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Research Paper

From Fear-Based Moral Transmission to Critical and Inclusive Moral Education: Rethinking the Discourse of *Anak Durhaka* in *Malin Kundang*

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Abstract

This article rethinks the discourse of *anak durhaka* in Indonesian folktales. This type of folktale is commonly regarded as a suitable source for children's moral education. However, its narrative structure emphasizes fear-based moral transmission which does not align with SDG 4 Target 4.7 on sustainable education and 4.a on safe, non-violent, and inclusive learning environments. Using qualitative textual analysis and Derridean deconstructive reading, this study examines the discourse's narrative structure, binary oppositions, contradictions, and shifting meanings to find an alternative reading of the folktale. The result of the deconstructive reading reveals the instability within the narrative structure and opens an alternative educational interpretation. The new reading is centered on dialogue, empathy, children's agency, forgiveness, and mutual recognition. Building on this reading, the study proposes Critical Folklore Literacy as a pedagogical approach that combines canonical folktales with structured critical discussion. For education policy and curriculum development, the study recommends integrating critical reading into character-education guidelines for a more inclusive, dialogical, and critical moral education

Keywords: Critical pedagogy, Derridean deconstruction, Inclusive and critical moral education, Malin Kundang, SDG 4 education policy.

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1. Introduction

In the early 2000s in Indonesia, a viral hoax circulated widely in Indonesian media about a woman who was allegedly cursed by her mother and transformed into a stingray as punishment for mistreating her parent (Mafindo, 2023). The story was accompanied by an image of a stingray whose facial features were claimed to resemble a human face. Public responses to the hoax varied: some accepted it as true, some expressed doubt, while others rejected it, arguing that the appearance was simply a natural feature of a stingray. Nevertheless, they agree on a shared cultural discourse: a disobedient child (*anak durhaka*) who mistreats their parents deserves punishment.

The discourse of disobedient children is a recurring discourse in Indonesia. The discourse can be traced back to the folklore circulated in Indonesian societies. Indonesian folklore has long functioned as a cultural medium through which moral values and social norms are transmitted across generations (Nurgiyantoro, 2021). The folktale occupies a strong position in the minds of many Indonesians. Folktales of disobedient children, like *Malin Kundang*, have long been used to teach the value of obedience as one important moral value for children to learn (Al Hadad et al., 2025; Kusumaningrum, 2023; Novrita & Zulfadhli, 2019; Ratmiati et al., 2024; Sitohang & Alfianika, 2021; Sumardi et al., 2020; Yayuk, 2013). Previous researchers tended to celebrate the folktales as exemplary moral teaching, showing the dominant use of the folktales as educative tools. However, few studies have questioned the effectiveness of such moral teaching, especially its sustainability and alignment with the purpose of SDG 4: critical and inclusive education.

This relates to SDG Target 4.7 (education for sustainable development and global citizenship) and Target 4.a (safe, non-violent, and inclusive learning environments). The discourse of disobedient children shows how folktales function as educational tools that shape children's moral imagination. However, when obedience is taught through fear-based discipline, moral education may reproduce hierarchical domination of one party rather than encouraging critical, humane, and dialogical learning. The imbalanced hierarchical relation between parent and children constructs a logocentric position in which parental authority is placed as the center of the truth—that cannot be disputed—while children are positioned as the subordinate subject that must obey without question. Through this hierarchy, the meaning of disobedient children becomes fixed and stable: children are always represented as guilty, while parents are morally correct.

The fear-based discipline propagated by the folktales as a moral teaching tool is not fully in line with SDG 4.7 or Target 4.a. The spirit of SDG 4 emphasizes quality education that promotes inclusive, equitable, critical, and transformative learning, while underlining the importance of fostering human rights, peace, non-violence, cultural appreciation, and responsibility in social participation (UNESCO, 2017). If disobedient children's folktales are taught as warnings to children to obey their parents unconditionally, they risk reducing moral education to a mechanism of fear and control. Therefore, a critical approach to the folktales is needed to encourage learners to question unequal hierarchical relations, recognize marginal voices, open dialogue, and imagine more situational possibilities of parent-child relationships.

