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USING FOLKTALES IN MORAL EDUCATION FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Vietnamese folktales constitute a rich cultural heritage that embodies profound moral values. This article analyzes the role of folktales in shaping and developing ethical qualities among primary school students. Based on theoretical analysis and practical surveys conducted in several northern mountainous provinces of Vietnam, the study affirms that folktales have a positive impact on fostering qualities such as diligence, kindness, honesty, responsibility, and patriotism. The paper proposes a process for selecting and utilizing appropriate folktales aligned with educational objectives and emphasizes the application of diverse methods such as storytelling, role-playing, and group discussions to enhance student engagement and promote the practical application of moral behaviors. These findings support primary school teachers in effectively integrating folktales into moral education, thereby contributing both to the preservation of national culture and the successful implementation of character and competency-based education.

KEYWORDS: folktales, primary students, education, character, morality

INTRODUCTION

Folktales are a form of oral literature passed down through generations, reflecting the spiritual life, emotions, and aspirations of working people. Vietnamese folktales encompass various genres such as fairy tales, fables, legends, and humorous stories, characterized by metaphor, personification, and profound moral messages [1]. These stories often use familiar situations and characters to convey norms and ethical behaviors in society. As a national intellectual treasure, folktales offer broad educational potential through vivid, memorable imagery that is easily accessible to children. [2]

In the context of comprehensive reform of general education in Vietnam, moral education at the primary level plays a crucial role in shaping foundational character traits and competencies of future citizens. The 2018 General Education Curriculum explicitly defines the task of developing qualities such as patriotism, kindness, diligence, honesty, and responsibility from the primary stage. These qualities are not only cultivated through the subject of Moral Education but are also integrated across all subjects and school activities [3].

Leveraging traditional cultural elements—particularly Vietnamese folktales—is considered a promising approach to enhancing the effectiveness of moral and character education for students. Folktales contain profound ethical lessons that help primary school students develop qualities such as filial piety, honesty, and a sense of responsibility. More than just oral literary products, folktales serve as vehicles for transmitting life values and ethical lessons that are close to children's cognitive levels [4], [5], [6]. With their engaging storytelling format, folktales easily evoke emotions, encourage empathy, and prompt students to reflect on their own behaviors through the characters in the stories [7], [8], [9]. Children can develop ethical awareness and moral character through the experiences presented in folktales [10], [11].

Folktales play a vital role in moral education and the holistic development of children's personalities. Their use in teaching promotes students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. Furthermore, storytelling fosters cognitive development and problem-solving abilities in children [4], [8]. According to Manukyan & Ryan (2019), exposure to moral dilemmas in stories helps students build the capacity to evaluate situations and make appropriate decisions in life [12].

In Vietnam, folktales have been used in primary education, primarily for teaching language or analyzing literary and cultural aspects. In the teaching of Moral Education and the cultivation of ethical qualities in primary students, moral behaviors are generally taught through simulated real-life situations. In organizing moral education lessons, aside from the content and language materials provided in current primary school textbooks, many Vietnamese primary teachers have yet to fully recognize and utilize the potential of Vietnamese folktales to shape and foster students' moral development.

2. RESEARCH QUESTION

Although several studies have explored the educational value of folktales, there remains a significant gap in constructing a scientific, contextually appropriate, and pedagogically sound process for utilizing folktales to promote moral education among Vietnamese primary school students. This paper aims to contribute both theoretical and practical foundations to address this gap. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (1) What roles and effectiveness do folktales have in developing moral values and character traits in primary school students?
- (2) What is the current state of awareness and application of folktales by primary school teachers in Vietnam for moral education?
- (3) What strategies should teachers adopt to effectively utilize folktales in promoting moral values among primary school students?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Folktales have long been recognized as an effective tool for developing language, imagination, and thinking capacity in primary school students. Both globally and in Vietnam, many scholars have

examined the educational role of folktales in children's learning. For primary school students—who are forming their initial concepts of the world and human behavior—folktales serve not only as entertainment but also as powerful educational instruments to nurture qualities such as kindness, honesty, responsibility, filial piety, and patriotism. Using folktales in the classroom helps students expand their vocabulary, improve expression skills, and increase engagement in learning activities [5], [6].

