

Integrating Vietnamese Folktales in Moral Education: Theoretical Perspectives and Practical Challenges in Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT: Integrating Vietnamese folktales into primary moral education requires a theory-driven and curriculum-aligned approach rather than ad hoc storytelling. This conceptual paper synthesizes recent scholarship on moral and values education, experiential and dialogic pedagogy, and cultural pedagogy (2022–2025) to propose a practical framework for folktale integration under Vietnam’s 2018 General Education Curriculum. We first map core moral motifs in Vietnamese folktales (e.g., honesty, gratitude, responsibility, fairness) to competency standards and lesson objectives, and then introduce a four-criterion selection rubric addressing age appropriateness, ethical complexity, bias risks, and transfer potential. Next, we classify implementation challenges in five domains—curriculum fit, teacher capacity, assessment of moral competencies, learning resources, and educational technology—and respond with classroom-ready tools: 30–35-minute lesson kernels emphasizing dialogic analysis and experiential transfer, together with a performance-based assessment checklist usable in routine lessons. The framework is culturally grounded, actionable without experimental trials, and adaptable to local narratives and school constraints. We conclude with implications for teacher professional development and policy, and outline directions for future empirical validation across provinces and comparative ASEAN contexts.

KEYWORDS: Vietnamese folktales; moral education; values education; curriculum mapping; selection rubric; dialogic pedagogy; digital storytelling; primary education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Vietnamese General Education Curriculum (2018) identifies Moral Education as a foundational subject at the primary level, aiming to nurture both moral reasoning and behavioral competence. In this curriculum, moral education is structured around five core virtues- Patriotism, Kindness, Diligence, Honesty, and Responsibility- which are developed spirally across grades 1–5. These virtues are integrated into learning themes related to students’ relationships with themselves, family, school, community, and the nation [1]. This framework provides a clear foundation for aligning folktale-based pedagogy with national learning standards.

Moral education in primary schools serves as a cornerstone for shaping students’ ethical reasoning, empathy, and social responsibility. Within the competency-based reform framework of Vietnam’s 2018 General Education Curriculum, moral education is expected not only to transmit knowledge of ethical norms but also to cultivate attitudes and behaviors through experiential learning [1]. However, current teaching practice often remains abstract and lecture-driven, limiting children’s emotional engagement and ability to transfer moral concepts into everyday contexts. This gap has prompted growing interest in culturally grounded pedagogical resources that can make moral learning both meaningful and accessible.

Vietnamese folktales- rich repositories of collective wisdom and cultural values- embody generations of ethical reflection on virtues such as honesty, gratitude, responsibility, and fairness. Their vivid characters and morally instructive plots offer children concrete and emotionally resonant situations through which to understand right and wrong. International research reinforces this potential: folktales have been shown to enhance empathy [2], moral imagination [3], and social-emotional learning [4]. Yet despite this evidence, the integration of folktales into formal moral education in Vietnam remains fragmented. Teachers often lack theoretical frameworks, systematic selection rubrics, and pedagogical tools that align folktale content with curricular standards and classroom realities.

This paper addresses this gap by analyzing the theoretical foundations of folktale integration in moral education and identifying the practical challenges of implementation in Vietnamese primary schools. Drawing from contemporary research in values education,

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dialogic pedagogy, and cultural learning, the study proposes a conceptual framework that connects moral motifs in Vietnamese folktales with competency standards, while also outlining the contextual barriers teachers face in translating these ideas into classroom practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Folktale-Based Moral Education

The educational use of folktales draws upon the intersection of moral and values education, experiential learning, and cultural pedagogy. Narvaez (2002) emphasized that moral development must engage both cognition and emotion to enable children to generalize ethical principles beyond stories [5]. Later studies (Shih, 2022; Jie, 2022) further elaborated that dialogic and life-based pedagogies- where learners reflect upon real-life moral dilemmas through stories- encourage deeper moral understanding and empathy [6], [7]. From a cultural standpoint, García Liendo (2022) demonstrated that folklore-based instruction not only nurtures ethical reasoning but also strengthens students' sense of community identity and regional pride [8].