Discourse is not merely a literary or linguistic representation; it produces and organizes knowledge by determining how meaning is legitimated, normalized, and morally accepted within the society (Foucault, 1972; Palti, 2024). When a discourse is repeatedly circulated in the classroom, it establishes a particular understanding of truth, while excluding other possible perspectives. In the discourse of *anak durhaka*, folktales like *Malin Kundang* do not merely deliver a moral truth; they also construct moral authority through fear-based discipline. Through repeated cultural and educational transmission, this construction may become normalized as the dominant framework of moral education, diminishing the purpose of critical and inclusive moral education.

The current dominant discourse on *anak durhaka* is relevant to address in the context of sustainability. Education planning does not only involve improving physical infrastructure; more importantly, it should consider the forms of knowledge, values, social relations, and citizen competencies that educational institutions reproduce over the long term (Clark, 2026). Education for sustainable development requires cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral learning that enables learners to reflect critically, understand different perspectives, participate in decision-making, and respond responsibly to social problems (UNESCO, 2017). When cultural narratives are taught through fear, unquestioned

authority, and one-directional moral judgment, they may limit children's agency, critical reasoning, and participation.

Questioning the hierarchical position constructed by the discourse also opens a way for a more equitable human right. Children, as subjects, are marginalized in the construction of a discourse involving them. Children have a right to speak and to be heard on all matters involving their education (Shier, 2019). Children's marginalized position reveals how discourse limits their agency by representing them less as speaking subjects and more as objects of moral judgment. Consequently, moral education becomes a disciplinary tool instead of a dialogical process that enables children to develop ethical understanding, critical reflection, and meaningful participation in constructing moral knowledge (Schmitz et al., 2026).

To open possibilities for a more inclusive and dialogical reading of the discourse of disobedient children, this paper reopens the rereading guided by Derrida's deconstruction. Deconstruction is a reading strategy that disrupts the fixed and stable meaning of a discourse. Derrida rejects logocentrism—absolute truth—and epistemic closures by disturbing the hierarchical structure that sustains discursive authority (Ungkang, 2013; Widijanto et al., 2020). Through deconstructive reading, the very conditions that make discourse possible are interrogated (Martínez Aguilar et al., 2025). Martínez et al. further elaborate that deconstructive reading has five purposes: unraveling binary logic, exposing the instability of meaning, opening supplementary interpretations, shaking up hegemonic discourse, and challenging basic assumptions. In essence, deconstruction rereads the text by revealing how its dominant moral values depend on suppressed possibilities, unstable meaning, and unequal hierarchical positions.

Therefore, to scrutinize the dominant moral teaching of obedience to children, this article aims to reinterpret the folktales about disobedient children through Derridean deconstruction reading. Rather than rejecting the importance of obeying parents, this study examines how the tale constructs obedience, punishment, and parental authority in an unequal hierarchical position. Consequently, obedience and punishment are perceived as natural moral truths that close other alternative moral possibilities. In doing so, this article contributes to a more critical and inclusive understanding of Indonesian folktales as educational text which in turn aligns with the spirit of SDG 4.

Against this background, this study addresses a gap in existing scholarship by examining not only the moral message of *Malin Kundang*, but also the discursive structure through which obedience, parental authority, punishment, and children's subjectivity are produced and normalized. Previous studies have largely treated *anak durhaka* folktales as effective instruments of moral transmission, while giving limited attention to how their fear-based and hierarchical logic may conflict with contemporary commitments to critical, inclusive, and dialogical education. Rather than rejecting filial respect as a cultural value, the study seeks to reconstruct the moral value through critical understanding, dialogue, mutual responsibility, and recognition of children's agency. In doing so, the article contributes both theoretically and practically by proposing Critical Folklore Literacy as a culturally grounded approach for curriculum development, classroom instruction, teacher education, and character-education policy. Such an approach enables folklore to remain a meaningful cultural resource while supporting long-term educational development.

2. Methods

This study employs qualitative textual analysis with Derridean deconstruction as its main reading strategy. The primary text analyzed in this study is the online version of *Malin Kundang* published by Indonesia Kaya under the title "Cerita Rakyat Sumatra Barat: Legenda Malin Kundang" (Indonesia Kaya, n.d.). A single published version was selected to establish a clearly delimited and consistent textual corpus because *Malin Kundang*, as a folktale originating in oral tradition, exists in multiple adaptations with variations in wording, characterization, and narrative detail. The selected text presents a complete narrative sequence, including Malin's relationship with his mother, his departure and social mobility, his rejection of maternal recognition, the mother's curse, supernatural punishment, and an explicit moral conclusion. The unit of analysis consists of narrative segments representing (1) character construction, (2) moral judgment, (3) authority relations, (4) punishment mechanisms, and (5) suppressed or marginalized perspectives.

