective is justified by the educational focus of many of the sources, especially those on children's song revitalization and character formation (Astuti et al., 2024; Hartiningsih et al., 2015; Wadiyo et al., 2021; Gunada et al., 2025). It is further supported by the interpretive tradition surrounding Frost, where critics have long treated his poems as dramatizations of difficult human truths rather than merely decorative verbal performances (Hopkins, 1954; Mehta, 2018; Aurangzeb & Amir, 2020). Accordingly, the study asks not only what the texts mean, but what habits of feeling and judgment they cultivate.

Because the study operates through textual and conceptual synthesis, its validity depends on interpretive coherence, fidelity to the cited scholarship, and transparency in inferential movement. The argument is built by triangulating multiple sources rather than relying on a single interpretive authority. For example, the claim that traditional children's songs carry moral value is not derived from one article alone but from converging discussions of preservation, character formation, tolerance, local wisdom, and preschool cultural need (Astuti et al., 2024; Hartiningsih et al., 2015; Wadiyo et al., 2021; Sativa & Kasiyan, 2024; Gunada et al., 2025). Likewise, the claim that "The Death of the Hired Man" centers on dignity, forgiveness, and the meaning of home is grounded in the poem itself and echoed across critical readings (Frost, 1995a; Hopkins, 1954; Mehta, 2018; Aurangzeb & Amir, 2020).

No human participants were involved in this research, and therefore conventional procedures related to interviews, surveys, or experimental ethics were not applicable. Nevertheless, the study assumes a broader ethical responsibility in comparative work: the responsibility not to flatten cultural difference. This is particularly important when placing local oral tradition beside canonical Anglophone literature. The comparison aims to honor difference while exploring shared educational capacities. Indonesian traditional songs are not treated as primitive moral tools awaiting validation by literary theory, nor is Frost's poetry treated as the normative benchmark for moral depth. Rather, both are approached as culturally specific forms of symbolic knowledge.

The method also acknowledges contemporary conditions of media transformation. Scholarship on screen time and child development is not used here as biomedical proof that traditional song should replace all modern media, but as contextual evidence that questions of attention, emotional regulation, and developmental environment are urgent today (Muppalla et al., 2023; Schmidt-Persson et al., 2024). This allows the study to frame its literary-cultural analysis within a broader educational conversation: what kinds of symbolic environments support humane development in a distracted age? Astuti et al. (2024) are especially important in this regard because they suggest that digitalization can be harnessed for preservation rather than treated only as a threat. This article incorporates that nuance by examining not simply preservation versus loss, but the conditions under which symbolic pedagogy can remain alive.

Methodologically, then, the study can be described as a qualitative comparative hermeneutic analysis of moral discourse in traditional children's songs and literary poetry. It uses the provided references to construct a theoretically informed interpretation of how value is embedded in verbal art and how that value may remain relevant under contemporary cultural pressures. The intention is not to close interpretation but to open a coherent field of understanding in which folklore, pedagogy, and literary ethics can speak to one another.

RESULTS

The analysis yields several interrelated findings. First, Indonesian traditional children's songs emerge as dense pedagogical forms in which entertainment, socialization, and moral education are inseparable. Second, Robert Frost's "The Death of the Hired Man" emerges as a mature literary parallel to such pedagogical forms, not because it resembles a children's song in style, but because it also encodes

ethical understanding in symbolic and socially situated language. Third, both traditions demonstrate that values are most effectively transmitted not through abstract declaration alone but through emotionally charged scenes, relational language, and culturally resonant symbols. Fourth, the comparison highlights the contemporary relevance of both traditions in educational contexts marked by digital acceleration and weakened intergenerational continuity.

One of the clearest findings concerns the pedagogical density of Indonesian children's songs. The scholarship consistently indicates that *dolanan anak* songs should not be understood as trivial or merely recreational. They are embedded in communal play, but precisely for that reason they become effective vehicles for early moral learning. Hartiningsih et al. (2015) show that revitalizing traditional children's songs contributes to the formation of character in early childhood. This is not accidental. Children encounter these songs in embodied, social situations where melody, movement, repetition, and shared participation reinforce one another. Values are therefore not encountered as detached concepts but as lived patterns. Cooperation is learned by singing together; patience is learned by waiting turns in game structures; attentiveness is learned by listening and responding; belonging is learned by joining a shared cultural act.

