

Research Article

Investigating Children's Moral Development through Folk Elements in Primary Education in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Particularly in elementary school, folklore is a key cultural and teaching instrument that helps children's moral and character development. This study sought (i) to investigate how folk elements support the moral development of primary school children in Bangladesh, (ii) to investigate the variations in the use of folk elements between rural and urban primary schools and their impact on students' ethical values and behavior and (iii) to suggest efficient strategies for including folk elements into the main education curriculum and classroom to improve students' moral and cultural development. Using qualitative approaches, the study included unstructured conversations with guardians, instructors, and students across seven main schools situated in both rural and urban parts of Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions, as well as classroom observations. The findings revealed that rural schools actively include folklore components—including traditional crafts, proverbs, and storytelling—into their curricula, therefore cultivating moral values, emotional ties with families, and student creativity. On the other hand, urban schools showed in the elementary level their use of folk elements with limited use of folklore in the upper level (classes 3, 4, and 5), mostly focusing on academic achievements and technological integration, resulting in a lack of moral development among learners compared to rural pupils. Structural changes, enhanced library resources, folklore-based projects, and guardian awareness campaigns to protect the cultural legacy and inculcate moral values among students constitute recommendations. This study exposes the latent potential of folklore education to produce a balanced and culturally sensitive generation for the next generation.

Keywords: Folklore, Primary Education, Moral Development, Cultural Heritage, Teaching Methodology

How to cite this article:

Rahman MH, Khatun S, Parul RS, Rahman MM. Investigating Children's Moral Development through Folk Elements in Primary Education in Bangladesh. Research Journal of Education and Advanced Literature. 2025;4(5):1-12

Source of support: Nil.

Conflict of interest: None

DOI: doi.org/10.58924/rjeal.v4.iss5.p6

Received: 12-10-2025

Revised: 15-10-2025

Accepted: 26-10-2025

Published: 14-11-2025



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1. Introduction

One of the most important features of personality development is moral growth. Thus, education's and society's main responsibilities are these. Social growth comes first, then moral development. A socially maladjusted person develops immoral behavior either from another disturbance of their social development. Morality is composed of values or guidelines controlling human behavior.

When we consider the teaching of children, we naturally expect and consider folk components. The people of a nation reflect its culture and legacy (Das and Lenka 2009). It is impossible to

ignore the value of folk aspects in our daily lives. Through folk features such as storytelling, tales, humor, oral tradition, myths, etc., a child can develop their moral side during their early years. In this sense, a child's moral growth is much influenced by family, institution, and society. Among the social institutions is the school, the finest location for a child to gain the most.

Children's moral, cognitive, and other intellectual growth depends much on folk aspects. Important in the evolution of values, ethical, cultural, religious, and intellectual life in children, folk stories give moral direction/suggestions to them (Amali, 2014). They show the rise of morals, lifestyle trends, and the triumph of good over evil (Stavrou, 2015). From the above-mentioned, it is abundantly evident that children's moral education and folk aspects are strongly connected. Moral education with folk components essentially makes education quite resourceful. With so many folk traditions, stories, proverbs, and rituals handed down through the years, Bangladesh has a rich cultural scene (Folklore, B. 1957). These traditional components are sources of ethical knowledge in addition to stores of cultural identity. They contain ageless teachings about morality, compassion, and societal responsibility. Though the Bangladesh education policy 2010 prioritized the moral and spiritual development of children, as well as their physical and cognitive growth (Ministry of Education, 2010), and this priority has been emphasized in the 2022 educational curriculum (Tasnim, 2024). But the current decision to revert to the 2012 curricula is not so much concerned with the integration of folk elements in the curricula of primary education. Given the great possibility of integration of folk elements in promoting moral development of the students, it is urgently necessary to look at how these elements might be included in the main education system to help the children of the nation grow morally and ethically. There is extensive literature on folk elements and education, but there is a lack of existing literature on how the primary education system can use folk elements to develop the moral education of the students (Table 1).

From this perspective, the main objective of this study is to investigate the children's moral development by folk elements in primary education in Bangladesh. This involves

1. To explore how folk elements (e.g., storytelling, proverbs, and traditional practices) contribute to the moral development of primary school children in Bangladesh.
2. To examine the differences in the use of folk elements between rural and urban primary schools and their impact on students' ethical values and behavior.
3. To recommend effective strategies for integrating folk elements into the primary education curriculum and classroom to enhance students' moral and cultural development.

