THE INFLUENCE OF FAIRY TALES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORAL VALUES AMONG PRESCHOOLERS

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ABSTRACT

THE INFLUENCE OF FAIRY TALES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORAL VALUES AMONG PRESCHOOLERS

Farah Dianti Binti Abdul Rahizam

This study aims to identify the influence of fairy tales to the development of moral values among preschoolers. In this study, 16 preschoolers aged six (6) years old were interviewed at one of the preschools in Petra Jaya, Kuching. The preschoolers were divided into two (2) groups, which are the experimental group and the control group. The instruments used in this study were based on the ideas from related previous researches. A fairy tale story written by Irene Malek was used as an intervention to the experimental group. As a result, both groups of participants show dissimilarity of understanding in moral value. From the finding of this study, it can be concluded that fairy tale characters can influence the understanding of moral values among preschoolers. The findings of this study were then discussed based on the theories related to children’s moral development. Recommendations for future researchers as well as for other related parties were also proposed at the end of this report.
ABSTRAK

KAJIAN TENTANG PENGARUH CERITA DONGENG TERHADAP PERKEMBANGAN NILAI MORAL KANAK-KANAK PRASEKOLAH

Farah Dianti Binti Abdul Rahizam

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Using fairy tales as a tool to teach moral values among children is not something new. The concept of telling stories to develop moral values in nursery schools was the common idea among the Victorians (Guroian, 1996). The idea of fairy tales is to give the chance for children to embrace their imagination and let them free to be in another world out of reality. It is through fairy tales as well that children can learn to build their characters and virtues (Guroian, 1996).

This chapter will introduce the background of this study about fairy tales and children’s moral development and also the problem statement of the study. We will also look at the objective of the study, the research framework, research questions, conceptual and operational definition, significant of study and also limitation of study.
1.1 Background of Study

Children stories such as fairy tales have been used for ages to entertain children as well as adults. The moral value that lies behind fairy tales is usually easy to understand thus it is commonly used as a mean of teaching moral values among children. Values, according Piaget’s theory, is apart of the affective development of children (Wadsworth, 1989). Piaget’s theory concerns a lot about the affective as well as cognitive development as both are constructed in children the same way (Wadsworth, 1989).

The values in fairy tales influence the development of children in terms of cognitive, emotional, moral, language, social and holistic (Ida Nurul Chasanah, 2004). In relating fairy tales to the development of moral values among children, we also need to understand the moral development of children. There are many theories to understand moral development. In this research, we will emphasize the moral development from cognitive-developmental approach, such as by Piaget and Kohlberg.

Piaget’s theory stated that children go through four (4) stages of moral development. As this research will emphasize on preschoolers, the stage of concern is stage two – heteronomy and moral realism. At this stage, children believe that rules are established by other people and must be followed as it is, usually handed down by authority figures and adults (Steuer, 1994). Children believe that the actions they take are judged solely by the moral values and have nothing to do with any other reasons or conditions (Berk, 1991). They also believe in immanent justice, which is the belief that justice is always done and wrongdoings are always punished (Steuer, 1994).

A child’s thinking during the stage of pre-operational and the stage of heteronomy and moral realism are very egocentric. They believe that every think the same way as they do and they cannot see the point of view of another person. From here we can see the ability of perspective-taking of preschool children.
Perspective-taking, as studied extensively by Robert Selman, is the capacity to understand or take on other’s psychological points of view and appreciate the various viewpoints including one’s own (Steuer, 1994). This ability is usually not yet well-developed during the pre-school years.

Various methods have been used to teach moral values among pre-school children. According to Piaget, moral concepts are constructed by the child itself, as how they construct their knowledge. Authoritative figures often influence the way they perceive moral values as these are the people who usually impose the values to them. Children learn mostly through play activities and also interaction with adults and peers. Thus, the significance of using fairy tales as a mean of teaching moral values is because of the nature of the tales itself. In western countries, stories are used to encourage the development of children’s cognitive ability and in the same time, foster interaction between children and adult (Natsiopoulou, Souliotis & Kyridis, n.d.). Such activity is a not a norm to Eastern countries.