Astuti et al. (2024) extend this understanding by demonstrating that the learning method surrounding *dolanan anak* songs can be developed to preserve traditional arts while inculcating educational values through digitalization. The significance of this finding is substantial. It indicates that traditional songs are not fixed relics. Their pedagogical value can be reactivated in contemporary contexts if digital tools are used to support rather than flatten cultural meaning. The educational values embedded in the songs remain legible because they are carried not only by content but by form: repetition, imagery, rhythm, and culturally intelligible symbolism. When properly mediated, digitalization can therefore serve continuity rather than rupture.

Wadiyo et al. (2021) reinforce the seriousness of this issue by noting an absence of children's songs in Indonesian preschool education and by framing song composition as a contribution to filling that void. The result is revealing. It suggests that the decline of traditional song is not merely a cultural lament but an educational deficit. Where song disappears, an entire mode of affective pedagogy weakens. Children may still receive instruction, but they lose a medium through which language, sound, play, and moral imagination once converged. In this sense, the analysis shows that children's songs are not supplementary ornaments in

education; they are structurally significant forms of early meaning-making.

The philosophical and ethical content of such songs is further illuminated by Sativa and Kasiyan (2024), whose hermeneutic analysis of the Javanese *dolanan* song “Cublak-Cublak Suweng” emphasizes philosophical meaning and tolerance. The result of reading this scholarship comparatively is that traditional songs transmit value not simply at the level of behavioral rule but at the level of worldview. They can encode assumptions about human relation, modesty, communal harmony, and the limits of selfishness. Such songs do not merely tell children what to do; they shape how children come to perceive social life. This is an important distinction. Behavioral instruction can be forgotten or resisted, but when a song enters memory and affect, it contributes to what might be called moral atmosphere.

Gunada et al. (2025) provide a related finding from a Balinese context through the concept of *Panca Siksaning Angaji*, which is discussed as a resource for strengthening character education within ethnopedagogy based on local wisdom. The significance of this material for the present study lies in its confirmation that local knowledge traditions contain coherent educational philosophies. Traditional verbal forms are not random leftovers of premodern culture. They often express disciplined understandings of how human beings ought to learn, relate, and conduct themselves. The analysis therefore finds a strong continuity across Javanese and Balinese scholarship: local wisdom traditions function as educational systems, and verbal forms such as songs are among their most effective carriers.

Folklore and philosophy texts deepen this finding. Danandjaja (n.d.) frames Indonesian folklore as a domain encompassing gossip, tales, and other forms of social narration, suggesting that everyday verbal practices are central to cultural knowledge. Endrawsara (2018), through the discussion of Javanese life philosophy, points toward a moral universe in which conduct, social harmony, and wisdom are embedded in culturally inherited modes of thought. These sources, read together with the song scholarship, yield a broader result: children’s songs are not isolated pedagogical tools but microcosms of a larger moral culture. They condense a society’s sense of proper relation, memory, and personhood into accessible and memorable form.

A second major finding concerns the moral-discursive structure of Robert Frost’s “The Death of the Hired Man.” The poem has often been interpreted as a dramatic exploration of home, human failure, and

obligation (Hopkins, 1954; Mehta, 2018; Aurangzeb & Amir, 2020). The analysis confirms these readings and further suggests that the poem functions pedagogically, though in a different register from children’s songs. Its educational force lies not in repetition and play but in dramatic ambiguity. The poem presents readers with a conflict between Warren’s emphasis on earned obligation and Mary’s emphasis on compassion. Silas, the hired man, returns to the farm not as a successful worker but as a vulnerable figure whose dignity is bound up with where he chooses to die. The poem does not reduce this situation to a simple moral slogan. Instead, it forces readers into interpretive participation.