Literature Review

Folklore through folktales, proverbs, and songs serves as a tool by which culture, social attitudes, and values are passed on from one generation to the next. This review divides the literature into four categories: folk elements in formal education, folktales as moral and ethical interpretations, folk literature in establishing national/heritage identity, and challenges in implementing folklore in modern curricula.

Conventional Elements in Formal Education

Formalizing traditional content in the curriculum ensures that children learn about their own and other people's heritage and identities in a familiar frame of reference. Razzak (2022) highlights the benefits of integrating folklore, songs, and customs into the primary schools of Bangladesh. These characteristics foster an intense loyalty among people to their national identity. Amali (2014), in her interest in Sepedi language institutions in South Africa, highlights the enduring value of folktales in developing 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and communication. Educational narratives, which are culturally embedded in the form of stories, teach students practical knowledge and societal messages reflecting their real lives.

Penjore (2005) reports on a situation in Bhutan where adolescents who were not receiving institutional education access folktales that offer moral lessons from everyday life. Instead, they act as an alternative to schooling, communicating sophisticated concepts and moral instruction through the oral tradition.

Folk Literature as Moral and Ethical Thought

A multitude of research has verified that folktales work as a channel of moral values. Doley (2014) also takes a look at missing folktales in India and hopes they impact the moral development of youth. The article also tries to make a point concerning key features such as collaboration, empathy, and solidarity within an evolutionary perspective, and may speculate about the erosion of ethical norms in a recent period, which may be associated with a weakening of close connection to oral traditions, at least in specific social settings. Almerico (2014) argues for character development through children's literature, but also denounces flat use of general folklore. She suggests that folk tales and oral storytelling would introduce deeper-set morality.

In a sweeping review of global systems of education, Ahmed (2020) challenges the nationalist orientation of the school curriculum, arguing that such structures more often than not overshadow the development of transcendent values. If not exactly focused on traditional lore, his research shows that folktales – usually based in humanistic and moral corners – can also operate as a potent antidote to violent ideological conditioning.

Folk Literature and Cultural Development

Folklore plays a great role in forming ethnic character, especially in early childhood. These elements are crucial to formulating genesis narratives and shaping group consciousness.

Challenges of Introducing Folklore in Modern Education

Despite its pedagogical benefits, the integration of folklore into contemporary curricula is not without its problems. Ahmed (2020) explains that the national curriculum often emphasizes conformity and national identity at the expense of diversity and inclusivity.

The fact that folklore has long been undervalued as a knowledge system in the academy continues to provide a barrier to its inclusion in the curriculum.

The study gaps

The enrollment of children in primary schools is increasing. A significant portion of a student's time is allocated to school. When considering quality, the initial aspect that arises is ethics and moral values. Educational institutions serve as the primary avenue for imparting ethics and morality; yet, educators, parents, and guardians compel children to maintain a distance from cultural aspects to achieve academic excellence, secure distinguished employment, and reside in urban or international settings. Educators assert that Bangladesh's educational system lacks the study of ethics and moral education (citation). Parents and instructors are often apprehensive about their children's future due to the pupils' deficiency in values, ethics, and attitudes mandated by society and the state. Furthermore, contemporary primary school kids are deprived of the knowledge imparted by previous generations, as well as their own cultural heritage, resulting in a greater disparity in knowledge and moral/ethical understanding compared to pupils of earlier eras. The primary research purpose is to examine guidelines for enhancing learners' moral values through the integration of folk components in the primary school curriculum and classroom practices.

Originality of the Research

This study analyzes the present condition of folk elements that significantly influence children's values, ethics, and moral development. The findings indicate that integrating additional traditional components into urban classrooms could enhance moral development for pupils in those regions. This would foster ethical conduct, cultural understanding, and societal ideals, ultimately resulting in more knowledgeable and honorably conscious persons.

Materials and Methods

This research's philosophical foundation is a qualitative study. Descriptive and qualitative research methodologies have been discovered to be crucial in the exploration of folk elements in Bangladesh's primary education. Data collection and data analysis have been classified into two categories. Before data collection, we reviewed relevant papers and set the goal and objectives. Depending on the aim and objectives, we selected the participants of the research.