Recent global scholarship provides converging evidence that folktales foster holistic moral competencies. Cynthiya and Bhuvaneswari (2023) analyzed folktales across six continents and argued that their cultural diversity functions as an intercultural bridge promoting tolerance and global moral awareness [9]. Hudhana et al. (2025) showed that digital folktale comics can scaffold children's reflection on moral dilemmas, thereby enhancing empathy and analytical thinking [10]. Similarly, Kaliszewska-Henczel (2025) explored the role of *wonder* in fairy tales, suggesting that imagination is integral to children's moral reasoning and ethical sensitivity [3]. These insights align with the broader shift from prescriptive to participatory approaches in character education.

2.2. Folktales in Asian and Vietnamese Moral Education

In Asian contexts, folktales are widely recognized as culturally authentic tools for moral instruction. Jie (2022) proposed the *Life-Based Moral Education Curriculum* in China, integrating traditional stories into real-life applications [7], while Shih (2022) highlighted dialogic teaching as a means to embed moral reflection in Taiwanese classrooms [6]. In Indonesia, Suwandi et al. (2025) incorporated *Pancasila* character values into folktale-based lessons, resulting in measurable gains in students' moral reasoning and civic responsibility [11]. These studies demonstrate that folktale integration aligns naturally with competency-based education reforms across Southeast Asia.

In Vietnam, similar potential has been affirmed by multiple scholars. Hoang Huu Phuoc (2017) emphasized that Grimm's and Andersen's tales, when adapted into Vietnamese curricula, can simultaneously foster linguistic competence and moral reasoning [12]. Chan Thi Nhung and Nguyen Thi Minh Thu (2023) highlighted folktales as powerful vehicles for teaching life values, empathy, and socio-emotional competence [13]. Bui Thi Luyen, (2022), Dang Quoc Minh Duong and Le Van Thien (2022) further underscored the importance of aligning story content with national cultural identity and ethical standards [14], [15]. However, these works also acknowledge a lack of clear pedagogical models and selection criteria that teachers can easily apply.

2.3. Research Gap and Need for Theoretical Consolidation

While the moral and cultural potential of folktales is widely documented, most existing research remains descriptive or limited to isolated case studies. Few studies have systematically mapped the moral motifs of folktales to formal learning outcomes or examined the institutional challenges of their classroom application. Consequently, there is a pressing need for a unified theoretical and practical framework that bridges cultural authenticity with curricular alignment. The present paper responds to this gap by synthesizing recent global and Vietnamese findings to propose a theoretically grounded yet context-sensitive model for integrating folktales into moral education.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CURRICULUM MAPPING

3.1. Theoretical Foundations for Folktale Integration

The integration of folktales into moral education rests upon three interrelated theoretical pillars: moral and values education, experiential and dialogic learning, and cultural pedagogy.

First, moral and values education conceptualizes morality as a multidimensional construct involving cognition, emotion, and behavior [5]. Within the Vietnamese 2018 General Education Curriculum, moral education aims to cultivate these three dimensions through self- awareness, social- emotional competence, and civic responsibility. Folktales, with their moral conflicts and resolutions, engage children's moral cognition while stimulating emotional resonance with virtuous characters. This combination promotes both moral awareness and the internalization of ethical norms. In contrast to didactic instruction, folktales allow learners to infer moral principles organically through observation and reflection.

Second, experiential and dialogic learning emphasizes moral understanding through participation, empathy, and guided dialogue [6], [7]. When students analyze characters' actions and consequences, they engage in what Narvaez terms "moral rehearsal"- imagining themselves as moral agents. This mirrors the experiential orientation of Vietnam's 2018 General Education Curriculum experiential orientation, where learners are expected to apply moral knowledge in real- life contexts. The teacher's role shifts from

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moral authority to facilitator of dialogue, guiding learners to evaluate values, negotiate meanings, and connect moral lessons to real-life dilemmas. This process transforms passive reception into active moral reasoning.