One of the most important results of the analysis is that the meaning of “home” in Frost’s poem is not given as an objective definition but negotiated through discourse. Mary’s famous formulation, that home is “the place where, when you have to go there, / They have to take you in,” has drawn lasting attention because it makes belonging sound at once unconditional and tragic (Frost, 1995a). Critics such as Aurangzeb and Amir (2020) read the poem in terms of forgiveness and acceptance, while Hopkins (1954) and Mehta (2018) emphasize its humane and analytical dimensions. The present analysis finds that the poem’s moral power lies precisely in its refusal to detach home from vulnerability. Home is not a sentimental abstraction. It is the site where social obligation becomes personal and where dignity persists even in failure.

Frost’s theory of symbol helps clarify this result. In “The Constant Symbol,” Frost (1995b) suggests that symbol is not a mechanical code but a dynamic means by which thought and feeling are held in suggestive relation. This theoretical position is reflected in the poem’s rural details. Farm labor, evening light, the physical return of Silas, and the domestic space occupied by Mary and Warren are not mere scenic decorations. They are symbolic condensations of economic life, relational ethics, and mortality. The poem’s dramatic surface remains ordinary, yet its emotional field is charged with philosophical significance. Li (2010) and Fu (2013) support this broader view of Frost by showing how his poetry often joins concrete imagery to deeper conceptual tensions, including dualism, transcendence, and human limitation.

The analysis also reveals that Frost’s poem is pedagogically dialogic. Unlike direct moral instruction, it educates through competing voices. Mary and Warren do not occupy simple positions of right and wrong. Warren’s concern with labor, reciprocity, and practical reality is not dismissed as cruelty. Mary’s compassion is not presented as naïve idealism. Instead,

readers are made to experience the difficulty of judgment itself. This aligns with broader critical assessments of Frost as a poet whose apparent simplicity often conceals moral and philosophical complexity (Parini, 1993; Rothman, 2013). The poem therefore becomes a training ground in ethical reflection. It teaches not by resolving ambiguity but by requiring responsible interpretation.

A third result of the analysis lies in the comparison itself. When Indonesian children's songs and Frost's poem are examined together, both appear as symbolic pedagogies operating at different developmental and rhetorical levels. Traditional songs often socialize shared values before children can fully articulate them conceptually. Frost's poem addresses readers who are capable of reflective moral struggle. Yet in both cases, values are mediated through memorable verbal structures rather than through abstract principles alone. In children's songs, rhythm and communal repetition make value emotionally inhabitable. In Frost, dialogue and symbol make value interpretively contestable yet deeply felt.

This comparison highlights a common structure: both traditions rely on the transformation of ordinary life into meaningful scene. Children's songs take daily play, objects, and social roles and turn them into carriers of value (Hartiningsih et al., 2015; Sativa & Kasiyan, 2024). Frost takes farm labor, domestic conversation, and the return of an aging worker and turns them into an inquiry into dignity and belonging (Frost, 1995a; Hopkins, 1954). The result is that neither tradition teaches morality as detached doctrine. Both ground ethical understanding in concrete human worlds. This grounding may be one reason such forms remain memorable across time.

The role of symbolism appears as another point of convergence. Symbolism, as a literary principle, involves the use of images, actions, or objects that carry meaning beyond their immediate literal presence (Litcharts, 2025). In Indonesian children's songs, symbolic meaning often emerges through culturally familiar images whose significance is gradually internalized within communal life. In Frost, symbols remain open, resisting single interpretation while directing attention toward deeper questions (Frost, 1995b). The result is that symbolic discourse serves pedagogy by preserving complexity without sacrificing memorability. A symbol is educative precisely because it cannot be exhausted at first encounter. It grows with the learner or reader.

The discourse dimension of the findings is equally significant. Both traditions use language as social action. Purba (2011) and Leech (1993) help illuminate

how utterances do more than transmit information. They invite, position, persuade, caution, and bind. In children's songs, language organizes participation and social rhythm. In Frost's poem, dialogue stages moral negotiation. Fairclough's (2023) view of discourse as linked to social change helps explain why these forms matter beyond aesthetics. They help sustain social relations by teaching how speech itself participates in ethical life.

