



Moral Development of Child Protagonists in Perrault's Fairy Tales: A Kohlbergian Analysis

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Article History	ABSTRACT
Received: 03-01-2026 Accepted: 08-06-2026 Published: 21-08-2026	Background: Fairy tales play an important role in shaping children's character because they contain moral values that reflect stages of moral development. Purpose: This study aims to analyze the stages of moral development in children in Charles Perrault's fairy tales using Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Method: This study uses a qualitative design with a content analysis approach based on literature review. Data were sourced from two selected fairy tales in <i>Contes de Perrault</i>, <i>Le Petit Chaperon Rouge</i> and <i>Le Petit Poucet</i>, which feature children as the main characters. Data collection techniques were carried out through text reading and note-taking of narratives containing moral values. The data were analyzed by classifying the findings into levels and types of moral development according to Kohlberg's theory. Results and Discussion: The results show that both fairy tales contain two levels of Kohlberg's moral development with different variations. Differences in the complexity of the storyline and the maturity of the main characters influence the diversity of moral values found. This study fills a gap in research by showing that classic French fairy tales are not only narrative in nature, but also systematically represent the stages of children's moral development. Conclusions and Implications: This study concludes that Charles Perrault's fairy tales are relevant as a medium for studying children's moral development. These findings imply the use of classic fairy tales as a source of moral learning and open up opportunities for further research on other children's literature.
Keywords:	<i>Moral Development; Kohlberg's Theory; Children's Literature; French Fairy Tales; Charles Perrault.</i>
	ABSTRAK

Latar Belakang: Dongeng berperan penting dalam pembentukan karakter anak karena mengandung nilai moral yang mencerminkan tahapan perkembangan moral.

Tujuan: Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis tahapan perkembangan moral anak dalam dongeng karya Charles Perrault menggunakan teori perkembangan moral Kohlberg.

Metode: Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif dengan pendekatan *content analysis* berbasis kajian pustaka. Data bersumber dari dua dongeng terpilih dalam *Contes de Perrault*, yaitu *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge* dan *Le Petit Poucet*, yang menampilkan tokoh utama anak-anak. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui penyimakan teks dan pencatatan narasi bermuatan nilai moral. Data dianalisis dengan mengklasifikasikan temuan ke dalam level dan tipe perkembangan moral menurut teori Kohlberg.

Hasil dan Pembahasan: Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kedua dongeng mengandung dua level perkembangan moral Kohlberg dengan variasi tipe yang berbeda. Perbedaan kompleksitas alur cerita dan kematangan watak tokoh utama memengaruhi keragaman nilai moral yang ditemukan. Penelitian ini mengisi celah kajian dengan menunjukkan bahwa dongeng klasik Prancis tidak hanya bersifat naratif, tetapi juga merepresentasikan tahapan perkembangan moral anak secara sistematis.

Kesimpulan dan Implikasi: Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa dongeng karya Charles Perrault relevan sebagai media kajian perkembangan moral anak. Temuan ini berimplikasi pada pemanfaatan dongeng klasik sebagai sumber pembelajaran moral dan membuka peluang penelitian lanjutan pada karya sastra anak lainnya.

Kata Kunci

Perkembangan Moral; Teori Kohlberg; Sastra Anak; Dongeng Prancis; Charles Perrault;



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INTRODUCTION

Children's literature must remain a bearer of elevated ideas about humanity—it should shape and inspire moral values (kindness, gentleness, generosity, sensitivity, empathy, simplicity, modesty) and foster attitudes essential to any meaningful formative process.[1] Examples of writers using reading to reflect on their own lives and connect themselves sympathetically to wider humanity are legion. Books gave these children what they needed to develop wide knowledge of the world; imagination, tenacity, and natural talent did the rest.[2]

Children's books have a long history around the world, and they have absorbed into themselves elements from folk, fairy tale, and oral tradition.[3] One such work is the fairy tales by Charles Perrault. Charles Perrault (12 January 1628 – 16 May 1703) was a French author, literary theoretician, member of the *Académie Française*, an influential figure in the 17th century French literary scene and he is known as the man who invented the modern fairy tale genre.[4] According to *Pusat Bahasa*, Fairy tales are stories that did not really happen or are made up. One of the intrinsic elements of fairy tales is that they contain a moral message. Therefore, fairy tales can be used as a medium to shape children's characters because they contain moral values that children can learn from.[5]