Our respondents were primary schools, school students, teachers (interview), and students' guardians (FGD). The sites of the research were 7 primary schools, 4 in the Division of Rajshahi and 3 in the Rangpur Division (2 in the Kurigram Zilla and one in the Panchagarh Zilla). We visited all the schools and noticed all sides. And, a random selection approach We were used there for data collection, Respondents, and area selection. the schools are selected by a convenience approach depending on the research objectives and goals. Additionally, we nominated those schools based on our familiarity.

Sample size:

- Observation class 1-5
- Teachers (interview- 7 schools+ 5 classes= per class 1 teacher= 28+ (include headteacher 7). Some teachers handle multiple classes; for this kind of situation, we selected our preferred sample 28 because class 1+2, the maximum time 1 teacher covers classes.
- Parents- 35 for FDG. And per school guardians (5*7) = 35.

We used a two-class observation and an unstructured discussion method, depending on the goal and objectives.

Class Observation Method:

In the morning, the researcher joined the school classroom. Before attending the class, permission was obtained from the headmaster and also the class teacher who would conduct that class. At the same time, they were informed about the research goal and objectives, and assurance was given that the presence in the classroom would not disrupt the teaching and learning process. The first presence to the students was as a stranger, and it was observed that they felt hesitant. But after a certain period, the situation was managed, considering knowledge of child education and the capability to deal with children in any situation. After finishing the class, the students rushed out to do other work, and the researcher also joined with them until the next session started. After finishing the class, the teacher was thanked, and it was informed that, as a perception, chocolates were gifted to the students.

Unstructured Discussion Method

For this research, we used teacher interviews and a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) for parents. We talk with them over the phone and discuss our research objectives and how we will collect the data. After that, on the fixed date, we went to the teachers' room and collected data through interviews. Questions were left open-ended. We did our best to relate their answer to our objectives and goals. After the interview, we showed it to our supervisor, and he pointed out a gap in the interview.

On the other hand, we collected data from parents using the FGD method. To reach the parents, we had previously informed the head teachers of the selected schools about the study and requested them to ensure the presence of parents at the designated time. For parent selection, we randomly chose participants whose children were studying in classes 1 to 5. Additionally, we consistently used a field diary/notebook to document observations within the school premises.

Data Preservation and Data Analysis

For data preservation, we took audio recordings, anotebook, and also took images after being granted permission, and saved all. We organized the data into categories depending on the study's goal. We used an investigation and inductive approach here.

Ethics of the research

Before collecting data from the respondents, we obtained special consent. We gave them full freedom at any time they can stop their dialogue and can offer me no response. After their permission, we took a photo and did an audio recording. We didn't obstruct the teaching and learning. We also assured them that my research will not be harmed.

Results and Discussion

Exploring the state of folk elements in primary education, how teachers are incorporating folk elements in their teaching, and the current state of using folk elements based on subjects was our objective. Besides, we also explored how these folk elements are aiding in developing the moral values in their life. We found from our study that the village schools are using folk elements (storytelling, crafts, proverbs) for their teaching. These styles enhance the capacity for knowledge, the capability of recalling, and thinking among the students. This is explained by Majid's opinion (2001), which states that stories that contain ideas, objectives, imaginations, languages, and language styles are influential in the personal formation of children. Also, these assist in developing the moral values among them. We observed the reason for this fact and we have found that it is as follows:

The adaptation of technology couldn't capture the students in the visited village area. Students of that school expressed their interest in any story to learn something new. Moreover, when a student has an interaction with the teacher by storytelling, he/she feel an emotional connection with the teacher. Many primary pupils in the chosen profession enjoy fine arts, and the cover pages of many children's practice books are in the field of drawing and various animals and individuals. Students adore teachers who will tell stories, jokes, and other rhythms and who encourage youngsters to tell stories of their own, which removes Children's fear of the teachers. It is beneficial in the interaction between teachers and students (Razzak, 2022). As a result, the teachers' teaching of morality affects a child greatly and gradually leads to the child's moral development. The traditional beauty is still present in every village of Bangladesh. In the continuation of that subject of ethics, religion, and social education are taught by folk in their home. When Children are used to this kind of environment, they want the same environment in school. And, if they get this effect positively in growing their mental development, that aligns with moral development.