Fairy tales uses the imaginative figures and roles in the stories. Apart from entertaining children, it also broadens the child’s perspective of life. Although most fairy tales are not of realistic settings, the storyline itself pictures the moral intended to be understood by the children. For example, the story of ‘The Tortoise and The Hare’ shows us that we should not take things for granted over other people’s weaknesses. Perseverance, in the end could bring success to a person.

In the West, even a famous psychiatrist, Bruno Bettelheim, gave the priority to the importance of using fairy tales in teaching morals and values. In his book of “The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales”, he stated that children should be taught moral education through a medium which is meaningful and evidently right and not just through ethical concepts, and the child can find this meaning through fairy tales (Bettelheim, 1975 as cited in Guroian, 2006).
1.2 Problem Statement

Children’s stories and fairy tales are often told to children as a mean of teaching moral values and to develop their perspective-taking ability. However, tales and stories told to children often vary according to the culture of the community and the setting they live in. Thus, the question lies on how does different kinds of stories influence the way they think and the way they perceive their current environment.

Historically, fairy tales are not meant for children. As time passes, modifications have been made so that these stories are suitable for children. The elements of violence and other immoral acts were altered with a milder version of stories and basically a present fairy tales would have a happy ending. Although some fairy tales do promote moral values, others are mere folklore stories full of imaginary characters and do not demonstrate any clear moral values. For example, the story of Jack and the beanstalk have been criticized for letting children making fun if the oversized giant (Caudle, 2005).

One of the factors influencing a child’s moral development is the early experience from their environment. Thus, it is questionable whether the usage of fairy tales has any effect on the child as some families and kindergartens used them as teaching methods. Children’s moral reasoning is also another factor that determines whether fairy tales are suitable for their moral development or not. However, works by Willian J. Bennet had open the eyes of parents and teachers in the usage of fairy tales for nurturing moral imagination and building the child’s moral character (Guroian, 1996). He had collected around 500 tales, poems and essays in his books such as “The Book of Virtue” that had eventually influence parents to use this type of literature to teach moral values.

Another aspect to be considered is the origin of the fairy tale. Most fairy tales are from the West. Thus the moral in those stories originate from the Western settings and culture. There was no apparent research whether these
stories could actually alters the ways of thinking among the local pre-school children. As how researches have shown adolescence are easily influenced of immoral acts, claimed to be influenced by the Western culture, there were no significant research on the effect of Western culture to children through other mediums.

Tales and stories told to children often vary according to the culture of the community and the setting they live in. It is common in the western society to use stories as a teaching method, however some other cultures consider cultural stories are full of lies thus it is not used as a teaching method (Heath, 1982 as cited in Natsiopoulou et. al, n.d.). The question lies on how effective are fairy tales in teaching moral values among children despite their cultural background. A training done by Farkirska (1999) proves that fairy tales by Hans Andersen are able to enrich preschoolers’, aged five (5) to six (6) years old, understandings of good values. Such trainings have not yet been done in the preschools of this country.

If we look into Malaysia’s education system, preschools are not directly a part of it. Preschools or kindergartens are not subsidized by the Ministry of Education. They are only provided with direction books to set up preschools. The syllabus are not centralized but each preschools need to fulfil certain criteria to be established. Some of the functions of preschools are to identify children’s weaknesses before entering primary schools, to expand children’s moral and spiritual knowledge and also to implement positive attitudes by balancing the emotional state of preschoolers (Kertas Kerja Kajian Sistem Pendidikan Kebangsaan, n.d.). Fairy tales is only implemented in preschool that values the morals behind it.
1.3 Objective of the Study

The objectives in this study is divided into two (2). The general objective will give the overall idea of the research being done. The specific objective will highlight the specific area that is going to be studied in this research.

1.1.1 General Objective

The general objective of this research is to find a significant relationship between fairy tales and the preschoolers' moral values.

1.1.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this research are:
1) to study the influence of fairy tale characters toward the understanding of moral values among preschoolers; and
2) to compare preschoolers' understanding about moral value between those who listen and those who do not listen to a fairy tale story.