Analysis of moral development aspects and levels from Kohlberg's theory has been used in moral analysis in various works of children's literature. This can be seen from the results of research

by Biskin & Hoskisson, in their analysis of the children's storybook "Be Nice to Josephine", by taking the moral issue of "obligation" as the scope of analysis in the storybook. Then, Casey's study analyzed 25 children's picture books to determine the moral conflicts that could be identified to determine whether the question-and-answer process could be used by teachers to expand the development of children's moral reasoning abilities when conflicts in stories were described and could spark discussions about moral problem-solving behavior. Research using the same theory in the analysis of children's books can also be found in Hardwick's study to investigate the decline in moral and ethical behavior among adolescents in many public-school environments.

These various analyses show satisfactory results in applying Kohlberg's moral development theory to examine the moral values found in children's literature. However, previous studies have primarily focused on contemporary children's books, picture books, or educational contexts, while analyses of classical French fairy tales using Kohlberg's theory remain limited. In particular, studies examining the moral development portrayed by child protagonists in Charles Perrault's *Contes de Perrault* are still scarce. Considering the enduring influence of Perrault's fairy tales on children's literature worldwide, further investigation is needed to understand how moral values are represented through the actions and reasoning of child characters.

Therefore, the aim of this study aims to explore the potential that can be found in the French fairy tale collection "*Contes de Perrault*" published by "*La Martinière Jeunesse*" in 1998, where out of the eight stories presented, there are two fairy tales that portray children as the main characters in the story, namely "*Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*" and "*Le Petit Poucet*". In line with the theory underlying this study, Kohlberg's moral development theory focuses on identifying the potential and values inherent in topics directly related to children. Therefore, this theory serves as a tool for examining the moral values present in the two-fairy tales by Charles Perrault.

These works have been translated and published all over the world, and in consequence are almost certainly better known than any other French work. Yet in literary history they are largely neglected, and most people who know the tales would not recognize his name.^[6] This study is expected to contribute to the development of children's literature, particularly in terms of moral values. This study will analyze the classification of moral values according to Kohlberg's theory in the main characters of two selected fairy tales in the book "*Contes de Perrault*," which is expected to enrich our understanding of how children's literature incorporates moral values into children at different stages of development. The large number of fairy tales that feature children as the main characters of the story has the concept that children have their own way of thinking to understand what moral values are.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Values and morals are two different concepts that are often used interchangeably.^[7] Morality is a person's general standard regarding behavior that is considered right or wrong. Most children exhibit more moral and appropriate behavior as they get older.^[8] Lawrence Kohlberg, An expert in moral education, said that a child's moral development is closely related to the way a child thinks. This means that a child's ability to see, observe, estimate, think, guess, consider, and judge will influence their moral development.^[9]

Children's thinking is influenced by the activities they engage in, and the use of children's literature to stimulate moral thinking and moral development has great potential. Moral thinking is slightly different from other types of thinking. According to Kohlberg, the assumptions underlying moral development are the same as those underlying cognitive development.^[10] It is further explained that the stages of moral character development in a story and the moral issues in the story must be identified. As a model, the authors use Kohlberg's stages of moral development and the procedures he developed for content analysis. A literary text can be evaluated in terms of many

different perspectives; moral values, national values and behaviours, elements that will help history, individual-psychological and social-psychological values for the reader of later times have been listed among these.[11]

Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Kohlberg categorizes moral development into three levels, and each level is divided into two types, resulting in a total of six stages. Each stage has distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from the others.[12] Six types of moral judgment were defined after extensive case study.[13] Three levels, each covering two types of moral development, are a continuation of the types in each level to show the interrelationship of moral development types from the simplest (level 1) to the most complex (level 3).

Level I (Pre-moral) includes Type 1, which is oriented towards punishment and obedience, and Type 2, which relates to naive instrumental hedonism. Level II (Morality of Conventional Role-Conformity) includes Type 3, which describes the morality of children in maintaining relationships and the approval of others, while Type 4 focuses on morality that maintains authority. Finally, Level III (Morality of Self-Accepted Moral Principles) includes Type 5, which emphasizes contract morality and democratically accepted laws, and Type 6, which reflects the morality of individual conscience principles.

