

From Pinocchio to Pancasila: A Comparative Study of International Literary Values and Indonesian Culture

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Abstract

This study examines the moral values embedded in the Western children's narrative Pinocchio and evaluates their compatibility with Indonesian cultural ethics. While Western stories have long been introduced into Indonesian classrooms and media, limited research has critically analyzed how their underlying cultural norms interact with local values. Using qualitative content analysis based on Ary et al.'s research framework, this study analyzed five thematic constructs found in Pinocchio—honesty, obedience to parents, responsibility, helping others, and identity formation—against Indonesian moral principles rooted in *budi pekerti*, communal harmony, filial duty, and social responsibility. Findings indicate that although Pinocchio shares universal virtues relevant to Indonesian culture, tensions arise in how these values are conveyed. Western narratives frame moral development as individualistic self-realization through rebellion and personal consequence, whereas Indonesian ethics view character formation as relational, socially mediated, and spiritually grounded. The study concludes that Pinocchio can reinforce Indonesian character education when culturally interpreted rather than directly adopted. It recommends culturally responsive pedagogy where educators guide students to reinterpret global literature through Indonesian values, enabling foreign narratives to enrich rather than contradict local moral identity. The study contributes to cross-cultural literary analysis, character education discourse, and curriculum development in multicultural contexts.

1. Introduction

Children's literature plays a central role in shaping moral reasoning, social imagination, and value transmission (Nikolajeva, 2014). In Indonesia, Western stories such as Pinocchio, Snow White, Cinderella, and Beauty and the Beast have long been translated, broadcasted, and adopted in educational settings (Setyarini & Sukyadi, 2020). Although these narratives communicate universal virtues such as courage, honesty, and perseverance, they also embed cultural norms linked to Western worldviews—particularly individual autonomy, romantic expression, and liberal social interaction (Hofstede, 2001; Stephens, 2018). Some of these elements stand in contrast with Indonesian socio-cultural values, which emphasize modesty, communal harmony, obedience, and respectful conduct toward authority figures (Koentjaraningrat, 2009; Geertz, 1992).

For instance, Western fairy tales often portray public displays of affection such as kissing between unmarried characters or romantic pursuits driven by personal desire, which are socially acceptable in Western contexts but considered inappropriate and morally sensitive in Indonesian culture (Susanto, 2019). Moreover, several Western narratives normalize behaviors such as children speaking back to adults, opposing authority, or prioritizing individual identity over familial responsibility—behaviors that conflict with Indonesian expectations of humility, filial piety, and communal orientation (Lickona, 1991; Kim & Markus, 1999). Meanwhile, Indonesian folktales traditionally convey morality through symbolic storytelling, indirect instruction, and spiritual-cultural frameworks rather than overt rebellion-resolution structures typical of Western plots (Suryadi, 2017).

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This cultural mismatch raises an important concern for educators. When Western stories are consumed without contextual adaptation, children may internalize attitudes that contradict indigenous norms, potentially weakening cultural identity and respect for social boundaries (Setyarini & Sukyadi, 2020). Therefore, critical examination is required to determine how Western narratives—such as Pinocchio—align with or deviate from Indonesian character values. By comparing moral elements embedded in global children’s literature to Indonesian ethical principles, this study seeks to help teachers and curriculum designers reinterpret imported storybooks so they enrich rather than disrupt local character development goals (Lickona, 1991; Nikolajeva, 2014). Western children’s literature such as Pinocchio, Snow White, Beauty and the Beast, and Cinderella has long been used in Indonesian learning contexts, either through translated books, animated films, or classroom texts (Setyarini & Sukyadi, 2020). Although these stories contain universal moral messages, they also depict social behaviors—such as public displays of affection, individual rebellion, and autonomy against authority—that are culturally acceptable in Western societies but conflict with Indonesian moral codes emphasizing modesty, communal obligation, and respect toward elders (Geertz, 1992; Koentjaraningrat, 2009; Susanto, 2019).

Indonesian schools have increasingly adopted storytelling as a tool for character education, yet little attention is given to how imported narratives may transmit contradictory values (Lickona, 1991; Nikolajeva, 2014). Without critical cultural mediation, children may internalize moral attitudes that dilute local cultural identity, normalize socially inappropriate behaviors, or weaken indigenous moral philosophy (Kim & Markus, 1999; Setyarini & Sukyadi, 2020). Therefore, the central problem of this research is the lack of systematic analysis on whether Western cultural values embedded in children’s literature align with Indonesian moral principles and how these discrepancies may affect character education.