A fourth major result concerns contemporary relevance. The article's comparative findings become especially important when read alongside current research on screen use and child development. Muppalla et al. (2023) review the effects of excessive screen time on child development, while Schmidt-Persson et al. (2024) examine screen media use and mental health in children and adolescents. These studies do not directly concern folklore or poetry, yet they create an important interpretive frame. They suggest that environments saturated by rapid, fragmented media may weaken precisely those capacities that traditional songs and reflective poetry cultivate: sustained attention, embodied participation, emotional nuance, and relational imagination. The result is not a simplistic condemnation of screens but a stronger recognition of what may be lost when symbolic cultural forms are displaced without pedagogical replacement.

At the same time, the analysis confirms that digitalization need not be antagonistic to cultural preservation. Astuti et al. (2024) demonstrate that digital modes can support the learning and transmission of *dolanan anak* songs. This indicates that the real issue is not technology itself but the design of cultural mediation. If traditional songs are digitized without context, embodiment, and interpretive depth, they risk becoming flattened content. But if they are taught through participatory, value-conscious, and culturally grounded methods, digital tools may extend rather than destroy their pedagogical life. The same is true for literary poetry. Frost's works can circulate digitally, but their educational value depends on interpretive engagement rather than mere availability.

Another result concerns the relation between local wisdom and universal ethical themes. The comparison shows that culturally specific forms can carry values that resonate beyond their immediate setting without losing their local identity. Indonesian children's songs are deeply rooted in local languages, philosophical assumptions, and play practices. Frost's poem is rooted in rural New England and American literary history. Yet both engage themes recognizable across cultures: belonging, tolerance, care, dignity, and the need to interpret others humanely. The result is not a claim of

sameness but of translatability at the level of moral concern. Newmark's (1969) work on translation is relevant here in a broad sense: meaningful cross-cultural transmission requires sensitivity not only to words but to cultural intention and symbolic force. Comparative reading, like translation, must preserve difference while allowing relational understanding.

Finally, the results indicate that verbal art remains indispensable for moral education because it forms imagination rather than merely regulating conduct. Educational systems often focus on measurable outcomes, but the materials analyzed here reveal another dimension of learning: the formation of sensibility. A child who internalizes values through song learns not only rules but rhythms of relation. A reader who enters Frost's poem learns not only a lesson about kindness but an awareness of how difficult kindness may be under real conditions of labor, resentment, and pride. This kind of learning is subtle, slow, and culturally embedded. Yet the analysis suggests it is precisely this form of learning that sustains humane social life.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study have several important implications for comparative literature, cultural pedagogy, and moral education. Most broadly, they suggest that traditional song and literary poetry should be understood as parallel, though not identical, technologies of ethical formation. Modern educational discourse often separates the aesthetic from the moral, play from seriousness, folklore from literature, and childhood culture from adult reflection. The present analysis challenges those divisions. Indonesian traditional children's songs and Frost's "The Death of the Hired Man" reveal that aesthetic form is often one of the most effective means by which communities preserve, test, and transmit values.

One significant implication concerns the nature of moral education itself. The materials analyzed here indicate that values are rarely internalized through abstract propositions alone. They are learned more deeply when attached to voice, rhythm, scene, repetition, and symbol. Traditional children's songs illustrate this with great clarity. Their pedagogical strength does not lie merely in the fact that they contain positive messages, but in the way those messages are woven into memorable communal acts. Singing together is itself a mode of social learning. It joins language to breath, sound, bodily rhythm, and shared attention. This creates an affective pathway into moral formation that formal instruction often lacks (Hartiningsih et al., 2015; Wadiyo et al., 2021). When scholars argue for the revitalization of *dolanan anak*, they are implicitly arguing for the preservation of

educational forms that teach through lived participation rather than through detached command.

This matters because contemporary education frequently faces a tension between efficiency and depth. Systems driven by standardization and measurable outputs can undervalue forms of learning that are slow, repeated, embodied, and difficult to quantify. Traditional songs fit precisely into that neglected category. Their effects are cumulative rather than immediate. They may seem simple, but their simplicity is misleading. Through repetition, songs stabilize language in memory; through communal performance, they model social reciprocity; through imagery, they invite interpretation; through cultural familiarity, they situate the child within inherited meaning. This layered process makes them unusually powerful instruments of character formation (Astuti et al., 2024; Sativa & Kasiyan, 2024).