Malin Kundang is considered sufficiently representative of the *anak durhaka* discourse because it contains the core narrative structure repeatedly found in similar Indonesian folktales. Comparable patterns appear in stories such as *Batu Menangis*, *Si Lancang*, *Si Kintan*, and *Gunung Batu Bangkai*,

although their characters, settings, and local cultural details differ. Therefore, *Malin Kundang* is not treated as statistically representative of all Indonesian folklore, but as an analytically representative and information-rich case that clearly embodies the central discursive features of this broader narrative tradition. Furthermore, *Malin Kundang*'s wide cultural recognition and frequent use as a moral teaching resource in previous studies further indicate its relevance for examining how the discourse of filial obedience is reproduced as moral education.

Methodologically, deconstruction is aporetic—it inherently has no standard procedure (Martínez Aguilar et al., 2025). Derrida purposively keeps it that way to avoid the theory falling into logocentrism. However, in practice, a reading procedure is needed to scrutinize a discourse. This paper used the deconstruction reading strategy proposed by Martínez Aguilar et al. They propose two reading strategies that can be used simultaneously and in parallel, viz. double commentary and disruptive reading. The reading involves reading the text through two different orientations: the first orientation is reading the text according to the author's intention in order to find their *vouloir-dire* (what the author meant to say); the second orientation is reading the text critically by showing what is not intended by the author (Kakoliris, 2022). The reading strategy is not rigid, but aporetic and iterable. Applying the strategies, this paper analyses the discourse of disobedient children and offers a new reading in the following steps of analysis:

1. Determining the discourse structure by identifying how the story organizes the dominant meaning and the marginalized meaning.
2. Identifying the hierarchical binary oppositions that shape the discourse.
3. Disrupting these oppositions by tracing contradictions, tensions, and ambivalences within the text.
4. Showing the shifting of meaning through *différance*.
5. Opening supplementary interpretations and undecidables. Because deconstruction is an inherently open-ended process, this paper limits itself by offering only one supplementary reading of the discourse.
6. Offering alternative reading and moral teaching method.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. The Dominant Structure of Disobedient Children Discourse

To uncover the structure of the discourse, the initial stage of the deconstructive reading involves breaking the narrative into Freytag's pyramid—a classical five-stage framework for analyzing narrative structure in literary works (Çiğerci & Yıldırım, 2024). The discourse of disobedient children is structured through a linear moral narrative that connects disobedience with punishment. In this narrative pattern, the child's failure to recognize, respect, or obey the parent is constructed as a moral error that deserves punishment. The structure of this discourse can be traced through the following narrative stages of *Malin Kundang*:

Table 1. Dominant Discourse within the Folktale

Narrative Stage (Freytag's Pyramid)	Narrative Event	Dominant Discourse Construction
1. Introduction: Establishing Emotional and Moral Connection	The story introduces Mande Rubayah as a loving, nurturing, and protective mother who remains devoted to Malin despite poverty and hardship.	The mother is constructed as the moral foundation of the narrative. Her unconditional love establishes her as the legitimate moral authority, creating the basis for later judgment of Malin's actions.
2. Rising Action: Separation, Mobility, and Moral Tension	Malin leaves his village with his mother's blessing to seek a better life. His departure is motivated by economic hardship and the desire for social improvement.	At this stage, Malin's departure is not constructed as an act of disobedience. Instead, mobility and ambition are presented as legitimate attempts to improve his condition and his mother's life.

Narrative Stage (Freytag's Pyramid)	Narrative Event	Dominant Discourse Construction
3. Climax: Rejecting Parental Recognition	After achieving wealth and higher social status, Malin refuses to acknowledge his mother. This becomes the central moment of the <i>anak durhaka</i> discourse.	Malin's rejection is framed as a moral transgression against the mother, who functions as the center of moral authority. The narrative positions Malin as guilty and the mother as the injured moral subject.
4. Falling Action: Transformation of Moral Injury into Curse	Mande Rubayah transforms her emotional suffering into a prayer of curse, asking for divine punishment against Malin.	The curse becomes the mechanism that transforms personal conflict into moral judgment. It functions as the central point that stabilizes the meaning of the discourse: wrongdoing against parental authority must receive punishment.
5. Resolution: Confirming Punishment as Moral Closure	Malin receives punishment through supernatural transformation, commonly represented as becoming stone or another cursed form.	The ending confirms the dominant moral lesson that disobedience toward parents leads to punishment. The narrative closes the possibility of alternative moral interpretations through a definitive punishment.