Third, cultural pedagogy situates moral learning within the lived heritage of the community. Folktales encapsulate collective wisdom, social ideals, and identity markers that help learners internalize not only moral standards but also cultural belonging [8]. As Kaliszewska- Henczel (2025) notes, the “wonder” dimension in folklore nurtures moral imagination [3]- a crucial capacity for ethical sensitivity and perspective-taking. In Vietnam, this perspective resonates with the Competency- Value Orientation of Vietnam’s 2018 General Education Curriculum, which emphasizes the integration of moral education with national identity, citizenship, and cultural appreciation.

Together, these perspectives underpin an integrative approach to using folktales as vehicles for competency- based moral development- where storytelling, dialogue, and cultural context coalesce to foster ethical awareness, social empathy, and behavioral competence.

3.2. Curriculum Mapping: Aligning Folktale Motifs with Vietnam’s 2018 General Education Curriculum Standards

The Vietnamese primary Moral Education curriculum (2018) aims to develop students’ moral cognition, attitudes, and behaviors through experiential learning and value-based reflection. It emphasizes the formation of five key virtues (Patriotism, Kindness, Diligence, Honesty, and Responsibility) and three core competencies: self-awareness and self-regulation, communication and cooperation, and moral problem-solving. Folktales naturally illustrate these virtues through narrative, character actions, and moral dilemmas, making them ideal for integration into the existing curriculum. Table 1 below maps selected Vietnamese folktales to the major virtue domains and competency standards of the curriculum.

Table 1. Mapping of Vietnamese Folktales to Primary Moral Education Outcomes

Moral Qualities	Corresponding Folktale Themes	Related Core Competency	Suggested Pedagogical Activities
Honesty	Distinguishing truth from deceit (<i>The Starfruit Tree</i>)	Self-awareness and self-regulation	Character analysis, moral reasoning dialogues
Gratitude	Expressing thankfulness (<i>The Legend of Chung Cakes</i>)	Social-emotional competence	Story reflection, gratitude journals
Responsibility	Keeping promises, fulfilling duties (<i>The Hundred-Knot Bamboo</i>)	Civic responsibility	Scenario-based role play
Respect	Valuing others’ contributions (<i>Saint Giong</i>)	Social-emotional competence	Group discussion, peer recognition
Love and Solidarity	Helping and supporting others (<i>The Legend of Son Tinh and Thuy Tinh</i>)	Social-emotional competence and civic awareness	Cooperative storytelling, dramatization

This mapping illustrates how Vietnamese folktales concretely embody the five virtues prescribed by the national curriculum. Through guided storytelling, analysis, and creative moral problem-solving, students can connect literary meaning with moral standards already embedded in their learning outcomes.

3.3. Selection Rubric for Folktales in Moral Education

To ensure systematic integration, teachers require a selection rubric that links story content with pedagogical suitability. Building upon Cynthiya & Bhuvanewari (2023) and Hudhana et al. (2025), the following four-criterion framework supports alignment between folktale characteristics and curricular goals [9], [10]:

Table 2. Rubric for Selecting Folktales in Moral Education

Criterion	Description	Evaluation Guide
1. Age Appropriateness	The story’s complexity, length, and moral depth fit students’ cognitive and emotional development (Grades 4–5).	Assess language difficulty and emotional tone.
2. Ethical Complexity	The story includes moral dilemmas rather than simplistic good–evil binaries.	Rate from 1 (simple) to 4 (complex moral tension).
3. Cultural and Gender Sensitivity	The story avoids stereotypes or biased depictions and promotes inclusivity.	Check cultural accuracy and inclusiveness.
4. Transfer Potential	The moral lesson can be meaningfully applied to daily life and school contexts.	Evaluate real-life applicability.

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This rubric operationalizes folktale selection as a pedagogical decision-making process, ensuring coherence between moral content and learning outcomes. It also encourages teachers to reinterpret traditional tales through contemporary values such as gender equity, civic responsibility, and environmental consciousness—aligning folklore with current educational missions.