Frost's poem points toward a related but more mature dimension of moral education. Adults, and older students in particular, often do not need direct moral scripting so much as environments in which ethical complexity can be experienced without being prematurely resolved. "The Death of the Hired Man" provides such an environment. The poem stages conflict without offering doctrinal closure. Warren is not simply wrong to care about labor, reciprocity, and past unreliability. Mary is not simply right in a way that cancels Warren's concerns. Instead, Frost dramatizes the painful truth that moral life often unfolds amid competing claims, wounded pride, economic reality, and emotional fatigue. This is precisely why the poem educates. It does not simplify judgment; it dignifies the work of judgment.

The discussion of home is especially revealing in this regard. Mary's formulation of home has often been quoted as if it were self-evident wisdom, but within the poem it is neither easy nor abstract. It arises within a situation where a man has failed economically and socially, yet still seeks a place to die with dignity (Frost, 1995a). The definition of home therefore becomes inseparable from questions of obligation, memory, forgiveness, and human worth. Such a scene can have profound educational significance because it teaches that ethical concepts are not static terms in a moral glossary. They are living meanings negotiated in relation to particular human beings. This helps explain the continued critical interest in the poem (Hopkins, 1954; Aurangzeb & Amir, 2020; Mehta, 2018).

The comparison also enriches our understanding of symbolism as a pedagogical device. Too often symbolism is taught in literary studies as a technical feature to be identified and labeled. The present

analysis suggests a deeper view. Symbol is not merely a decorative layer added to content; it is a mode of thinking and feeling that allows values to remain dynamic. A symbol condenses meaning without exhausting it. Because it is not reducible to one explicit proposition, it invites repeated engagement. This is pedagogically advantageous. The child encountering symbolic imagery in song and the adult reader confronting symbolic tension in poetry both enter a process of unfolding meaning. Frost's own account of symbol supports this openness (Frost, 1995b). Symbolic discourse teaches by staying alive across contexts rather than by collapsing into summary.

Another important implication concerns local wisdom and universalism. In many educational and literary discussions, there remains a tendency either to universalize too quickly or to isolate cultural forms so completely that no meaningful comparison seems possible. This study points toward a middle path. Indonesian children's songs are rooted in specific traditions of play, language, and local philosophy (Danandjaja, n.d.; Endrawsara, 2018; Sativa & Kasiyan, 2024). Frost's poem is rooted in a particular American rural world (Parini, 1993; Stanis, 2018). Yet both become legible to comparative analysis because they engage recurring human concerns through culturally specific forms. The value of comparison lies not in proving sameness but in showing how different traditions generate moral intelligibility through distinct symbolic means.

This has methodological implications for comparative literature. The field has often privileged canonical written texts, especially from globally dominant literary traditions. By bringing oral-derived children's songs into a comparative framework with canonical poetry, the present study argues for a more democratic understanding of what counts as intellectually and pedagogically significant verbal art. Folklore and children's culture should not be treated as preparatory or inferior forms beneath "serious" literature. They are, in many societies, primary sites of moral world-making. Conversely, canonical poetry should not be isolated from educational discourse as though its only value were aesthetic refinement. It can serve as a profound resource for ethical reflection. The comparison therefore destabilizes familiar hierarchies between "simple" cultural forms and "complex" literary forms. Both are complex, though in different ways.

The educational context of digitalization sharpens these points. Contemporary children and adolescents increasingly inhabit media environments characterized by speed, distraction, personalization algorithms, and fragmented attention. Research on excessive screen time and mental health does not by itself prescribe a

cultural curriculum, but it does suggest that attention, social interaction, and emotional well-being are under strain in many contexts (Muppalla et al., 2023; Schmidt-Persson et al., 2024). Within such conditions, traditional songs and reflective poetry acquire new relevance. They require rhythm rather than constant novelty, memory rather than endless scroll, and interpretation rather than impulsive reaction. They cultivate patience, listening, and symbolic depth. These are not nostalgic virtues alone; they are educational necessities in a culture where many experiences are designed for immediate stimulation rather than sustained reflection.

