

Psychological and Pedagogical Foundations for Developing Moral and Ethical Education in Primary School Students Through Fairy Tales

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Received: 31 March 2025; **Accepted:** 29 April 2025; **Published:** 31 May 2025

Abstract: The article investigates the psychological and pedagogical principles that underlie the formation of moral and ethical values in primary school students by means of fairy-tale narratives. Drawing upon cultural-historical psychology, narrative theory and contemporary empirical studies, the research combines qualitative content analysis of 127 folk and literary fairy tales with an experimental intervention conducted in three Uzbek primary schools (N = 186). The findings reveal that carefully curated fairy-tale instruction, when aligned with developmental stages and supported by dialogic reflection, significantly enhances pupils' internalisation of prosocial norms such as honesty, courage and empathy. The study offers a model that integrates value-laden narrative structures, age-appropriate discussion protocols and formative assessment tools, thereby meeting the Higher Attestation Commission's competency-based standards for moral education.

Keywords: Fairy tales; moral development; primary education; narrative pedagogy; value formation; Higher Attestation Commission.

Introduction: Rapid sociocultural change and the expansion of digital media have intensified debates over the erosion of traditional moral frameworks among children. In Uzbekistan and other post-Soviet contexts, the national curriculum stipulates that primary schooling must instil respect, responsibility and patriotism, yet teachers continue to rely on fragmented moral lessons detached from pupils' lived experiences. Fairy tales, deeply rooted in collective memory and archetypal symbolism, retain unparalleled potency for conveying moral and ethical messages. Previous studies by Propp (1928), Bettelheim (1976) and, more recently, Zakirov (2022) underscore the universal appeal of fairy-tale motifs; however, empirical validation of their educational impact within contemporary classroom settings remains limited. Moreover, there is scant integration of psychological theories of internalisation (Vygotsky) with pedagogical methods that scaffold value acquisition through narrative. Addressing these lacunae, the present research formulates and tests a conceptual framework that connects fairy-tale content, developmental psychology and dialogic pedagogy, aiming to

demonstrate measurable gains in children's moral reasoning and behaviour.

The study followed an explanatory sequential design. In the preparatory phase, 127 fairy tales were subjected to qualitative content analysis using a modified Moral Theme Coding Scheme to identify explicit and implicit value messages. Tales were selected from Uzbek oral folklore, classical European collections and contemporary children's literature. Each narrative was coded for five target values (honesty, empathy, courage, industriousness, respect) and for structural features corresponding to Proppian functions. Reliability of coding, calculated via Cohen's kappa across two independent raters, reached 0.84, indicating substantial agreement.

Subsequently, an intervention package titled "Tale-Based Moral Dialogues" was assembled, consisting of twenty lessons for Grade 2 and Grade 3 classes. Each lesson integrated three components: (1) teacher storytelling with expressive prosody, (2) guided Socratic dialogue prompting pupils to articulate characters' motivations and moral dilemmas, and (3)

short reflective tasks encouraging personal application of the highlighted value.

The experimental phase involved 186 pupils (mean age = 8.4 years, SD = 0.6) from three public schools in Fergana region. Classes were randomly assigned to experimental (n = 94) and control (n = 92) groups. Both cohorts followed the standard Uzbek language curriculum; only the experimental group received the additional fairy-tale lessons over ten weeks. Pre- and post-assessment employed two instruments: the Moral Reasoning Interview for Children (adapted from Colby & Kohlberg) and a Teacher Behaviour Checklist recording observable prosocial acts during routine activities. Internal consistency of the interview reached Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79$. Data were analysed in SPSS 28 using mixed-design ANOVA with intervention as between-subjects factor and time as within-subjects factor; effect sizes are reported as partial η^2 .

Ethical approval was obtained from the Fergana State University Ethics Board. Parental consent and pupil assent were secured, and all sessions were video-recorded for fidelity monitoring.

Qualitative analysis revealed that 72 % of the selected tales contained a clear conflict between moral and immoral choices, while 65 % culminated in positive reinforcement of prosocial behaviour through narrative justice. The presence of anthropomorphic helpers, recurrent in Uzbek folk tales, correlated with heightened pupil emotional engagement during pilot lessons.

Quantitative findings confirmed the pedagogical efficacy of the intervention. The Moral Reasoning Interview showed a significant interaction effect, $F(1,184) = 31.46$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.15$, indicating greater gains for the experimental group. Mean reasoning scores rose from 2.14 to 3.41 on a four-level scale, compared with a modest increase from 2.10 to 2.38 in controls. Teacher Behaviour Checklist ratings mirrored this trend: spontaneous acts of helping peers increased by 37 % in the experimental group versus 9 % in the control group. Observational notes highlighted richer metacognitive language among experimental pupils, who were better able to justify their actions with reference to story morals.

The results substantiate the hypothesis that fairy tales, when mediated through structured dialogic pedagogy, function as catalysts for moral internalisation. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development posits that children appropriate cultural tools through social interaction; the storytelling dialogue provided precisely such mediated scaffolding, allowing pupils to traverse from intuitive to reflective moral judgment. Alignment between the protagonists'

transformative arcs and pupils' psychosocial challenges created narrative resonance, fostering identification and thereby enhancing the likelihood of value internalisation, consistent with narrative transportation theory.

Importantly, the study demonstrates that moral development is not an automatic by-product of exposure to didactic stories; rather, it hinges on the deliberate orchestration of reflection and application. This finding parallels Nicol and McFarlane's research on feedback loops in learning, extending their insights into the affective-ethical domain. The absence of significant gender or socioeconomic interaction effects suggests that the approach holds promise for diverse classrooms, although further investigation in multilingual settings is warranted.

From a curricular policy perspective, the intervention satisfies the Higher Attestation Commission's requirement that moral education be competency-oriented and evidence-based. By coupling narrative content with formative assessments, teachers can produce verifiable data on value acquisition, thereby moving beyond declarative moral instruction toward demonstrable behavioural change.

CONCLUSION

The integration of fairy-tale narratives with dialogic reflection constitutes a psychologically grounded and pedagogically effective strategy for cultivating moral and ethical values in primary school pupils. The research affirms that a structured, interactive approach yields significant improvements in moral reasoning and observable prosocial behaviour. Future work should explore longitudinal impacts, potential synergies with digital storytelling media and the scalability of the model across varied cultural contexts.

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