3.4. Lesson Sequence and Pedagogical Concept

To translate the theoretical scheme into action in the classroom, it is possible to organize the teaching of integrated folk tales to educate students in ethics according to the following 3-step lesson process:

(1) **Storytelling and Visualization:** The teacher narrates or plays a digital version of the folktale; students visualize scenes and identify emotional responses.

(2) **Dialogic Reflection:** In pairs or groups, students analyze characters' motives, discuss dilemmas, and justify moral judgments.

(3) **Transfer and Application:** Students design short skits, reflective journals, or digital comics illustrating how the moral lesson applies to their daily life.

This process demonstrates the dialogic and experiential learning method, allowing students to connect *moral understanding*, *emotional resonance*, and *behavioral enactment*. Importantly, they can be implemented within standard 35-minute moral education periods, requiring no experimental restructuring of the curriculum.

3.5. Summary of Framework Implications

The proposed framework situates folktale integration at the intersection of cultural relevance, dialogic pedagogy, and competency-based education. By aligning story motifs with curriculum standards and operationalizing selection criteria, it offers a scalable model for schools to implement folktale-based moral education systematically. Moreover, it underscores that storytelling is not merely a cultural activity but a structured, theory-informed pathway to ethical development in the Vietnamese educational context.

4. PRACTICAL CHALLENGES AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

4.1. Curriculum Alignment and Time Constraints

A major challenge in integrating folktales into moral education is aligning traditional narratives with existing curriculum frameworks and limited instructional time. The 2018 General Education Curriculum emphasizes competency-based outcomes and specific moral themes (e.g., honesty, gratitude, responsibility), yet many folktales are long, multi-layered, and linguistically complex. Teachers often struggle to fit storytelling, discussion, and reflection within a 35-minute period while also meeting prescribed lesson objectives.

Proposed Solution: Develop modular lesson kernels and abridged story scripts aligned with each moral theme. Teachers can select short, age-appropriate excerpts that emphasize a single moral dilemma, allowing time for discussion and reflection. Supplementary teacher manuals should include *learning maps* linking each folktale motif to curriculum competencies, ensuring instructional focus while maintaining narrative richness. Digital storytelling platforms (e.g., short animation clips or comic versions) can further condense content without losing emotional impact.

4.2. Teacher Capacity and Professional Development

Effective folktale-based pedagogy requires teachers to master storytelling, dialogic questioning, and moral facilitation skills—competencies rarely emphasized in traditional teacher training. Many primary teachers report limited confidence in oral storytelling or in handling open-ended moral discussions, leading to superficial transmission of story morals rather than deep reflection.

Proposed Solution: Introduce micro-credential professional development modules focused on three skill domains:

(1) *Expressive storytelling*—voice modulation, pacing, visualization;

(2) *Dialogic facilitation*—posing moral questions, managing diverse perspectives;

(3) *Moral reflection and assessment*—guiding students toward ethical reasoning rather than rote answers.

These can be offered through short workshops, peer mentoring, or blended online formats. Following Shih (2022), teachers should be trained as *moral facilitators*, not moral authorities, fostering participatory discussion grounded in students' lived experiences.

4.3. Assessment of Moral Competence

Traditional evaluation methods in moral education—such as written quizzes or short-answer questions—fail to capture the affective and behavioral dimensions of moral development. Teachers often find it difficult to assess students' empathy, reflection, or moral reasoning, especially when outcomes manifest through classroom behavior rather than explicit verbal responses.

Proposed Solution: Adopt performance-based and formative assessment tools, such as:

- Observation rubrics (for participation, empathy, fairness in discussion);
- Reflective journals (students connect story morals to real-life experiences);
- Creative artifacts (story retellings, role-play performances, digital comics).

These tools align with the 5-criterion model used in previous research (recognition, analysis, behavior, attitude, and application) but adapted for routine classroom use rather than formal experimentation. This approach mirrors Hudhana et al. (2025), who

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demonstrated that digital folktale storytelling enhanced empathy and moral reflection when paired with guided reflection checklists [10].