The structure of the discourse depends on the repeated opposition between the morally legitimate parent and the morally guilty child. The repeated opposition is used as a moral arrangement that determines who is allowed to speak as the victim and who must be blamed as the moral transgressor. In this context, the morally high Mande Rubayah holds moral authority since she is a mother in its archetypal sense: loving, nurturing, and protective (Neumann, 2015). Malin, on the other hand, is the moral transgressor. He is arrogant and morally low for rejecting his mother. The moral structure allows the tale to produce a stable moral position: the mother becomes the center of moral truth, and Malin becomes the object of blame.

The narrative structure identified is not limited to the folktale's intrinsic structure; more importantly, it reflects the dominant pedagogical use of Malin Kundang as moral education. Al Hadad et al. (2025), in their analysis of *Buku Teks Bahasa Indonesia Kelas IV Kurikulum Merdeka*, highlight the importance of the folktale as moral education. Malin's regret is seen as an important narrative structure in teaching positive moral values. Consequently, the study argues that it provides strategic recommendations for teachers in developing contextual learning based on local narrative texts. Similar argumentation is also found in other pedagogical studies of Malin Kundang or the folktales of disobedient children (Novrita & Zulfadhli, 2019; Ratmiati et al., 2024; Sitohang & Alfianika, 2021; Yayuk, 2013). These studies echo the importance of Malin Kundang as character education. Consequently, they fall into the narrative structure that centers on fear-based discipline.

This dominant pedagogical use creates limitations. When the narrative is taught only through the fixed sequence of wrongdoing, curse, and punishment, students are positioned as recipients of a predetermined moral conclusion. The educational use of *Malin Kundang* should move beyond asking what moral lesson students must accept but encourage them to investigate how that lesson is constructed, whose voice is marginalized, and whether punishment, dialogue, forgiveness, or reconciliation offers a more ethical resolution. Such critical reading does not reject filial respect but expands it into a relational value grounded in empathy, mutual responsibility, critical reflection, and non-violent moral reasoning (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2013).

3.2. Hierarchical Binary Oppositions within the Discourse

The second structure analyzed within the discourse is binary oppositions. Binary opposition is "contrasting pairs of concepts or ideas often framed as dichotomies" (Onyshchak et al., 2023). The meaning of language is constructed through opposition and relation to the other (Saussure, 1959). For example, it is structurally not possible to know about 'light' without putting it in relation with 'darkness.' Hence, binary opposition is an innate structure of a language. In deconstruction, binary opposition is not merely a pair of contrasting terms, but a hierarchical structure in which one term is dominant while the other is subordinated.

The discourse of disobedient children is constructed through a series of hierarchical binary oppositions. These oppositions do not merely organize the characters and events in the story; they also determine which position is dominant and which position is marginalized. The main binary opposition is “mother vs child.” The story puts Mande Rubayah and Malin Kundang as a binary opposition. As a result, the characterization of the mother and the son is a series of characteristics that are in opposition with each other. The *vouloir-dire* of the folktale puts the mother in a superior moral position. She is the archetypal figure of a mother who loves, nurtures, and protects her children. Consequently, Malin, the son, is constructed in opposition to the mother; he is put in an inferior moral position with characteristics such as disobedience, ingratitude, and arrogance. This hierarchical position allows the story to frame the mother’s resentment at Malin’s rejection as morally valid, while at the same time, it puts Malin’s position as the bearer of blame for transgressing the moral boundary. Within the main binary opposition of mother vs child, the subsequent binary opposition is constructed:

Table 2. Binary Opposition within the Folktale

Binary Opposition	Dominant Meaning Construction	Hierarchical Position	Deconstructive Reading
Obedience vs. Disobedience	Obedience is constructed as the expected moral attitude of children, while disobedience is represented as a serious moral violation that deserves divine punishment. Malin Kundang’s refusal to acknowledge his mother is interpreted primarily as a moral failure.	Obedience occupies the dominant position as the ideal moral value, while disobedience is positioned as a deviation that must be punished.	The opposition overlooks the complexity behind Malin’s action, including social mobility, shame, and class anxiety. The narrative fixes Malin as morally guilty without considering the social and psychological conditions that shape his decision.
Authority vs. Subordination	Mande Rubayah’s position as a parent and mother places her in a higher moral position. Her representation as loving, nurturing, and protective strengthens her authority as the moral center of the narrative. Malin, despite becoming wealthy and socially powerful, becomes morally subordinate after rejecting his mother.	Parental authority is privileged, while the child’s position is marginalized. The mother becomes the source of moral truth, while Malin becomes the object of moral judgment.	The hierarchy becomes unstable because Malin’s lack of voice prevents the narrative from exploring his perspective. The story constructs parental authority as unquestionable while limiting the possibility of understanding the child’s experience.
Blessing vs. Curse	The mother’s blessing initially represents approval, protection, and legitimacy for Malin’s journey. However, the narrative ultimately transforms the relationship into a curse, which becomes the mechanism for restoring moral order through punishment.	Blessing represents legitimate parental approval, while curse functions as the ultimate confirmation of moral transgression and divine punishment.	The transformation from blessing to curse reveals a contradiction: maternal love and protection are transformed into a destructive form of authority. The curse exposes how moral education in the narrative relies on fear and punishment rather than dialogue and forgiveness.

Through these hierarchical binary oppositions, Malin Kundang produces a moral discourse that privileges parental authority and marginalizes the child’s voice. Privilege and marginalization are important to keep the structure intact. The story appears to offer a clear moral lesson about filial respect, yet this lesson depends on a structure that fixes the child as guilty and the parent as moral authority. Preserving the binary opposition is important to keep the story intact and the *vouloir-dire* which it delivers. As such, disturbing the construction can change the structure of the discourse and, eventually, the moral message (Joseph, 2022). Subsequent subchapters will disturb the discourse to show the fragility of its moral teaching.

3.3. Contradiction within the Discourse

Previous discussions have provided explanations that the hierarchical binary opposition within the discourse of disobedient children in Malin Kundang does not produce a fully stable moral meaning. The contradictions, tensions, and ambivalences exist within the discourse itself (Martínez Aguilar et al., 2025). In deconstruction, contradiction, tensions and ambivalences do not appear as the weakness of the text,

but an innate characteristic of the text. Derrida's approach shows how the meaning is never fully fixed as the internal contradictions always exist within the text (Hepburn, 2026). The internal contradictions appear in four internal aspects of discourse: the mother, the disobedient child, and the function of punishment.

The first contradiction appears in the representation of the mother. At the beginning of the story, the mother is constructed as the archetypical figure of the mother that loves, nurtures and protects her child. Her high-moral standing characteristics establish moral authority and prepare the reader to sympathize with her position. However, this image becomes unstable in the end of the narrative when her love is transformed into a curse. The mother, who is initially associated with affection and protection, eventually becomes the source of the curse and punishment. Even if this does not erase her disappointment of her son's rejection, this ending complicates her moral position. The tale presents the curse as justice, yet the curse also reveals how parental authority can become punitive and violent. Inadvertently, the discourse transforms parental love into parental curse. It forces children into filial obedience in fear of this curse.

The second tension lies in the construction of Malin as the disobedient child. The structure of the discourse constructs Malin's disobedience as fixed and final, as he refuses to recognize his mother after gaining wealth and social status. However, the narrative also shows that his departure from home is initially motivated by poverty and the desire to improve his life. His social mobility is therefore ambivalent: it marks his success, while at the same time producing anxiety about being excluded from his current class status. The story condemns Malin's rejection of his mother, but it does not fully explore the social and psychological conditions that make such rejection possible. The narrative never gives Malin a voice to speak from his perspective; the exclusion is essential to the story's structure. Consequently, Malin's voice is marginalized, while his guilt is made fixed and final.

Furthermore, contradiction emerges in the function of punishment. The resolution of the folktale presents Malin's transformation into stone as the natural consequence of his moral transgression. This ending seems to restore moral order by confirming that children must respect their parents. However, the punishment also raises a crucial problem. If moral education is completed through curse and destruction, then the folktale not only teaches respect but also normalizes fear as a mechanism of moral formation. The moral message becomes dependent on violence, and obedience is produced not through understanding, but through the threat of punishment. Inadvertently, the discourse of disobedient children produces a fear-based discipline that relies on threat and physical punishment (Pagán, 2025).