The correlation between the three levels affects moral maturity between the other levels. Explained according to Kohlberg (as expressed in Hanafiah) [12], Individual development in achieving moral maturity involves six stages. It is important to note that these types are considered a universal process, experienced by every child. Although the order and timing of achieving these types may vary between individuals, moral development usually follows the same sequence. The categories mentioned are used to classify data in research.

Kohlberg proposed sequence of stages must have logical as well as empirical support.[14] Moral Type 1 has characteristics similar to Piaget's heteronomous concept, such as a focus on consequences rather than intentions, a lack of awareness of the relativity of values, and a definition of truth as obedience to authority. Moral Type 2 is characterized by the emergence of individualistic hedonism from increasingly developed cognitive differentiation. From a developmental perspective, Type 2 morality, which is based on needs and reciprocity, reflects both cognitive advance and a firmer internal basis of judgments than does the Type 1 morality.

In terms of motivation, this second level is where behavior is controlled by the anticipation of praise and reprimands, characterized by certain cognitive and motivational traits. Cognitively, moral judgment at this level is demonstrated through moral stereotypes, intentionalism, and positive, active, and empathetic moral definitions. On the Motivational behavior side is influenced by sensitivity to anticipated approval or disapproval and identification with authority and its goals. Kohlberg explains that all these characteristics indicate that moral judgment at this level is based on role-taking. In both Type 3 and Type 4, respect for rules is based on respect for an organized social order. For Type 3, this order is primarily defined by the relationship between the good or "natural" self, while for Type 4, this order is more defined by rights, assigned duties, and rules.

At the final level, Kohlberg explains that Type 5 and 6 children accept the possibility of conflict between norms, and they try to make "rational" decisions between conflicting norms. This is most clearly seen in Type 6 children who try to choose based on moral principles rather than moral rules. Type 5 defines right and wrong based on legal or institutional rules that are considered to have a rational basis.

Kohlberg has demonstrated that growth in moral judgment is a developmental process. It does not occur through the inculcation of rules and virtues by example, advice, or punishment and reward, but through a process of cognitive structuring.[15][16]

Moral Values in Children's Stories

French philosopher and anthropologist Francois Flahault argues that what we know about the situations in which fairy tales are told and the art of storytelling leads to a simple but fundamental conclusion: the function of fairy tales in European oral tradition is to fill time as best as possible with pleasure.[17] Fiction, fundamentally, is not only enjoyable because of the escape it offers; it is also enjoyable because that enjoyment is established as a legitimate goal. The situation of telling and listening to a story (as well as other play or entertainment activities) has a moral quality in the sense that experiencing this situation means, for those who participate, acknowledging de facto that their existence and togetherness are goals in themselves.[17] Flahault also added that shared enjoyment is not only the purpose of fairy tales, but also a prerequisite for their preservation.

Many educational institutions are trapped within the paradigm of transfer of knowledge without being balanced by transfer of values, resulting in a disparity between students' intellectual intelligence and moral maturity.[18] This is precisely why children's stories that convey moral values need to be highlighted more. Children's storybooks not only provide new knowledge – by enriching children's vocabulary and enhancing their communication skills – but also ensure emotional support during problematic circumstances of the life.[19] One of them is in folktale, folktales are a reflection of the lives of communities with interesting mindsets and imaginations. As such, communities find them interesting and learn moral lessons from them.[20] Folktales provide students with a great education in the form of moral values, both directly and indirectly, which teach children moral values.[20] One of the most obvious things fairy tales do is help children understand values. In most fairy tales, good is rewarded and evil is punished. These types of stories help children understand the difference between right and wrong.[21]

Contes de Perrault

As a writer, Charles is an essential contributor to the conflict between ancient and modern literary concerns as well as to the *Académie Française*, a prose writer and historian. Initiator of a new literary form, namely Fairy Tales.[22] Perrault's fairy tales were adapted and inspired by oral tradition, and some were his own creations. His revolutionary idea of transforming folk tales into sophisticated and subtle forms of written literature would later be a source of inspiration for other authors. Today, we associate fairy tales with children's literature, but in Perrault's time, the concept of children's literature did not exist. Thus, we can see that the "moral" of these fairy tales takes on worldly goals, despite the cunning and clever packaging in the fantastic universe of fairies, ogres, and talking animals.[23]