4.4. Resource Availability and Cultural Representation

Another constraint lies in the limited availability of pedagogically adapted folktale resources. Many printed or digital collections prioritize entertainment over moral instruction, lack contextual annotation, or contain culturally outdated stereotypes (e.g., gender bias, hierarchical obedience). Such issues hinder teachers' confidence in selecting and adapting stories for moral lessons.

Proposed Solution: Create a nationally curated repository of *pedagogically annotated folktales*, each tagged by moral theme, age suitability, and learning outcome. An interdisciplinary team of educators, linguists, and cultural historians could collaborate to modernize language and remove bias while preserving narrative authenticity.

This repository could be integrated into the Vietnamese Education Repository (VER) or provincial digital libraries, ensuring equitable access across regions.

Moreover, cross-cultural modules (as seen in Cynthiya & Bhuvanewari, 2023) could allow teachers to pair Vietnamese tales with counterparts from other cultures (e.g., "The Starfruit Tree" and "The Golden Goose") to promote intercultural moral understanding.

4.5. Integration of Educational Technology

The rapid digitization of classrooms offers new opportunities for folktale-based learning but also presents technological and pedagogical challenges. While digital storytelling can increase engagement, overreliance on screens may reduce interpersonal interaction and spontaneous moral dialogue. In addition, not all teachers have the digital literacy to curate or create multimedia folktales.

Proposed Solution: Implement low-tech to high-tech pathways for folktale integration:

- *Low-tech*: printed illustrated storycards, puppetry, and hand-drawn comics encouraging student participation;
- *Mid-tech*: PowerPoint story slides with teacher narration;
- *High-tech*: digital storytelling apps and AI-assisted audio folktales for flipped learning contexts.

Professional learning communities should be encouraged to share digital folktale materials through open-access repositories, similar to Indonesia's *Pancasila Digital Tales Initiative* [11]. Importantly, the focus should remain on pedagogical depth, ensuring that technology enhances- not replaces- the human, emotional dimension of storytelling.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study reaffirms both the theoretical and practical value of integrating folktales into moral education. The proposed framework synthesizes insights from moral psychology, dialogic learning, and cultural pedagogy, demonstrating how folktales connect cognition, emotion, and behavior in the moral development process. Within the competency-based education framework, this approach offers a localized pedagogical model that harmonizes global principles of moral education with Vietnam's cultural heritage.

For teachers, folktales can serve as flexible instructional tools, adaptable through storytelling, dialogue, and creative application within regular classroom periods. The proposed mapping framework and selection rubric provide concrete guidance for linking folktale themes to curriculum competencies and learning outcomes.

For policymakers, folktale integration represents a culturally responsive approach to educational reform, reinforcing national identity through moral and civic education. Developing teacher training programs in expressive storytelling and moral facilitation, along with digital repositories of annotated folktales, would enhance both quality and accessibility across schools, particularly in rural areas.

Future studies should empirically validate the framework across diverse contexts and subjects to assess its long-term effects on students' moral reasoning and behavior. Comparative and technology-based research could further explore how traditional narratives—supported by digital storytelling and emerging media—continue to foster empathy, reflection, and intercultural understanding in modern classrooms.

Thus, folktales function not only as pedagogical instruments for moral formation but also as culturally grounded vehicles for achieving the virtue-based and competency-oriented objectives of the Vietnamese Primary Moral Education Curriculum (2018). Integrating Vietnamese folktales into moral education offers a culturally anchored response to the challenges of teaching values in contemporary classrooms. The framework and curriculum mapping proposed in this study demonstrate how folktales bridge abstract moral concepts with children's lived experiences, making ethical learning more meaningful, affective, and behaviorally relevant.

By addressing key challenges such as curriculum alignment, teacher readiness, and resource availability, this study presents a feasible and scalable model for folktale-based moral education in Vietnamese primary schools. Beyond national relevance, it contributes to the global discourse on value-based education, illustrating how indigenous narratives can enrich competency-based learning systems.

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Ultimately, Vietnamese folktales- when purposefully and reflectively integrated- can transform moral education into a dialogic, experiential, and culturally affirming journey, helping young learners internalize virtues while cultivating pride in their national identity.

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