Previous studies on children’s literature in Indonesia have largely focused on either translation accuracy and linguistic adaptation (e.g., Setyarini & Sukyadi, 2020), the role of stories in moral development in general (Lickona, 1991; Nikolajeva, 2014), or documentation of local wisdom within Indonesian folktales (Suryadi, 2017). However, very few studies explicitly compare the cultural values in Western children’s stories with Indonesian moral frameworks and analyze where they diverge. Existing literature rarely addresses specific mismatches — such as romantic gestures (kissing), rebellion against authority, assertive speech, or individualistic identity pursuits — and their potential implications for Indonesian students’ social behavior (Susanto, 2019). Moreover, while character education policies in Indonesia call for alignment with Pancasila values and cultural modesty, there is a lack of empirical or conceptual research evaluating whether Western narratives reinforce or contradict these goals (Kim & Markus, 1999; Hofstede, 2001). No comprehensive framework is provided to help educators reinterpret or localize imported stories within culturally appropriate boundaries.

Thus, this research fills the gap by conducting a comparative cultural analysis of Western children’s literature (e.g., Pinocchio) and Indonesian value systems, identifying specific areas of value compatibility and conflict, and proposing culturally responsive interpretation strategies for classroom use. This contribution is expected to help curriculum developers, teachers, and parents critically mediate Western storybooks rather than adopt them unquestioningly. Finally, the research gap leads the researchers to two research questions, including what moral and cultural values are embedded in Western children’s stories such as Pinocchio, and to what extent do these values align or conflict with Indonesian cultural and moral principles? And how can Western children’s literature be interpreted or adapted to support rather than undermine Indonesian character education and cultural identity?

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach, drawing upon the interpretive research tradition described by Ary, Jacobs, and Sorensen (2010). Qualitative content analysis allows researchers to examine textual materials to identify patterns, themes, and meanings embedded in narratives. Given that children’s literature transmits cultural norms and moral messages, this method is appropriate for critically analyzing Western stories—such as Pinocchio—and comparing their value content with Indonesian cultural principles. The qualitative design also provides space for researcher interpretation, enabling cultural contextualization of story elements and examination of implicit messages (Ary et al., 2010). The primary data source consists of selected Western children’s narratives, particularly Pinocchio and other widely circulated stories in Indonesian media and classroom settings. These texts serve as units of analysis, enabling systematic identification of value representations and culturally sensitive elements. Secondary data include scholarly literature on culture, character education, and Indonesian moral philosophy, supporting comparative interpretation.

Data were collected through document analysis, as outlined by Ary et al. (2010). The researcher systematically read and coded relevant passages from the chosen texts. Coding categories were developed inductively and deductively—deductively based on Indonesian cultural constructs such as modesty, respect for authority, communal harmony, and moral restraint, and inductively based on emergent themes identified within the stories. Notes, keywords, and interpretive memos were generated to assist in categorizing themes. To ensure trustworthiness, Ary et al. (2010) recommend credibility, dependability, and confirmability procedures. This study enhances credibility through prolonged engagement with textual sources and comparison with theoretical literature. Peer discussions with experts in literature or cultural studies help improve dependability. Documentation of coding decisions and analytic reflections supports confirmability by enabling audit trails.

3. Result and Discussion

Theme Identified: Honesty as a Moral Foundation in Pinocchio

One of the most dominant moral themes in Pinocchio is honesty, portrayed explicitly through the puppet's repeated lies and the narrative consequence of his nose growing longer. In Collodi's text, lying functions as a visible moral transgression, and the physical punishment represents societal judgment and internal guilt (Zipes, 2012). Western scholars interpret the Pinocchio narrative as an educational allegory in which honesty is foundational to becoming a "real human" (Bernardi, 2018). The story teaches that moral failure leads to social exclusion and shame, while truth-telling is tied to redemption and transformation. This aligns with Indonesian cultural ethics, which position honesty (*kejujuran*) as a core virtue in family upbringing, school-based character education, and religious teachings (Lickona, 1991; Alwasilah, 2014). The Indonesian Ministry of Education lists honesty as one of its 18 essential character values, highlighting the importance of truthfulness, integrity, and accountability (Kemendiknas, 2011). However, the Pinocchio story communicates honesty through individualistic consequences—Pinocchio suffers alone and must independently correct his faults (Bernardi, 2018). In contrast, Indonesian culture frames honesty relationally: dishonesty affects the family, community, and spiritual harmony (Suryadi, 2017).

The Indonesian moral framework often emphasizes collective accountability and restorative correction, where elders, peers, or community members intervene to guide children toward moral improvement (Susanto, 2019). Meanwhile, Pinocchio relies on punishment-based symbolism (the nose growth) and solitary moral realization. Despite this contrast, both systems affirm honesty as vital for identity formation—Pinocchio must become truthful to become "fully human," whereas in Indonesia, honesty determines moral worth, social trust, and *budi pekerti* (Geertz, 1992; Koentjaraningrat, 2009).