1.4 Research Framework

This research framework (Figure 1) shows an overview of the content and issue highlighted in this study. The topic of focus (content) is about preschoolers' moral values development. The issue of interest is the influence of fairy tales toward the moral values development among preschoolers. The main method used in this study is using story telling as an intervention. The example of activities related to the fairy tale story is asking questions derived from the fairy tale.
Preschoolers’ moral values development → Influence of fairy tales

Method

- Story telling – To familiarize children with fairy tale
- Activities related to the fairy tale

Figure 1: Research Framework

1.5 Research Questions

i. Do the characters in fairy tales influence preschoolers’ understanding about moral values?

ii. Is there any difference in preschoolers understanding about moral values between those who listen and those who do not listen to a fairy tale story?

1.6 Significant of Study

Although moral education is already available as a part of preschools curriculum, the purpose of this research is not to alter the education system. Rather, it is hoped that the findings from this study could be used by teachers or parents to choose the appropriate types of stories to be told to children if intended to teach moral values. Children in preschool are very objective and they receive whatever presented to them by the authority figures as how it is.

Fairy tales gives the chance for children to dream and live up their imagination, which have positive to their cognitive development. However, it is best if the teachers and parents could really understand the relationship of moral development and the stories
children listens to so that the child will grow up with a proper understanding of the local moral values.

The findings from this study could be used by parents to choose the appropriate types of stories to be told to children if intended to teach moral values. Parents could understand the relationship of moral development and the stories children listen to. According to Kok (2006) from the National Publicity Secretary, the amount of child-care centre and preschools are quite small in this country and the quality is also questionable. Thus, by having some knowledge about fairy tales, parents can also educate the moral values to their children in their own home before they enter preschools or primary schools.

As for counsellors, this study is an extension from previous study about children's moral development. Future counsellors are able to understand more about other factors, such as children literature that influence children's moral development. According to Gysbers and Henderson (2000) as cited in Oden (2004), it was suggested that school counsellors should spend 30% to 40% of the counsellors time in responsive services which includes remediation activities, crisis counselling and consultation. As past researches, especially in psychoanalysis, have proven that fairy tale does have a remedial effect, it would be beneficial for counsellors to know more about the relationship between children and fairy tales. This research will also serve as a reference for future studies in the field of children's moral development and the factors that influence it.

1.7 Definitions

In this study, there are several significant terms that are used to clarify the whole idea of this paper. The definitions are divided into conceptual definition and operational definition. Conceptual definitions are definition of terms based on the actual concept of the term in other past researches. The operational definition of terms is the actual definitions used in this paper that is significant to the study.
1.7.1 Fairy Tale

Conceptual Definition

Folk tales are fictional stories about dealing with human relationships, morality, conflicts, human problems and solutions, and fairy tales are stories adapted from folktales which are designed to amuse children (Biechonski, 2004). The creator of these stories is usually anonymous and the stories are told or retold orally from generations to generations.

Fairy tale is also defined as simple a narrative, either of folk origin or individually written in a style reminiscent of a folk tradition, which typically involves supernatural beings or unbelievable characters, settings or events, authored in a style of reminiscent of a folk tradition (Gale, 1998).

Operational Definition

Fairy tale is defined as imaginative stories that are told to children as a mean of entertainment and as a medium of teaching moral values. In this context, fairy tales are stories that meant for children which contain moral values that are easy to understand by children.

1.7.2 Moral Values

Conceptual Definition

Morality is defined simply as the norms of right and wrong conduct. However in certain issues, Morality can be distinguished from concepts of social conventions, which are the agreed determined standards of conduct particular to a given social group (Nucci, 1997). In certain issues, the moral right or wrong is determined by whose criteria are used to judge the wrongness of actions (Nucci, 1997).
Values is said to be the solution of moral confusion. Values could not clarify on what a person should belief or what kind of morality that should be thought to the children (Groian, 1996).

Moral values are beliefs and personal opinions about what are the right and wrong conducts held by individuals and held collectively by socially cohesive groups of individuals (Cote', n.d.).