In 1697, Charles Perrault's Little Red Riding Hood was published, and since then, this three-page tale has never been far from bedside tables, libraries, or even classrooms. Since this work has not faded with the passage of time, it goes without saying that it continues to be studied.[24] In the fairy tale Little Red Riding Hood (*Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*), we see that the intentions of the three women (mother, grandmother, and little girl) are good: they are generous and selfless. Therefore, their behavior is pure and simple, and they have high morals. In contrast, for the Wolf (metaphorically representing a "bad" or "cunning" man), the situation is very different. The intentions he displays are cunning and hidden.[25]

While "*Le Petit Poucet*" which is still a classic French fairy tale by Charles Perrault, has a rather dark tone because it contains scenes that are too frightening to show to children. *Petit Poucet* and his brothers are threatened by an ogre, who unintentionally slits the throats of his own daughters, because he thinks they are the boys whom he wants to eat.[26] In Perrault's version, it is explained that Petit Poucet is the youngest of seven siblings. His family lives in poverty. It is not difficult to imagine that our hero is not the most wanted child of his parents, who are 15th-century French people.[27]

Morality is, of course, the ideal place in the text to communicate or suggest the message of the story, or its purpose. The dominant trend in Perrault's conclusions is to evaluate the stakes of the story without referring to a specific socio-historical context. Thus, in "*Le Petit Poucet*" he explains that it is sometimes the one we least expect who proves to be the most successful.[28]

METHOD

Among the eight collections of fairy tales available, two fairy tales were selected in which the main characters or objects in the story are children. Therefore, this study employed a qualitative content analysis design because it enabled the systematic interpretation of textual data to examine the moral values presented in the selected fairy tales. Qualitative research is categorized as research that validates the accuracy of findings and interprets data.[29] Furthermore, content analysis design is used based on a literature review. In content analysis, data is validated in terms of the procedures chosen by researchers to answer specific questions about phenomena in the context of the given text. Therefore, data is created, not discovered, and researchers are obliged to explain how they generated the data.[30] Qualitative content analysis supports interpretation by weaving quotations from the analyzed texts and literature about the context of these texts into their conclusions, by establishing parallels, by performing triangulation, and by unpacking any metaphors they can identify.[31]

The population of this study consisted of the fairy tales in the French-language children's literature collection *Contes de Perrault* by Charles Perrault. The sample consisted of two selected stories, *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge* and *Le Petit Poucet*, which feature children as the protagonist. The protagonist is the main character in a story or other literary work, the character that the reader or audience empathizes with.[32] The researcher analyzed the 1998 edition published by De La Martinière Jeunesse, which includes a moral message at the end of each story.

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the main instrument (human instrument). The researcher is responsible for planning, collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. To assist in the data collection and analysis process, supporting instruments are used in the form of: 1) A table categorizing moral value development based on Kohlberg's theory. 2) A moral value development identification sheet for recording each level and type found. Here, the researcher wants to examine the challenges of moral values through the main characters of children in the collection of fairy tales "*Contes de Perrault*" through Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which includes:

- a. Moral development levels, various narratives that demonstrate moral values in accordance with Kohlberg's theory of moral development in the main characters of the children's stories in the collection "*Contes de Perrault*" will be classified into three levels.
- b. Types of moral development, how the previous aspects in the level grouping category are broken down and identified into types from predetermined levels, where each level has two types that are interrelated with other types even though they are in different level categories: Level I (types 1 & 2), Level II (types 3 & 4), Level III (types 5 & 6).

The data collection technique used was observation and note-taking. The first step began with observing data in the form of a collection of fairy tales from the perspective of child protagonists that contained moral values. The next step is the note-taking technique, which involves identifying each narrative that has been read, which will then be categorized into each level and type according to Kohlberg's moral development theory. The collected data will be recorded in two languages, French and English.