Plyaskova (2024) emphasizes that integrating folktales into the primary curriculum enhances not only literary skills but also cultural and social awareness among students[13]. Cleto (2019) explored the use of fairy tales in classrooms to foster empathy. By analyzing three readings and a corresponding exercise, Cleto demonstrated that folktales can deeply relate to learners' lives and expose them to unfamiliar identities and experiences. Through role-playing and engagement with moral dilemmas in stories, students develop moral reasoning and a sense of community[14]. Supardjo et al. (2019) conducted qualitative research describing how students acquire moral values from Javanese folktales. Data were collected from traditional stories and student interviews. The findings indicated that folktales convey personality traits such as sincerity, honesty, acceptance, harmony, and patience, which are essential for moral development. The authors also noted that metaphorical situations in folktales train students to distinguish right from wrong and establish appropriate behavioral norms in real life [15].

Numerous scholars have confirmed the role of folktales in cultivating moral values and character. Supardjo et al. (2019) emphasized that folktales offer clear moral messages, help students distinguish right from wrong, develop moral reasoning, and build positive behavior habits[15]. Teaching through folktales provides an engaging and culturally rich context that supports the development of communication, critical thinking, and aesthetic judgment[16]. Additionally, folktales foster empathy and community awareness by allowing students to connect emotionally with characters, thereby nurturing compassion, love, and sharing [14].

In Vietnam, many authors have also studied the role and impact of folktales in teaching. Tran Thi Nhung and Nguyen Thi Minh Thu (2023) pointed out that folktales not only promote understanding of national traditions but also serve as effective tools for teaching life values, life skills, and socio-emotional competencies. Teachers can employ storytelling, role-playing, and group discussions to help students understand and express emotions, thereby developing essential social skills [17]. Bui Thi Luyen (2022) analyzed Khmer folktales in primary Khmer language textbooks and proposed techniques such as creative storytelling, role-playing, and group discussions to enhance moral and cultural education among Khmer students [18].

Regarding their impact on moral development, Pham Thị Thanh Vân (2023) proposed a storytelling framework focusing on life values in early childhood education through folktales. Although her

research focused on preschoolers, the findings support the use of folktales in cultivating values such as kindness, patriotism, solidarity, and self-respect in children

In summary, existing literature confirms that folktales play an important role in the holistic development of primary school students, especially in fostering moral values and ethical lifestyles. With their humanistic content, vivid imagery, and profound moral messages, folktales not only help students develop language and imagination but also nurture values such as compassion, honesty, responsibility, and patriotism. Many studies highlight the effectiveness of using folktales through storytelling, role-play, and group discussion to create a positive and relatable learning environment. However, most existing research remains at a general level of recommendation, lacking a systematic pedagogical model for teachers to effectively integrate folktales into moral education. This highlights the need for further research to develop concrete teaching frameworks and practical guidelines tailored to current educational contexts.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Survey on teachers' perceptions of the significance and current use of folktales in moral education for primary school students

We conducted a survey with 51 primary school administrators and teachers from the provinces of Ha Giang, Thai Nguyen, and Vinh Phuc. The age distribution of the participating teachers is illustrated in Chart 1:

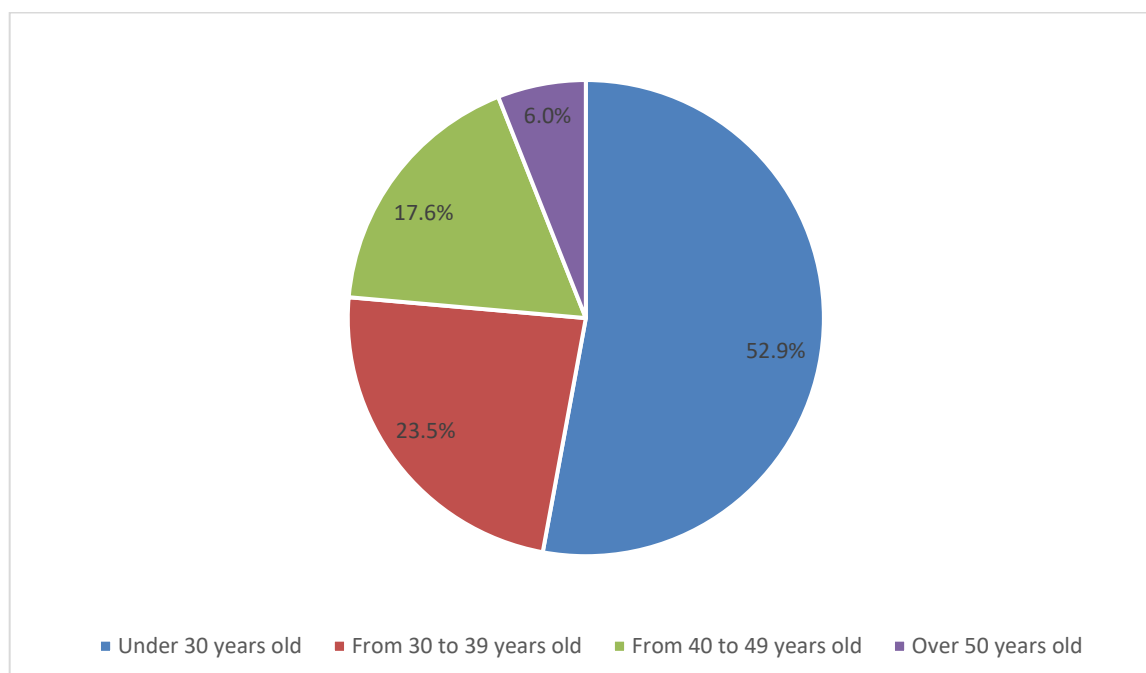


Chart 1. Age distribution of surveyed teachers

Regarding teachers' perceptions of the significance of using folktales in Moral Education, 17.6% of respondents believed that incorporating folktales into moral lessons is extremely important and yields highly effective learning outcomes. Meanwhile, 58.8% considered it important, and 23.6% rated it as very important. Notably, no teachers indicated that the use of folktales in Moral Education was unimportant or of little significance in terms of educational effectiveness.

However, despite acknowledging the important role of folktales in fostering moral values in students, the survey results show that only a small number of teachers reported using folktales "very frequently" or "frequently" in their teaching. These findings are illustrated in Chart 2:

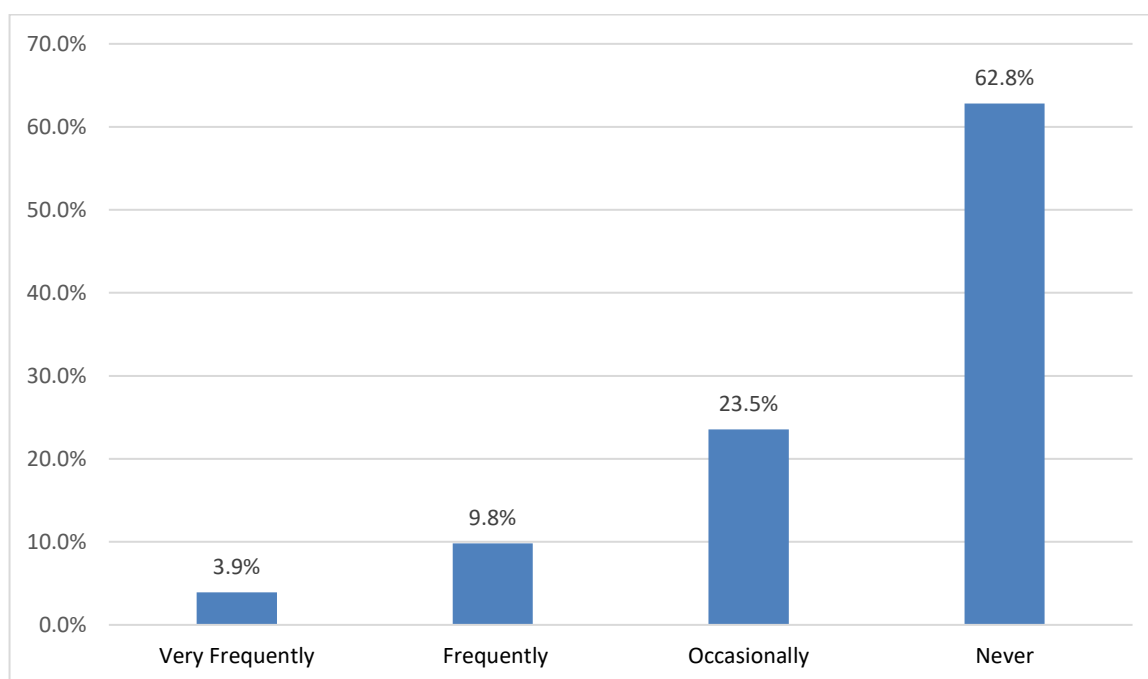


Chart 2. Frequency of using folktales in moral education for primary School students

The results indicate that although teachers emphasize the important and appropriate role of folktales in moral and character education, the actual frequency of their use remains low. To clarify this inconsistency, we conducted interviews with 10 primary school teachers to explore why folktales are rarely used in Moral Education lessons for character development. The reasons provided by the teachers include:

- Folktales are either absent or very limited in the primary Moral Education textbooks.
- Teachers are unsure how to effectively integrate folktales into moral lessons.
- There is insufficient time to search for appropriate folktales.
- There is not enough time during class to fully explore and utilize folktales.

These initial interview results reveal that many teachers are unfamiliar with the selection criteria and pedagogical process for using folktales in teaching Moral Education. This lack of guidance contributes to their hesitancy and reluctance to include folktales in their moral lessons.

4.2. A process for integrating folktales into moral education for primary school students

To effectively use folktales in moral education, teachers can design classroom activities following these basic steps:

Step 1: Identify moral education goals and select appropriate folktales

Based on the lesson objectives in the Moral Education curriculum, teachers should choose folktales with content, characters, and situations that are relatable to students and convey corresponding moral messages. Each genre of folktale has unique characteristics in terms of content, plot, and characters. Therefore, teachers must carefully select the type of folktale that best aligns with the intended moral lesson. The primary moral traits emphasized in Vietnam's primary education curriculum include patriotism, kindness, honesty, responsibility, and diligence. For example, fairy tales are especially suitable for cultivating kindness, filial piety, and care for loved ones. When teaching the Grade 1 lesson on "Caring for parents and family members", teachers can use the fairy tale "*Tich Chu*" to support moral instruction.

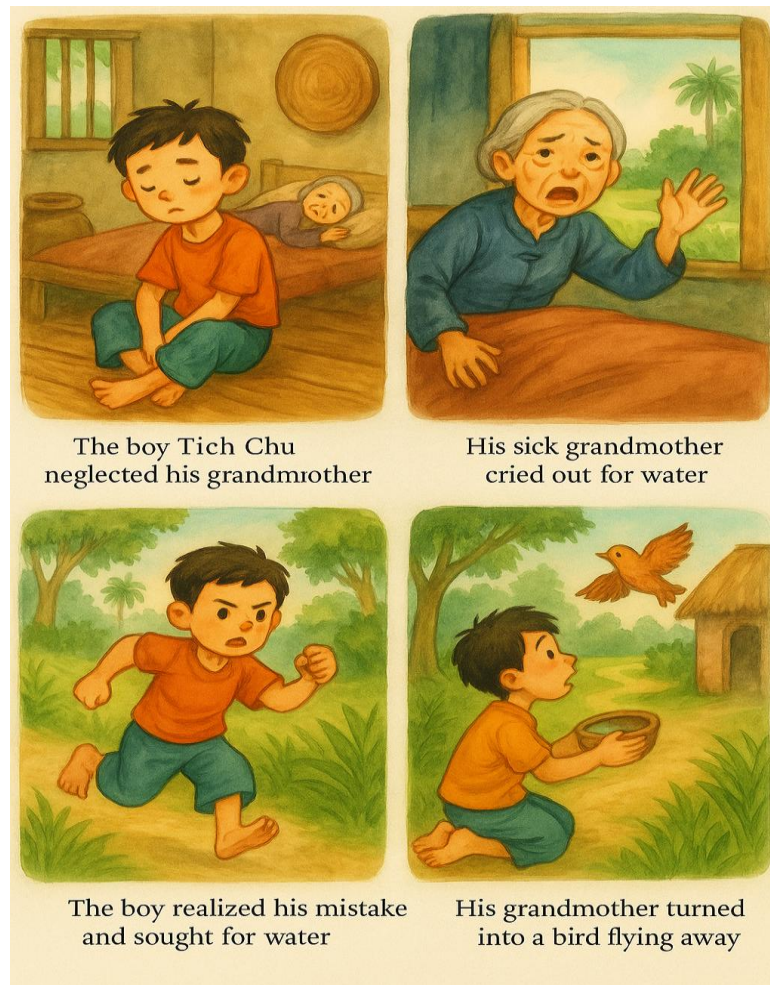
Step 2: Analyze the story to identify core moral dilemmas