Operational Definition

Moral values are defined as the things that are considered right or wrong in social norm. Moral values vary around the world according to the culture of the place. The moral values in one place are influenced by the culture, religion and social norms.

1.7.3 Preschoolers

Conceptual Definition

Preschool is defined as a school for children between the ages of three and five, staffed by qualified teachers and other professionals who encourage and supervise educational play rather than simply providing childcare. It is generally considered part of early childhood education (Wikipedia, 2007). Preschoolers are children who are enrolled in preschools.

Preschools in Malaysia can be categorized into many types. One of them is TASKI (Taman Asuhan Kanak-kanak Islam). In this type of preschool, academic education and religious education is emphasized on the children. This type of education is to build a good character out of Muslim children (ABIM Johor, n.d.).
Operational Definition

Preschoolers in this context are defined as children who are qualified to enter pre-school, aged around four (4) years old until six (6) years old. Preschoolers in this context are those assumed are at the stage of heteronomous morality in Piaget's stages of moral understanding.

1.8 Limitation of Study

There are some limitations in conducting this research. The first one is that this research is conducted using qualitative method. By using this method, we are able to have an in depth knowledge about the subject matter, however, the results could not be generalized to the whole population. The second limitation concerns with time. The researcher was given limited time by the school to conduct the research. Only certain days were allowed for the research to be done. Moreover, since this research uses preschoolers as the participants, there limited time to do follow up activities after the fairy tale story telling session. The class duration for preschools is only around three (3) hours. Another constrain is the limited amount of participants that suits the purposive sampling criteria. Thus, the researcher could only use 16 out of 39 preschoolers available in this school.

1.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher has presented the background of the study, the objectives and the overall view of the issues that is going to be studied. Fairy tales, in general, are imaginative literatures that have evolved over time. In the following chapter, the researcher will present more in detail about the theoretical background of this study and the past researches about the relationship between fairy tales and moral values.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

1.0 Introduction

This chapter consists of the theoretical background of the study about moral development from theorist such as Piaget and Kohlberg. It is also presented in this chapter the history of fairy tales and how it is related to teaching moral values as well as past researches regarding the influence of fairy tales in moral development. An article review about Harry Potter and the significant of the story to pre-adolescence moral development is also included in this chapter.

1.1 Theoretical Background of Study

The theoretical background of morality and moral development are wide and can be viewed from many perspectives such as the psychoanalytic perspective, behaviourist perspective and also from the cognitive-developmental perspective.
As this study is more emphasized on the cognitive and affective part of moral development, the researcher will emphasize on Piaget’s theory and Kohlberg’s theory.

### 2.1.1 Piaget’s Theory of Moral Development

Children’s perspective of moral values evolved as they grow. According to Piaget, children’s understanding of moral reasoning changes from a rigid form of moral rules that cannot be altered, into a more flexible form that can tally with a certain purpose and needs of humans (Berk, 1991). Piaget’s stages of moral development are divided into three (3) stages, which are the motor rules, heteronomy and moral realism, autonomy and moral relativism and formal reasoning about autonomy and moral relativism. As this study focuses on pre-school children around the age of four (4) until six (6) years old, the stage of focus would be stage two – heteronomy and moral realism.

Before entering this stage, children have already showed little understanding about social rules such as when playing rule oriented games (Berks, 1991). For example, when they are playing marble, they may repeat the same action over and over again which is what it means by motor rules. When they enter the second stage, they are more conscious about the rules and moral values. According to Piaget, a child view of rules is very rigid and they believe that it is a must to follow those rules. This due to two factors: 1) the constraints set up by authority figures that enforce respect to the rules; and 2) the child’s egocentric point of view and immaturity (Berks, 1991).

Egocentrism means that the child assumes everyone around them think the same way as they do. Their understanding of moral values is very objective and does not concern the reason behind every action or behaviour. They also believe in immanent justice, which means that every wrongdoing will have its punishment. Punishment can be in forms of punishment from the authority figures or from unfortunate accidents.
2.1.2 Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Kohlberg's work is an extension of Piaget's theory. Kohlberg's way of measuring a person's moral understanding is by giving a situation of moral dilemma. From the situation given, respondents were required to reason out what the character in the story should do and why. From this assessment, Kohlberg developed the stages of moral understanding in human. Stages are divided into three (3) levels, and each level consists of two (2) stages.