The coding and interpretation processes followed systematic procedures and were verified through triangulation with relevant literature and the theoretical framework, thereby strengthening the credibility of the analysis. The data analysis technique that will be used is Miles & Huberman's qualitative data analysis model through three approaches. 1) Data reduction, 2) Data display, and

3) Conclusion drawing and verification). Therefore, the data analysis techniques used will include the three elements above. Data was collected through a literature review/content analysis of the collection of fairy tales “*Contes de Perrault*”. The results of the relevant sections were then reduced into categories that reflect moral values. The data was presented in the form of tables and annotated transcripts. Conclusions were drawn by identifying the main themes in the data, which were then checked against the theory used.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The basis of this research is grounded in Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral development. Three types of moral development levels are defined, which are then divided into six types, split into two parts in each of the three levels. This theory will analyze the types of moral character found in the main characters of two selected fairy tales from the collection “*Contes de Perrault*”, namely “*Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*” and “*Le Petit Poucet*”.

Le Petit Chaperon Rouge (The Little Red Riding Hood)

Table 1. Moral Development Levels and Types in Literary Texts

No	Data	Moral Level	Moral Type
1			
2	“<i>La pauvre enfant, qui ne savait pas qu’il est dangereux de s’arrêter à écouter un Loup, lui dit :</i> - <i>Je vais voir ma mère-grand, et lui porter une galette avec un petit pot de beurre que ma Mère lui envoie.</i>” (The poor child, who did not know that it was dangerous to stop and listen to the Wolf, replied: - I’m going to visit my grandmother and bring her some cookies and a small bottle of butter that my mother sent her.)	Level II. Morality of Conventional Role-Conformity	Type 3 : Good-boy morality of maintaining good relations, approval of others
3	“<i>Le Petit Chaperon rouge, qui entendit la grosse voix du Loup, eut peur d’abord, mais, croyant que sa mère-grand était enrhumée, répondit :</i> - <i>C’est votre fille, le Petit Chaperon rouge...</i>” (<i>Petit Chaperon Rouge</i>, who heard the wolf’s hoarse voice, was frightened at first, but thinking her grandmother had a cold, she replied: - It’s your granddaughter, <i>Petit Chaperon Rouge</i>.)	Level I. Pre-Moral	Type 1. Punishment and obedience orientation
4	“<i>Le Loup, la voyant entrer, lui dit en se cachant dans le lit sous la couverture :</i> - <i>Mets la galette et le petit pot de beurre sur la huche, et vient te coucher avec moi.</i>	Level I. Pre-Moral Level	

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Le Petit Chaperon rouge se déshabille et va se mettre dans le lit, où elle fut bien étonnée de voir comment sa mère-grand était faite en son déshabille"

(The wolf, seeing her come in, said while hiding under the covers on the bed:

- Put the cake and a bottle of butter on the table, then come to bed with me.

Petit Chaperon Rouge took off her clothes and got into bed, where she was very surprised to see how her grandmother looked in her nightgown.)

Type
Punishment
and
obedience
orientation

1.

Excerpts 1 & 2 have the same level and type, but there are different cognitive characteristics identified in this type. Excerpt 1 has the element of "moral stereotype," which is the definition of goodness based on types of people and the definition of people and roles based on moral virtue. *Petit Chaperon Rouge* sees her role as a child who must obey the wishes or rules of the adults around her whose roles are considered good, such as her mother and grandmother. There is an action that is done voluntarily without coercion, because *Petit Chaperon Rouge* wants to please them. This action shows that there is a relational motivation.

Meanwhile, in excerpt 2, there is an identification of "Sensitivity and self-guidance by anticipated approval or disapproval." At this stage, *Petit Chaperon Rouge's* behavior is a natural process of acting like a good child because the situation she faces requires her to behave in this way, where she is confronted by the Wolf who pretends to be nice. *Petit Chaperon Rouge* only pays attention to how others will respond to her, without seeing the Wolf's hidden intentions.

The identification of moral stereotyping and relational motivation in Excerpt 1 demonstrates that her moral understanding is closely connected to the roles of trusted adults and the desire to fulfill those roles appropriately. Similarly, the sensitivity to anticipated approval or disapproval identified in Excerpt 2 suggests that her behavior is influenced by how others may perceive or respond to her. In *Petit Chaperon Rouge*, the character's moral decisions are largely shaped by interpersonal obligations and established social expectations rather than by independently formulated moral principles. This also corresponds with Hardwick's [33] finding that several research studies have provided evidence of the effectiveness of utilizing children's literature to facilitate instruction in character/values education. In this tale, values such as obedience, trust, and appropriate behavior toward adults are communicated through the character's actions rather than through explicit moral instruction.