Theme Identified: Obedience to Parents in Pinocchio and Its Relation to Indonesian Moral Values

Another central theme in Pinocchio is obedience—or more precisely, disobedience—toward parental authority. Collodi's narrative repeatedly shows Pinocchio ignoring Geppetto's instructions, choosing personal pleasure over responsibility, and seeking independence without maturity. Western scholars interpret Pinocchio's disobedience as a metaphor for childhood rebellion and moral development, where mistakes and suffering enable self-awareness (Zipes, 2012; Bernardi, 2018). In European morality tales, disobedience is framed as a necessary stage toward individuality and autonomy (Stephens, 2018). In contrast, Indonesian cultural ethics place stronger emphasis on obedience, respect, and filial piety (*bakti kepada orang tua*) as moral imperatives (Koentjaraningrat, 2009; Geertz, 1992). Indonesian folktales typically portray obedient children as virtuous and spiritually rewarded, while disobedient characters face communal shame or spiritual consequences (Suryadi, 2017). Studies in cultural psychology show that Indonesian and broader Asian parenting models prioritize relational harmony, duty to parents, and compliance as signs of moral maturity (Kim & Markus, 1999; Rudy & Grusec, 2006).

From this perspective, Pinocchio's repeated defiance toward Geppetto conflicts with Indonesian expectations of respectful child behavior. However, the narrative ultimately reaffirms parental authority—Pinocchio experiences hardship, repents, and earns the right to become "a real boy." This narrative arc aligns with Indonesian beliefs that moral growth occurs through obedience and learning from mistakes (Alwasilah, 2014). Yet, the method of moral transmission differs: Pinocchio communicates obedience through painful individual consequences, whereas Indonesian culture teaches obedience through collective guidance, spiritual teaching, and communal accountability (Susanto, 2019).

Theme Identified: Responsibility in Pinocchio and Its Cultural Relevance to Indonesia

Responsibility is a core moral lesson in Pinocchio. Throughout the story, Pinocchio frequently avoids duties—such as school attendance, obedience, and helping Geppetto—preferring impulsive pleasure and entertainment. Collodi uses repeated episodes of neglect and consequences to illustrate that irresponsibility causes suffering, dependency, and moral regression (Zipes, 2012). Western literary scholars interpret this as a moral initiation journey, where irresponsibility is part of developmental struggle, and responsibility emerges through learning from personal failures (Bernardi, 2018; Stephens, 2018). Thus, responsibility is depicted as an individual achievement earned through trial and error.

Indonesian culture likewise values responsibility (*tanggung jawab*), but with a stronger communal and relational orientation. Responsibility is not only personal but also social, spiritual, and familial (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). Indonesian folktales typically portray responsible children as loyal to their parents, fulfilling duties for the benefit of family honor, and upholding communal trust (Suryadi, 2017). Educational scholarship in Indonesia also emphasizes responsibility as a collective virtue tied to *budi pekerti*, group harmony, and obligations toward God, parents, and society (Alwasilah, 2014; Kemendiknas, 2011). In Pinocchio, responsibility becomes visible only after the boy confronts painful consequences—loss, danger, and remorse. This aligns with Western developmental psychology framing responsibility as self-regulation learned through lived experience (Rudy & Grusec, 2006). However, Indonesian narratives commonly teach responsibility through prevention, social guidance, and communal accountability rather than solitary suffering (Susanto, 2019). For instance, irresponsible behavior in Indonesian stories often results not in personal transformation alone but in collective disappointment or spiritual consequences, compelling restoration toward filial duty.

Theme Identified: Helping Others in Pinocchio and its Alignment with Indonesian Moral Values

Another prominent moral dimension of Pinocchio lies in the theme of helping others. Although Pinocchio initially acts selfishly, the turning point in Collodi's narrative occurs when he begins to show concern for the needs of others, particularly his father Geppetto and individuals he encounters along his journey. Scholars note that Pinocchio's moral maturation accelerates when he demonstrates altruistic behavior and empathy (Bernardi, 2018). Helping others is portrayed as a moral virtue that contributes to becoming "fully human"—a social identity granted only when one is capable of kindness and sacrifice (Zipes, 2012).

This moral message aligns strongly with Indonesian cultural ethics. Indonesia upholds the value of mutual assistance (*gotong royong*) as a foundational social principle embedded in community life, governance, education, and spirituality (Koentjaraningrat, 2009; Geertz, 1992). Helping others is considered not just an individual choice but an obligation to sustain social harmony and collective well-being. Indonesian folktales—including *Malin Kundang*, *Timun Mas*, and *Si Kancil* narratives—frequently emphasize kindness, generosity, and community solidarity, while condemning selfishness and betrayal (Suryadi, 2017). Educational scholars reinforce that Indonesian character education policy includes *kepedulian sosial* (social care) and *gotong royong* among its core values (Kemendiknas, 2011; Alwasilah, 2014).