Kohlberg's idea of moral understanding is that everyone goes through these six (6) stages in order. And every successful transition means that the person is able to view moral as something more widely applicable, logic and can adapt with a person's need (Berks, 1991). Kohlberg did not specify the age for each stages. For this study, the researcher will emphasize on the first level of moral understanding that is the pre-conventional level.

The first stage of pre-conventional level is heteronomous morality. At this stage, similar to Piaget's, a child considers what is right is based on the act or behaviour that will avoid punishment or bring benefits to himself (Stueur, 1994). They will accept whatever rules handed down by the adults and try to avoid punishment. The second stage consists of individualism, instrumental purpose and exchange. The moral view is still the same at this stage but the child began to consider the self-interest of the other person as well (Steuer, 1994). He is more aware that other people can have a different point of view. If ever the child needs to sacrifice something, he would consider a fair trade to meet with his own self-interest as well.

2.1.3 Moral Values from Islamic View

From the Islamic view, moral values are based on what have been stated in Al-Quran. The teaching of Islam is also based on what the Prophet of Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) has said in Hadis. Some of values as stated in surah al-Baqarah: 177
Translation: It is no virtue. That you turn your faces towards the east or the west, but virtue is that one should sincerely believe in Allah and the Last Day and the Angels and the Book and the Prophets and, out of His love, spend of one's choice wealth for relatives and orphans, for the needy and the wayfarer, for beggars and for the ransom of slaves, and establish the Salat and pay the Zakat. And the virtuous are those who keep their pledges when they make them and show fortitude in hardships and adversity and in the struggle between the Truth and falsehood; such are the truthful people and such are the pious.

There is also a Hadis which stated that “when a son of Adam passed away, all his good deeds has ended except for three things and they are the charity they gave, the knowledge they have disseminate and the prayers of their pious children”. From this Surah and Hadis, we can see how a religion influences the morality of a certain group of people.

2.2 The Usage of Fairy Tales

In past researches, fairy tales have been used not only for children but also for adults. Jure Biechonski, the creator of Transactional Hypno-Analysis wrote an article about the fairy tales from the psychoanalysis view based on other past researchers. According to Biechonski (2004), fairy tales offers the possibility to view imagination not only as a defence mechanism or a distortion of reality, but it also offers a more positive perspective through the expression of creativity and health. By working with adults through hypnotherapy using fairy tale, the
unconscious emotional part can be accessed to facilitate the personality integration. This therapy bypasses the critical and logical conscious factors to get into the subconscious mind.

Bruno Bettelheim has stressed the significance of fairy tales to children’s development through the stories’ psychoanalytic interpretations. Bettelheim had interpreted the symbolic meaning of fairy tale on three levels. In the first level, the crucial others in a child’s life is discussed through a character. In the second level, the character represents the experienced part of the child’s personality and the third part represents the internal processes, which are the id, ego and superego (Shapiro & Katz, 1978 as cited in Biechonski, 2004). The whole idea of using fairy tale is to enable the child to express his inner thoughts through the characters.

Bettelheim also stated that the unconscious have great effects on a child’s or adult’s behaviour. By permitting the unconscious material to work through a person’s imagination and enter his awareness, it can be used for positive purposes (Biechonski, 2004). In this case, fairy tale helps children to achieve maturity in their consciousness by resolving the issues in their unconscious. Additional to that, fairy tales can make us understand our internal processes by representing them through the characters and the events in the story (Biechonski, 2004). Fairy tale is more significant to a person’s childhood, which is why and adult remembers fairy tales from years ago but cannot remember the movies he watched few years back.

2.3 Previous Research on Fairy Tales and Moral Development

Previous studies have been conducted to analyze the impact of fairy tale like stories to the development of children. One of them is an article review written about Harry Potter and the influence of the story to the moral development of pre-adolescent children. In this article, Binnendyk and Schonert-Reichl wrote about the moral values portrayed by the characters in Harry Potter. According to