Excerpts tables 3 and 4 also have the same level and type. Excerpt 3 shows a brief conversation between *Petit Chaperon Rouge* and the Wolf, who is disguised as her grandmother. Although she initially feels afraid because of the wolf's hoarse voice, *Petit Chaperon Rouge's* innocence shows that she cannot yet read/interpret complex situation.

In excerpts 4, *Petit Chaperon Rouge* does not question or challenge whether the order is suspicious; she obeys it because it comes from someone, she believes to be her grandmother, someone she trusts. At this stage, once again, children are not yet able to assess intentions or the potential for deception behind an order or situation.

The findings in Excerpts 3 and 4 further demonstrate this conventional orientation. *Petit Chaperon Rouge* does not question the suspicious behaviour of the Wolf because she believes that she is interacting with her grandmother. Her inability to recognize the deceptive intention behind the Wolf's behaviour does not necessarily indicate an absence of moral understanding; rather, it

shows that her moral response remains dependent on an established interpersonal role. She obeys because the person giving the instruction is perceived as a trusted authority figure. Thus, her reasoning remains focused on maintaining the expected relationship rather than independently evaluating whether the instruction is morally justified.

Notably, no Level III reasoning was identified in this tale. *Petit Chaperon Rouge's* decisions are grounded in interpersonal expectations, trust, and obedience to familiar social roles. The absence of Level III therefore suggests that the tale primarily represents morality through concrete relationships and socially established expectations rather than through independently chosen moral principles. However, the absence of Level III does not mean that the tale lacks moral conflict or potential for moral reflection. Casey argues that movement to a higher stage requires the experience of conflict or difficulty in the child's attempt to apply his current level of thought to moral problems, it requires an exposure to the next level of thought. It involves a sense of active participation in the social problem-solving process and the opportunity to take the role of others, to see their point of view when it differs from his own.[34] It suggests that moral conflicts in children's literature can provide opportunities for children to discuss the basis of characters' moral decisions and potentially develop higher levels of moral reasoning through exposure to different perspectives. From this perspective, *Petit Chaperon Rouge's* failure to recognize the Wolf's deceptive intention can itself become a meaningful moral problem for discussion. Readers may be encouraged to consider whether obedience to an apparently trustworthy adult should always be sufficient, how intentions can be distinguished from appearances, and whether rules should be followed when a situation appears suspicious.

Le Petit Poucet (Tom Thumb)

Table 2. Moral Development Levels and Types in Literary Texts

No	Data	Moral Level	Moral Type
1	<i>"Il alla se recoucher et ne dormit point le reste de la nuit, songeant à ce qu'il avait à faire. Il se leva de bon matin, et alla au bord d'un ruisseau où il emplit ses poches de petits cailloux blancs, et ensuite revint à la maison. On partit, et le Petit Poucet ne découvrit rien de tout ce qu'il savait à ses frères."</i> (He returned to his bed and couldn't sleep all night, thinking about what he should do. He woke up early in the morning, went to the riverbank, filled his pockets with small white stones, then returned home. They left, and <i>Petit Poucet</i> didn't tell his brothers what he knew.)	Level I. Pre-Moral Level	Type 1: Punishment and obedience orientation
2	<i>"Le Petit Poucet les laissait crier, sachant bien par où il reviendrait à la maison ; car en marchant il avait laissé tomber le long du chemin les petits cailloux blancs qu'il avait dans ses poches. Il leur dit donc : - Ne craignez point, mes frères, mon Père et ma Mère nous ont laissés ici, mais je vous ramènerai bien au logis : suivez-moi seulement."</i> (<i>Petit Poucet</i> let them shout, because he knew for sure the way home; for as he walked, he	Level II. Morality of Conventional Role-Conformity	Type 3 : Good-boy morality of maintaining good relations, approval of others

In this fairy tale, there are five scenes that reveal moral issues in *Petit Poucet* as the main character who plays the role of a child. In excerpt 1, the main character performs a clever act by

devising a strategy for survival. However, here he keeps the information to himself, without the consent of others and without considering moral emotions such as empathy for his siblings, but he is already able to think logically by preparing a strategy.