Still, it would be simplistic to cast tradition as pure remedy and digital media as pure threat. Astuti et al. (2024) complicate such binaries by showing that digitalization can aid the preservation and teaching of traditional songs. This is a crucial point. The goal should not be to freeze tradition in pre-digital form or to imagine that cultural vitality depends on rejecting technology. Rather, the challenge is to design cultural mediation that preserves relationality, embodiment, and interpretive richness. A digitized song archive, for example, may preserve sound, lyrics, and access, but it will not automatically preserve pedagogical function. That function depends on whether the songs are still sung with others, discussed in relation to values, connected to cultural context, and allowed to shape feeling. Similarly, reading Frost online does not guarantee ethical engagement. Interpretation remains an educative practice, not an automatic consequence of access.

The findings also invite reflection on discourse and social change. Fairclough (2023) emphasizes that discourse both reflects and transforms social relations. This insight helps explain why the erosion or revitalization of song traditions matters socially, not merely aesthetically. When children no longer inherit shared symbolic forms, modes of communal imagination may weaken. When poetry is reduced to examination content rather than treated as a site of ethical thinking, public language may become thinner. Symbolic discourse contributes to what might be called the moral infrastructure of a community. It shapes how people imagine responsibility, belonging, tolerance, and dignity before these values ever appear in policy or formal ethics.

Urbanization and cultural transformation intensify this issue. Although some references in the set, such as He (2010) and Lewis (2023), address urban image and urban culture rather than directly discussing children's songs or Frost, they broaden the context of the present discussion. Modern cultural environments increasingly involve rapid representational change, mediated

identity, and shifting forms of belonging. Traditional song and rural poetry may seem remote from such conditions, yet precisely for that reason they can reveal what urbanized and digitized life often obscures: the need for durable symbols through which people interpret shared life. The movement from village to city, from oral circle to screen, or from communal play to individual entertainment does not erase the human need for moral imagination. It only changes the conditions under which that imagination must be sustained.

The article's findings further suggest that forgiveness and acceptance are central pedagogical themes across both traditions. Aurangzeb and Amir (2020) foreground forgiveness in their analysis of Frost's poem, and the theme resonates with the values of tolerance and harmonious relation identified in studies of Indonesian local wisdom and children's songs (Sativa & Kasiyan, 2024; Gunada et al., 2025). Yet the forms of forgiveness differ. In traditional song culture, tolerance may be socialized through repeated communal participation and symbolic play. In Frost, forgiveness appears as a difficult personal decision entangled with memory and practical resentment. This distinction is instructive. It suggests that moral education should not be imagined as a single-phase process. Early cultural forms may establish dispositions toward harmony and relation; later literary forms may complicate those dispositions by exposing them to the realities of conflict, disappointment, and mortality.

This developmental dimension may be one of the most valuable outcomes of the comparison. Children's songs and adult poetry can be understood as points along a moral continuum. The first teaches belonging before conceptual abstraction. The second teaches judgment after innocence has been interrupted by complexity. The first forms the ear and the communal body. The second forms reflective conscience. Both are necessary, and both rely on symbolic language. Such a model may offer a richer educational philosophy than approaches that either over-intellectualize moral learning or reduce it to behavior management.

At the same time, the study has limitations that must be acknowledged. Because it is based on a provided reference set and not on fieldwork, classroom observation, or direct textual corpus expansion, its claims remain interpretive and synthetic rather than empirical in the narrow social-scientific sense. It cannot, for example, measure how exposure to traditional songs affects behavior in a controlled educational setting, nor can it quantify how reading Frost changes ethical reasoning. Its strength lies instead in conceptual clarification and culturally grounded interpretation. Future studies could build on this work

by combining textual analysis with educational ethnography, curriculum design research, or reception studies.

A second limitation concerns textual specificity. The Indonesian corpus in the reference set includes discussions of children's songs and local wisdom but not a large, directly quoted anthology of song texts. As a result, the article necessarily interprets the pedagogical function of these songs through the scholarship provided rather than through extensive line-by-line analysis of multiple songs. Similarly, while Frost's "The Death of the Hired Man" serves as a rich focal text, further comparison with additional poems by Frost or with other literary traditions could expand the argument. The present study should therefore be understood as a foundational comparative intervention rather than an exhaustive mapping of all possible textual correspondences.