In Pinocchio, helping others is framed as a moral redemption pathway—Pinocchio is rewarded only after showing selflessness, working to support Geppetto, and sacrificing personal pleasure. Western interpretations view this as a narrative model of moral agency where empathy and charity serve as individual achievements reflecting internal growth (Stephens, 2018). Indonesian scholars, however, stress that helping others is culturally expected and guided by communal structures—such as extended family roles, village cooperation systems, and religious teachings (Geertz, 1992; Koentjaraningrat, 2009). Thus, while both contexts valorize helping others, the philosophical basis differs: Western narratives celebrate altruism as personal improvement, whereas Indonesia frames it as social duty and relational responsibility.

Theme Identified: Identity Formation in Pinocchio and Its Relation to Indonesian Moral Values

Identity formation is a core structural motif in Pinocchio. Collodi frames the puppet's journey as a transformation narrative: Pinocchio can only become "a real boy" when he demonstrates moral integrity, responsibility, and filial devotion (Zipes, 2012). Scholars argue that Pinocchio's identity is relational and conditional—his humanity is earned rather than assumed (Bernardi, 2018). Western interpretations see

this as an allegory of self-authorship and personal growth, where identity is crafted through individual experiences, moral choices, and self-realization (Stephens, 2018). Indonesian value systems share the belief that identity is morally constructed, but they emphasize collective, spiritual, and familial dimensions. In Indonesian culture, becoming a “real human” (*manusia seutuhnya*) requires fulfilling obligations to parents, adhering to community values, and practicing moral-spiritual discipline (Koentjaraningrat, 2009; Geertz, 1992). Identity formation is therefore not solely personal; it reflects the respect one gives to parents, community norms, and religious teachings (Alwasilah, 2014). Research on Indonesian parenting styles highlights that children’s identity is expected to grow through obedience, relational duty, humility, and socio-spiritual maturity (Rudy & Grusec, 2006).

Pinocchio’s identity journey mirrors this expectation to some extent. His transformation is triggered not by intellectual ability or independence, but by moral change — particularly his willingness to sacrifice for Geppetto and assume moral responsibility (Bernardi, 2018). This resonates deeply with Indonesian beliefs that one’s humanity is validated through service and devotion to family (*bakti kepada orang tua*) and social care (Kemendiknas, 2011). However, Pinocchio depicts identity formation as individual redemption, whereas Indonesian culture locates identity in a network of social and spiritual relationships (Susanto, 2019).

4. Conclusion

This study revealed that Pinocchio contains rich moral dimensions—honesty, obedience, responsibility, helping others, and identity formation—that align in many ways with Indonesian value systems. While these virtues are embedded in Western contexts, their universal meaning allows them to resonate with the ethical foundations of Indonesian culture, particularly those shaped by *budi pekerti*, filial duty, communal responsibility, and spiritual morality. Analysis shows that Pinocchio’s transformation into a “real boy” parallels Indonesian conceptions of becoming a fully moral human being; both depend on ethical growth, relational sensitivity, and the fulfillment of obligations toward others. However, the findings also demonstrate cultural tensions. Western narratives frame moral development as an individual journey characterized by rebellion, personal consequences, and self-driven redemption. In contrast, Indonesian culture views moral identity as relational, socially mediated, and guided by communal norms and parental authority. Behaviors such as public affection, autonomy against parents, and dramatic reward-based identity transitions found in Western literature reflect cultural norms that may not fully align with Indonesian moral expectations. Therefore, without cultural mediation, Western stories may unintentionally normalize values that conflict with Indonesian humility ethics, obedience norms, and collectivist identity formation.

Despite these mismatches, the study concludes that Pinocchio can serve as a valuable educational resource for Indonesian character education when interpreted contextually rather than uncritically adopted. Educators must guide students in examining story values through Indonesian perspectives—highlighting loyalty rather than individual heroism, communal responsibility rather than autonomous moral achievement, and relational harmony over rebellion. Through reflective discussion, comparative storytelling, and reinterpretation practices, Western literature can become a constructive bridge rather than a cultural contradiction. Ultimately, this research contributes to the understanding that children’s literature is culturally situated yet adaptable. It reinforces that moral narratives cannot be detached from their cultural assumptions but can be meaningfully localized to strengthen Indonesian ethical identity. Such findings support the need for culturally responsive pedagogy, where imported stories are reinterpreted through national values, enabling global narratives like Pinocchio to enrich rather than erode Indonesian character development frameworks.

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