Teachers should read and analyze the story, identifying character behaviors, emotions, and moral transformations in order to determine the key ethical situations linked to the lesson's objectives. Based on these core story elements, teachers can use AI tools to design illustrative video clips or visual materials.

For example, in the story "*Tich Chu*", the teacher may identify the following core moral situations:

- Tich Chu's indifference when his grandmother falls ill and asks for water.
- The tragic consequence of his neglect when she transforms into a bird.
- Tich Chu's remorse and realization of his mistake.
- His determined effort to overcome hardship and seek the magical water to save his grandmother.

These situations reflect a progression in the character's moral awareness and provide a foundation for designing educational activities. Based on these situations, illustrative images can be created using AI as teaching aids.



Step 3: Design the lesson plan with active learning activities to develop students' qualities and competencies

Based on the moral content and situations presented in the folktale, teachers should design a sequence of interactive activities such as storytelling, role-playing, group discussion, drawing, and positive writing—that are tailored to the developmental characteristics of primary school students.

Teachers should pose open-ended questions to encourage students to express their thoughts and emotions. From these discussions, students can draw moral lessons and relate them to their own lives, thereby making the lesson meaningful and promoting positive behavioral change.

Teachers should also reinforce and cultivate moral behavior through practical application. Assignments such as helping family members, writing apology notes, or sharing moral stories with classmates can help students transform moral awareness into concrete actions.

Example:

For a Grade 1 lesson on "Caring for Parents and Family Members," the following activities can be implemented using the folktale "*Tich Chu*":

- **Activity 1:** Storytelling with illustrated visuals
- **Activity 2:** Group discussion: Why did the grandmother fall ill? What would you do if you were Tich Chu?
- **Activity 3:** Role-play: Tich Chu apologizes to his grandmother and makes a promise to change
- **Activity 4:** Drawing or writing a message to a family member

5. CONCLUSION

Folktales are a valuable educational resource that convey profound moral values aligned with the psychological and cognitive characteristics of primary school students. Integrating folktales into Moral Education not only facilitates the acquisition of ethical knowledge but also fosters the development and practice of core moral qualities such as patriotism, kindness, honesty, responsibility, and diligence. Furthermore, the use of folktales in primary schools contributes to the preservation and promotion of traditional cultural values in a manner consistent with the goals of contemporary educational reform.

When systematically and appropriately implemented, folktales can serve as powerful educational tools that stimulate emotions, encourage positive behaviors, and support the formation of student character. To achieve this, teachers must have a solid understanding of moral education objectives, select suitable stories, and design flexible, creative learning activities. These should be aligned with the goals of Vietnam's General Education Program. In doing so, the use of folktales transcends their illustrative function and becomes a truly impactful method for shaping and nurturing the character and moral development of primary school students.

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