On the other hand, the folk elements exist in the city's schools, but the usageratio is not as high as in village schools, as they are focused on career-related issues and future jobs. It is said that education is the backbone of a nation, but if it does not have quality education, then that education will be spineless and dangerous for the nation. Education should have two objectives: first, to build up the capacity and skill of the student to cope with globalization, and second, to develop humanism and create citizens who are thoughtful, ethical, respectful of self and other religious, superstition-free, tolerant, patriotic, and active for the development of leadership toward growth. As per child psychologists, primary education is most important because it aims to ensure the development of social, cognitive, cultural, emotional, and physical skills to the best of their abilities. Primary education improves children's awareness and opens opportunities for them. (Kaizer, 2023). It goes without saying that moralizing primary education is essential for building a nation. What children learn during this period of life, they carry with them throughout their lives.

What we have found from our study is that the visited schools in the village area (Rowmari Model Primary School, Ijlamari Primary School, Shikarpur Government Primary School) are

concerned with using folk elements. Especially, teachers teach by different types of stories and use folk elements for students of the pre-primary and class one levels. As well as their textbooks have various moral stories and units, which are part of folklore. The pre-primary and class one levels in the visited schools have different folk paintings in the classroom, and a boundary wall through which they learn. Various moral stories, sports, and storytelling classes help students develop their morals, which reflect in their behavior.

Beyond the village school, we can see different pictures in the city's schools (Darika Mari Govt Primary School, Tero Khadiya Govt Primary School, Sheikh Russell, University School, Agrani School). Here, students are taught based on a test book. Stories are of little importance or use outside the test book. Through interviews with school teachers, one of the reasons behind not using traditional elements outside the use of curriculum-based folk elements is the career-oriented needs of families and the use of technology.

The use of technology has increased everywhere, from families to schools. As a result, individuality is seen among the students of the city, and usually, their focus is on good results in academia. As a result, there is always a sense of competition between them, and there is less understanding of labels among themselves. Inclusively, their ethical aspects are gradually decreasing.

Folklore focuses on the culture, history, and social contexts linked to political, religious, ethnic, regional, and other forms of group identity and gives us wisdom, moral values, patriotism, etc. (self). Because of the spread of social media, the internet, globalization, and colonialism, we have started to adopt Western culture, like their dress code, their food habit, even if we have started to like their song and neglecting our own dress code, foods, songs (Bhatiyali, Bhawaiya, Baul, Murshidi, etc). So folk elements such as folk traditions, folk fairs, folktales, fairy tales, legends, proverbs, rhymes, folk instruments, indigenous knowledge, folk technologies, historical, traditional, socio-cultural, religious, and so on are at risk of extinction. As a result of the industrial revolution, families have become single families, the grandparents are now largely separated from the family, and there is no one to inform the children about the tradition of Bangla, which is why it has almost disappeared. Therefore, to retain the history of Bangla and to impart good moral education, now is the time to make children's folklore education compulsory from the primary level. Folklore is a representation of culture and tradition. It reflects the moral values of a particular culture and society. Folklore as a subject in early school education could be an effective moral education that is devoid of any religious or spiritual sentiment. Folk tales have strong messages of ethics and values because they are lucid and simple explanations. Folklore can produce a feeling and a strong sentiment towards culture and unity. What is more interesting and unique is that this sentiment is devoid of the disadvantages and criticality of patriotism and competitive nationalism. The reason is that folklore is about common human values, and they signify universal characteristics of mankind. They generally signify geographic locations and identities such as land, river, and so on, rather than using names of existing countries and areas.

A good advantage of folklore is that it inspires simple and logical thinking (Hutto, 2012). Since folk tales are about relations of man to nature, this education will make students environmentally conscious, which is very important in the present times. Folktales and folklore provide a greater and deeper insight into life and living. An early education in folklore would be a better preparation for life for any young child. There is always enough for studying tough subjects such as Mathematics and Science. But the best time for folk tales is childhood. On the other hand, the problem with subjects such as Mathematics and Science is that they are not necessary for every student, apart from those who require them professionally. Since Folklore and folk stories are lucid and explanatory, they engage creativity in children.

Recommendations

Folklore is an education that focuses on moral development, increasing knowledge about the golden history of our country, the development of skills, increasing patriotism, and many other

things. For building a great nation, it is obvious that we should include folk culture from the primary level so that they pass it through their lifetime. but unfortunately, Bangladesh's primary education textbooks and course content contain a limited number of folk elements; some textbooks even contain no folk elements at all. For this, the educational institution should take some measures, such as:

Incorporating folk elements in the course content;

In the course content, along with Western literature, there should be our own literature, moral values, culture, society, tradition, etc. This study's academic recommendations include including folk elements in textbooks, assignments about folk elements, homework, practical work, providing guidance, listening, collecting, presenting, and preserving folk elements, as well as mentioning the social, historical, and cultural context of folk elements in textbooks. (Razzak,2022).