The contradiction that exists within the structure shows that the discourse of disobedient children is not as stable as it seems. The mother is both a victim and a figure of destructive authority. Malin is both a guilty child and a subject shaped by poverty, shame, and social transformation. Punishment is both moral closure and a form of violence. Through these tensions, the text opens itself to deconstructive reading. The meaning of disobedience can no longer be reduced to a simple lesson that children must obey their parents. Instead, the tale exposes the instability of obedience, authority, punishment, and moral truth within the parent-child relationship.

3.4. Différance and the Shifting Meaning of *Durhaka* (disobedience)

After showing the contradictions, tensions, and ambivalences within the text. The next step of deconstructive reading is showing the *différance*. *Différance* is a Derridean concept that shows how the meaning of language is never fixed, as it is always in a state of differ and defer (Derrida, 1997; Hepburn, 2026). The *différance* is shown in the central point of the discourse: *durhaka* (disobedience).

The contradictions and ambivalences within Malin Kundang show that the meaning of *durhaka* is not fixed. In the dominant moral reading, *durhaka* is understood as the child's disobedience toward the parent, especially the refusal to recognize, respect, and honor the mother (Sugiarti et al., 2023). This meaning appears stable because the story is structured that way: it constructs the mother as a figure of high moral authority and ends with divine punishment that confirms the child's guilt and the mother's moral authority. However, through Derrida's concept of *différance*, the meaning of *durhaka* can be seen as continuously shifting rather than final. It is produced through its relation to other meanings that are delayed, excluded, or suppressed within the discourse.

The shifting meaning of *durhaka* appears within the position of the mother. In the dominant discourse, the mother is placed outside the possibility of wrongdoing because she is constructed as

morally superior and as the victim. Her suffering gives moral weight to her prayer, and Malin's punishment is presented as a form of justice. However, when her prayer becomes a curse that leads to the destruction of her child, the meaning of *durhaka* begins to move. If *durhaka* is understood as a failure to fulfill ethical responsibility within the parent-child relationship, then the term may not belong exclusively to the child. The mother's curse complicates the moral hierarchy because it transforms maternal pain into destructive authority. She refuses dialogue, forgiveness, and moral repair for her child's wrongdoing. Therefore, the meaning of *durhaka* can also be attached to the mother as a disobedient parent who fails to establish mutual recognition with her son.

Through the analysis of *différance*, *durhaka* as a sign contains a meaning that is always delayed and dependent on other possible meanings. It can signify disobedience of the child (Malin Kundang), but it can also signify the denial of dialogue, forgiveness, and mutual recognition from the mother (Mande Rubayah). Through its structure, the narrative attempts to close this instability through the curse, yet this closure is never complete since it leaves unresolved questions: Is obedience meaningful when it is produced through fear? Can moral education be considered humane if its final form is curse and destruction? Can the parent-child relationship be called moral when only one side is allowed to define truth? When the questions are raised, the meaning of *durhaka* loses its original significance.

3.5. Supplementary Interpretation: Towards Parent-Child Mutual Recognition

After the dominant moral reading of Malin Kundang is disrupted, the tale can be opened to a supplementary interpretation. Supplementary interpretation is not simply an additional meaning placed outside the text. Instead, it is a secondary or marginal meaning that reveals the incompleteness of the dominant interpretation (Hepburn, 2026). In this context, supplementary reading does not reject the conventional moral lesson that children should respect their parents. Instead, it expands the tale by showing that the discourse of disobedient children also includes questions about authority, punishment, fear, recognition, and the silencing of the child's voice.

This paper interprets Malin Kundang as a narrative about the instability of moral authority. The dominant reading places Malin as the only guilty subject and the mother as the moral center whose moral rightness cannot be questioned. However, the deconstructive reading shows that this hierarchy is not fully stable. The archetypical characteristic of the mother is real, but the curse that turns Malin into stone shows that the mother transgresses her morality. Similarly, Malin's refusal to acknowledge his mother is ethically problematic, but his action may also be read in a complex social and economic situation. Therefore, the tale does not produce a single moral truth; it produces a contested moral space.