In excerpts 2 and 3 the same level and type were identified, but with different cognitive characteristics. In excerpt 2, *Petit Poucet* began to show values of responsibility and empathy. Not only did he save himself, but he also calmed his siblings by guiding them home. In this section, the cognitive characteristics typical of Type 3 emerge, namely “Positive, active, and empathetic moral definitions.” *Petit Poucet's* actions in actively providing a solution by leading his siblings along the limestone rocks to return home fostered a sense of security and hope for survival.

In excerpt 3, there are cognitive characteristics typical of type 3, “Moral Stereotyping - Definition of the good in terms of kinds of persons and a definition of persons and roles in terms of moral virtues.” Here, *Petit Poucet* positions himself and his siblings as helpless children in need of help. Conversely, he also considers the Ogre's wife to have a moral role to protect them. This treatment triggers empathy in the ogre's wife and shows respect for social norms by behaving like a good child.

Excerpt 4 presents a particularly important example of moral complexity. *Petit Poucet* exchanges the crowns of the Ogre's children with those of himself and his siblings in an attempt to save them from danger. This finding illustrates a survival/self-protection strategy in which *Petit Poucet* seeks a way to prevent himself and his siblings from being eaten. He takes instrumental action for the sake of himself and his siblings. This is very close to the logic of Type 2 “Naive Instrumental Hedonism,” with the motivation to avoid a bad outcome, specifically an extreme, life-threatening loss. If *Petit Poucet* explicitly risked his life to save his siblings, without sacrificing anyone else, the criteria applied would be more appropriate for Type 3, as this stage involves elements of loyalty, care, and interpersonal expectations. In this case, *Petit Poucet's* actions actually contributed to the deaths of the Ogre's children. This part of the story also cannot be interpreted as an entirely positive moral act.

However, given that the purpose of this fairy tale research is to identify moral categories, as measured by how the child protagonists choose a course of action and evaluate the reasons behind that action, the analysis of the portrayal of moral reasoning in these characters is the focus here. *Petit Poucet's* prioritization of survival and the protection of his immediate interests can be interpreted in line with Type 2 thinking. *Petit Poucet* saved his siblings by deliberately diverting the danger toward the Ogre's daughters; his primary focus, ensuring that they all survived was driven by the fear of being eaten (the ultimate physical punishment or consequence), which triggered a survival instinct that justified any means necessary. The action that led to the death of the Ogre's children was not driven by malicious intent, but purely by the desire to save himself.

In excerpt 5, a prominent motivational factor is identified, namely “Identification with authority and its goals.” This time, *Petit Poucet* is not only oriented towards his own or his family's interests, but has also become part of a larger moral order in his social environment through his role as a bearer of important news who serves the community around where he lives. This indicates that his awareness of social obligations and authority (king, state, community, and family) is beginning to take shape.

The absence of Level III in *Petit Poucet* can therefore be understood in relation to the nature of the moral reasoning represented by the character. Despite the increasing complexity of his decisions, *Petit Poucet's* moral judgments remain grounded in immediate interests, interpersonal relationships, social roles, and established authority. His later recognition of obligations to the king and community represents an expansion toward broader social responsibility, but it remains oriented toward maintaining an existing social order, corresponding to Type 4 rather than the self-accepted principles associated with Level III.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In both fairy tales, two levels of Kohlberg's moral development were identified with various types emerging. The moral reasoning depicted remains within Levels I (Pre-moral) and II (Morality of Conventional Role-Conformity). To date, no part of the story has been found that shows moral development at the highest level of level 3 (Morality of Self-Accepted Moral Principles). The identification of moral development in both fairy tales is mainly seen in the plot and the main characters. *Le Petit Poucet* presents a long and complex plot from the beginning, with a more diverse setting and characters, resulting in more mature and varied moral values in Kohlberg's stages of moral development. In contrast, *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge* has a simpler plot and characters, but still presents important moral values for children, particularly those related to obedience, sincerity, and honesty.

Pedagogically, these moral conflicts can be used as discussion prompts to encourage children to consider intentions, consequences, different perspectives, and alternative moral choices. However, this study is limited to two tales and a single-coder interpretation, which may involve subjective judgments. Future research should examine a broader corpus and involve multiple coders, as well as investigate how children respond to and reason about the moral conflicts presented in these stories.

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