A third limitation involves translation and cultural mediation. Comparative analysis across linguistic and cultural contexts always risks simplification. Traditional songs embedded in local languages may carry shades of meaning not fully accessible through secondary discussion alone. The same is true, in another way, of Frost's idiom, which depends partly on regional speech rhythms and cultural assumptions. Newmark's (1969) broader insights into translation remind us that meaning is not simply transferred but negotiated. Future research could deepen this comparative project by including bilingual analysis, original-language song texts, or collaborative scholarship involving experts in regional oral traditions.

Despite these limitations, the study opens several productive avenues for future inquiry. One promising direction would be curriculum research that integrates traditional children's songs and literary poetry within a developmental model of moral education. Early childhood education could draw on local song traditions for participatory value formation, while secondary and higher education could use literary texts like Frost's to deepen ethical interpretation. Another possibility would be digital humanities work focused on preserving, annotating, and pedagogically contextualizing song traditions so that digital access enhances rather than diminishes cultural meaning. Comparative research could also extend to other traditions of children's folklore and poetic narrative, exploring whether similar patterns of symbolic pedagogy appear across cultures.

Another future direction involves discourse and mental health. Given current concern about youth well-being in digitally saturated environments, researchers might explore whether participation in culturally rooted song

practices contributes to emotional regulation, social connectedness, or resilience. Likewise, literary pedagogy could be studied in relation to empathy, ethical reflection, and tolerance for ambiguity. Such work would not replace literary interpretation with therapeutic measurement, but it could illuminate how symbolic forms shape human flourishing under contemporary pressures.

Ultimately, the discussion returns to a simple but profound insight: communities teach what they value through the forms they repeat. When a society repeats songs that embody tolerance, belonging, and local wisdom, it educates character through memory and joy. When a culture preserves poetry that dramatizes home, failure, and forgiveness, it educates conscience through reflection and sorrow. To lose such forms is not only to lose heritage. It is to risk losing the symbolic languages through which humane life becomes imaginable.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that Indonesian traditional children's songs and Robert Frost's "The Death of the Hired Man" can be fruitfully understood as parallel forms of symbolic pedagogy. Although they differ in audience, cultural setting, rhetorical form, and historical location, both traditions encode values through emotionally resonant, socially situated language. Traditional children's songs preserve and transmit local wisdom through rhythm, repetition, communal play, and accessible symbolism. Frost's poetry, by contrast, stages ethical conflict through dialogue, ambiguity, and symbolic realism, inviting readers into reflective engagement with home, dignity, labor, and forgiveness. In both cases, verbal art functions not merely as entertainment or decoration, but as a medium through which human beings learn how to feel, judge, remember, and belong.

The analysis has shown that the educational value of these forms lies precisely in their refusal to separate meaning from experience. Songs teach by being sung; poems teach by being interpreted. Children's songs cultivate moral atmosphere before abstract reasoning fully develops. Frost's poem cultivates mature ethical awareness by dramatizing the difficulty of judgment. Both forms rely on symbolic density, discursive relation, and cultural memory. Both transform ordinary scenes into enduring moral inquiry. Both remind us that values are most deeply learned when attached to voice, place, and human relation.

In a time marked by accelerating digitalization, weakened intergenerational transmission, and increasing concern over the developmental effects of fragmented media environments, these findings

acquire special urgency. The issue is not simply preservation for its own sake. It is the preservation and revitalization of cultural forms that sustain attention, empathy, communal memory, and reflective thought. Traditional songs and literary poetry remain indispensable because they form imagination, and imagination is one of the deepest foundations of moral life.

The broader contribution of this article lies in demonstrating that folklore, ethnopedagogy, and literary criticism need not remain separate domains. When placed in conversation, they reveal a wider theory of verbal art as ethical infrastructure. Communities do not endure by rules alone. They endure through symbols, songs, stories, and poems that teach people how to inhabit shared life. To study such forms comparatively is therefore not a marginal academic exercise. It is a way of understanding how culture educates, and why that education still matters.

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