Using folk elements as an extra-curricular activity:

Inclusion of folk games in leisure time and in annual sports competitions, prioritizing of folk song, folk literature, and folk elements in co-curricular activities for students.

introduction and conversation with folk artist and organization of folk festival are among the Co-curricular activities recommended by this study.

Creating an environment of folk culture in school:

Representation of folk elements in the school compound, enrichment of the collection of folk elements in the school library, planting of folk medicine trees in front of the school building, use of folk elements in the classroom and play garden decoration, and establishment of a mini museum in the school are some of the structural recommendations made by this study. (Razzak,2022)

Use of AR, MR, and VR technology in folk education:

In the era of modern education, AR (Augmented reality), MR (Mixed reality), and VR (virtual reality) technology must be used in folk education to make education more alive. It can help students build their perception of the object being explored. As a result, students can learn both auditorily and visually. Technology can improve students' thinking and reasoning skills, create collaborative learning, and develop conceptual knowledge.

(The Effects of Integrating Folklore and Mixed Reality toward Students' Cultural Literacy Yunus Abidin1a, Tita Mulyati2a, Yeni Yuniarti3a, Trifalah Nurhuda4)

Aware of folk culture and education:

Various guardian meetings should be organized to make the parents of the children aware of the folk culture and education. As children spend most of their time with their parents after school, these meetings will develop folk culture not only in school but also at home. Implementation of the following guidelines will surely develop the socio-cultural, moral, and traditional improvement of children, and at the same time, folk culture will be protected from extinction.

Model for Moral Development through Folk elements for primary school children

Table 2: Recommendation

Folk Literature & Moral Values	• Storytelling sessions based on folk tales. • Discussions on the ethical lessons of folk stories. • Writing and illustrating one's own moral
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	folk tales.
Folk Festivals & Cultural Ethics	• Organizing folk drama, songs, and dances with ethical messages. • Observing folk customs that teach respect, unity, and gratitude. • Interactive workshops with folk artists.
Family & Community Involvement	• Grandparent storytelling sessions. • Parent workshops on moral teaching through folk culture. • Encouraging community-based cultural activities.
Technology & Folk Learning	• Using AR/VR for immersive folk storytelling. • Digital storytelling competitions with moral themes. Interactive folk quizzes and moral discussions

Conclusion

Folk elements are losing their importance in education, society, nation, and the modern world due to globalization, urbanization, and the acceptance of other cultures (citation). To identify the folk elements in Bangladesh's primary education course content, investigate the reflection on folk elements in primary classrooms, and exploring the ways that could be incorporated to reflect our folk elements in our primary course content to enhance the values and ethics among our students, Bangladesh primary education textbooks and course content has a limited number of folk elements even some books have no content about folk specially class 4 and 5. Using interviewing, FGD, and observation methods, it was discovered that, despite having some folk elements practices in village primary schools, there is a tendency to ignore folk elements in city's school because they are not important for examination and producing good academic results and future job. Primary education could have played an important role in instilling moral, cultural, traditional, social, diversified, and ecological knowledge by incorporating folk elements into the course content. This study offers and advises some new regulations based on a look at folk education in Bangladesh's primary schools. This study's academic recommendation includes assigning folk elements assignments, homework, and practical work, and also providing guidance, listening, collecting, presenting, and preserving folk elements, as well as mentioning the social, historical, and cultural context of folk elements in textbooks. Inclusion of folk games in the leisure time and annual sports competitions, prioritization of folk songs, folk literature, and folk elements in co-curricular activities, and the organization of folk festivals in schools are among the recommended co-curricular activities are recommended by this study. Also, representing folk elements in the school campus, enriching the collection of folk elements in the school library and classrooms, can also create a mini museum in the school campus. All will make them interested in folk, and they can learn about our culture, which we are losing day by day. Those folk elements will enhance children's cognitive development as well as their moral and ethical development. They will be able to be conscious about preserving our culture by folk.

Acknowledgements

The authors express their sincere gratitude to the head teachers, class teachers, students, and guardians of the selected primary schools in Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions for their cooperation

and valuable participation in this study. We also thank our colleagues for their constructive comments and encouragement during the research process.

This research did not receive any grant or specific financial support from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. The authors declare no conflict of interest in relation to this article.

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