The recognition of this contested moral space allows the discourse of disobedient children to move beyond a one-directional moral judgment. *Durhaka* is no longer limited to the child's failure to obey the parent. It becomes a more complex sign that may refer to the parent's failure of recognition, collapse of dialogue, and misuse of authority. In other words, parental authority should also be questioned when, in the end of the story, it denies forgiveness and chooses divine punishment. This reading does not mean that the traditional moral reading of Malin Kundang is wrong. Rather, it argues that such reading is incomplete when it ignores the unequal hierarchy that structures the discourse. The supplementary interpretation aims to transform the tale from a fear-based lesson about obedience into a more inclusive and critical moral education text.

3.6. Towards Inclusive and Critical Moral Education

Shier calls for inclusive children's moral education. He argues that education should include children's voices as they are the main subject of the education (Shier, 2019). Malin Kundang is the representation of the children. His failure to acknowledge his mother is a fear-based reminder for children to always obey their parents. Malin must be voiceless because he is positioned as the guilty object of judgment. This structure implies that children themselves are not given a voice in their education.

Critical classroom reading can reopen this structure by asking students not only what Malin did wrong, but why the narrative gives little space for his perspective. This is not to say that Malin is justified in rejecting his mother. Rather, learners should be encouraged to see moral conflict as complex and relational. By discussing poverty, shame, social mobility, and family recognition, students learn that moral failure is usually embedded in broader social and psychological conditions.

A critical approach also enables students to question the moral position of parental authority. Mande Rubayah's suffering is at the heart of the emotional structure of the tale, but her curse also raises ethical questions about punishment, forgiveness, and moral repair. If the story is used as a moral teaching, teachers should not only stress that children should respect parents but also reflect on whether punishment by destruction is a desirable form of moral resolution. This discussion helps learners understand that authority is inseparable from responsibility, care, and dialogue. Parental authority is not discarded in this sense, but rather rethought as an ethical relationship which must also be open to reflection.

This reading aligns more closely with the spirit of SDG 4, particularly the aim of promoting inclusive, equitable, and quality education (UNESCO, 2017; United Nations, 2015). Moral education should not simply reproduce inherited norms as fixed truths but rather enable learners to develop the capacity to question, interpret, and respond ethically to cultural narratives. The folktale of Malin Kundang can still be used as an educational text, but it should be taught in a way that encourages critical participation.

Thus, an inclusive and critical moral education does not discard the traditional value of respect for parents. Instead, it takes that value and makes it a more dialogical and humane ethical lesson. Respect is not only fear of curse or punishment, but mutual recognition between parents and children. The story of Malin Kundang can be reread not only as a story of a disobedient child, but also as a cultural text that teaches the importance of listening, forgiveness, responsibility, and ethical dialogue. Thus, Indonesian folktales remain a form of moral education, but one that also facilitates critical literacy, children's agency, and more equal parent-child relations. This paper terms it Critical Folklore Literacy: a classroom method that pairs canonical moral tales with structured critical-discussion protocols as a concrete pedagogical innovation for improving the quality of moral and character education.

3.7. Critical Folklore Literacy: An Innovation for Inclusive and Critical Moral Education

Beyond its contribution to literary and pedagogical theory, this reading carries direct implications for education policy and sustainable development planning in Indonesia. It offers Critical Folklore Literacy as an innovation in how moral education is delivered in the classroom. This model is intended to replace the traditional fear-based transmission with a critical discussion model in a way that can improve learning quality. This critical approach aligns with the mandate of character education in the Profil Pelajar Pancasila (Pancasila Student Profile), which requires critical reasoning, empathy, and student independence as core competencies.

As stated in the research background, Malin Kundang is widely used by researchers in teaching moral education, especially regarding filial piety. The folktale is also used as reading material in elementary and junior high school curricula. It is positioned as an informal but influential cultural legacy of Indonesia for character-building. The reading of Malin Kundang has created urgency for a transformational stance of how this folktale is taught. If left untransformed, the fear-based framing of parental authority contradicts the mandate of character education curricula and sustainable education mandated in SDG 4.

Critical Folklore Literacy is implemented to create emancipation for the students (children). In this model, children's voice and agency matter in their own process of education. Learners are positioned as critical co-investigators of the narrative to establish emancipatory education (Freire, 1970). Critical literacy is positioned as an orientation toward understanding the relation of power embedded in the text (Janks, 2013). In practice, critical literacy can be guided with questions regarding the missing perspective, alternative solutions, and power structure, such as:

1. Whose perspective is missing in the story?
2. What would be a fairer resolution between Malin and his mother?
3. Why is the mother's curse problematic?

The questions pave the way for critical-literacy interventions that shift learners' interpretive stances from fear-based moral transmission to critical and inclusive moral teaching. The act of questioning is important in understanding the non-neutrality of text, reading from a different perspective and offering an alternative one, and identifying socio-political issues within the text (Novianti, 2021; Seban & Çelik, 2026).

For curriculum developers, textbook writers, and teacher-training institutions under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, this study suggests three concrete steps: (1) accompanying canonical disobedient-child folktales in teaching materials with discussion guides that foreground dialogue, empathy, and children's agency rather than punishment and fear; (2) incorporating critical-reading protocols for folklore into pre-service and in-service teacher training, so that educators can mediate these narratives without reproducing fear-based discipline; and (3) referencing these revised materials in regional education roadmaps that feed into Bappenas' RPJMN, so that progress toward SDG 4 Targets 4.7 and 4.a can be tracked. These steps translate the deconstructive reading offered in this article into an actionable, planning-relevant intervention rather than a purely literary exercise.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the discourse of *anak durhaka* in *Malin Kundang* is not merely a literary representation of filial disobedience, but a cultural and educational discourse that produces particular forms of moral knowledge. Through repeated circulation in families, schools, and cultural practices, the narrative constructs a specific understanding of authority, obedience, punishment, and children's moral position. The deconstructive reading reveals that this knowledge structure is not neutral or fixed; rather, it is sustained through hierarchical relations that privilege parental authority while marginalizing children's voices. By exposing these contradictions, this study shows that moral education based solely on fear and unquestioned obedience may limit critical reflection, dialogue, and children's agency.

The study contributes to education policy and sustainable development planning by highlighting that curriculum and character education should consider not only what values are transmitted but also how educational texts construct knowledge, authority, and social relations. The proposed Critical Folklore Literacy approach provides a framework for transforming folklore from a mechanism of moral transmission into a medium for critical and inclusive learning. This approach does not reject the cultural value of filial respect; instead, it reconstructs respect through dialogue, empathy, mutual recognition, responsibility, and ethical reflection.

From a sustainable development planning perspective, Critical Folklore Literacy represents a culturally grounded educational innovation that connects local narratives with broader goals of inclusive and transformative education. By reconsidering how cultural discourses shape knowledge and moral understanding, education planning can move beyond improving access and infrastructure toward addressing the deeper processes through which values, identities, and social relations are reproduced. Future research involving teachers, students, and curriculum implementation is needed to examine how this framework can be operationalized within educational systems and contribute to long-term SDG 4 implementation.

Limitations

While this study has addressed the importance of transforming the traditional reading and moral teaching of traditional folklore, it has not evaluated existing educational policies, textbooks, or curriculum implementation practices in Indonesia. Further research is needed to investigate how folklore-based critical literacy approaches can be integrated into formal education systems, including through classroom studies, teacher-training evaluations, textbook analysis, and policy implementation research. Such studies would provide empirical evidence on how transforming cultural narratives can contribute to the broader goals of inclusive education and SDG 4 implementation.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

The authors declare that generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript. The use of AI was limited to supporting language improvement, grammar checking, and enhancing the clarity and readability of the manuscript. The authors remain fully responsible for the originality, accuracy, interpretation of data, arguments presented, and final content of the article. No generative AI tool was used to replace the authors' intellectual contributions, conduct the research analysis, generate research findings, or make scientific conclusions.

Author Contributions

The author contributions were distributed among the four authors as follows. Author One contributed to the conceptualization of the study, development of the research framework, literature review, methodology design, data analysis, and initial manuscript preparation. Author Two contributed to data collection, application of the theoretical framework, textual analysis, interpretation of findings, and manuscript revision. Author Three contributed to validation of the analysis, critical review of the manuscript, refinement of theoretical discussions, and improvement of the research arguments. Author Four contributed to supervision, research coordination, project administration, final manuscript editing, and approval of the final version. All authors participated in reviewing the manuscript and approved the final version for publication.

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