

Narrative Structures and Emotional Intelligence in Short Stories and Folktales: A Children's Literature Perspective

Liza Septa Wilyanti¹, Yundi Fitrah², Maizar Karim³, Hary Soedarto Harjono⁴

¹ Universitas Jambi, Jambi, Indonesia; liza.septa@unja.ac.id

² Universitas Jambi, Jambi, Indonesia; yundi.fitrah@unja.ac.id

³ Universitas Jambi, Jambi, Indonesia; maizar.karim@unja.ac.id

⁴ Universitas Jambi, Jambi, Indonesia; hary.soedarto@unja.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the narrative structures and emotional intelligence content of short stories and folktales published in *Bobo Magazine Edisi Koleksi Terbatas 50 Tahun: Cerpen & Dongeng*, with the aim of assessing their suitability as children's literature. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the research integrates structural and literary psychology approaches. Data were collected through purposive sampling of 13 texts, followed by close reading and note-taking techniques. Findings indicate that most stories follow a simple, linear narrative structure, with child or animal protagonists, familiar settings, and accessible language. Common themes include friendship, family affection, honesty, gender equality, and heroism—elements that align with the conventions of children's literature. Structural analysis reveals that 8 out of 13 stories fully meet the criteria for children's literature. However, emotional intelligence analysis, based on Goleman's five dimensions (self-awareness, emotion regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills), shows that only a few texts demonstrate all five components, while most focus primarily on emotional recognition and regulation. The study concludes that while these narratives structurally qualify as children's literature, their representation of emotional intelligence remains limited. Given the educational value of emotional content in literature, the findings underscore the need for more intentional integration of emotional intelligence in children's stories. The study is limited by its small corpus drawn from a single source and period (1993–2003). Future research should expand the corpus and explore alternative analytical approaches to deepen understanding of emotional intelligence in Indonesian children's literature.

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Corresponding Author:

Liza Septa Wilyanti

Universitas Jambi, Jambi, Indonesia; liza.septa@unja.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Magazines are one form of mass media that plays a role in shaping a culture of literacy through the presentation of popular literary works that are easily accessible to the public (Waluyo, 2002). As a medium of popular literature, magazines have a strategic function in introducing literature to society, including

beginner readers such as children. This function aligns with the view of (Semi, 1993), who stated that popular literature in media such as magazines can serve as an effective starting point in fostering a love for literary works. After 50 years of being a loyal companion to Indonesian children, *Bobo* magazine published its limited collector's edition at the end of 2023. This special edition features selected short stories and fairy tales previously published in *Bobo* magazine from 1983 to 2003. This choice reflects the strengths of short stories and fairy tales as prose genres that can be read in a single sitting, with clear plots, settings, and engaging intrinsic elements that spark children's imagination (Kosasih, 2008).

In essence, literature exists in society to fulfill two main purposes: enjoyment and understanding (Lukens, 1999). Literary works can foster friendship among children worldwide through the stories they read (Emer, 2004). Through literature, children can gain moral lessons and insights into various human and life issues (Nurgiyantoro, 2004). Stories consumed by children are known as children's literature. It emerges from the prayers, dreams, and hopes of parents for their children (Latifah, Munajah, & Hasanah, 2021). Children's literature first developed as oral literature or folktales (Zipes, 2007). Its written form began in 1744 with **A Little Pretty Pocket Book** by John Newbery, followed by **The History of Little Goody Two Shoes** by Oliver Goldsmith in 1765 (Norton & Norton Sandra, 2010). Theoretically, children's literature is defined as literature read by children under the guidance of adults (Sarumpaet, 2009). It may take oral or written forms and aims to shape the child's character through moral values in the stories (Nurgiyantoro, 2010). According to (Wahyuni, 2017), children's literature is not about children but is written and intended specifically for children readers. It should not contain violence, eroticism, betrayal, revenge, cruel murder, or adult conflicts unrelated to children's world (Shintya, 2018).

General literary works may appear in children's magazines if their elements, themes, and diction are appropriate and acceptable for children. However, the term children's literature can only be applied to works that meet the genre's specific criteria—such as using direct and simple language, including illustrations and images, focusing on action rather than narration, having simple plots and settings, featuring child or animal protagonists, and portraying themes relevant to children's lives. Therefore, structural analysis using a structuralist approach is needed to categorize stories as children's literature. A structuralist approach is appropriate due to its autonomous nature, allowing short stories and fairy tales to be assessed based on their internal coherence (Karim, 2016).

A good children's literary work should also consider the perspective of children's emotional intelligence. In the context of children's literature, emotional intelligence can be instilled through stories that depict emotional situations, character conflicts, and problem-solving processes that involve empathy, patience, and cooperation. Emotional intelligence (EQ) is a relatively new concept, first introduced in 1990 by psychologists John Mayer (University of New Hampshire) and Peter Salovey (Yale University). It was further developed by Daniel Goleman through his book **Emotional Intelligence**. According to (Goleman, 2006), emotional intelligence helps children increase self-awareness and self-confidence, regulate emotional impulses, and develop empathy. Emotional intelligence not only improves behavior but also contributes to measurable academic achievement. It enhances both intrapersonal and interpersonal life skills. Goleman (2006) outlines five levels of emotional intelligence: recognizing one's own emotions, regulating emotions, self-motivation in the face of negative feelings, recognizing others' emotions, and maintaining relationships with others.

Previous studies on children's literature in Indonesia have generally focused on moral and educational values but have rarely examined emotional intelligence as reflected in narrative structures. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing how emotional intelligence is represented through the structural elements of short stories and folktales in *Bobo* magazine's limited 50th anniversary edition, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the emotional dimensions in Indonesian children's literature.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design using content analysis to interpret the meanings and structures embedded in literary texts (Pradopo et al., 2003). This method emphasized depth of interpretation rather than quantification, focusing on the process and meaning of the texts (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992; Moleong, 2018).

The study integrated two analytical perspectives: structuralism and literary psychology. The structural approach was applied to examine intrinsic elements such as plot, character, setting, theme, and moral message, drawing on Robert Stanton's narrative theory. Meanwhile, the literary psychology approach explored emotional intelligence as reflected in characters' behaviors, dialogues, and interactions, based on Goleman's (2006) framework.

2.2 Data Source and Sampling

The data consisted of 13 children's stories—eight short stories and five fairy tales—taken from Bobo Magazine 50-Year Special Edition: Short Stories & Fairy Tales (Kompas Gramedia, 2023). The stories were selected through purposive sampling, based on their relevance to the research objectives and their representation of themes in Indonesian children's literature.

The selection focused on works published between 1993 and 2003, the final decade before the magazine's collector's edition. This period was chosen to capture the transitional phase of thematic and structural development in Indonesian children's literature.

The analyzed short stories were *Terima Kasih Tuhan*, *Rini Tidak Malang*, *Saat untuk Menjadi Kuat*, *Gigi Rahasia Makhluk Aneh*, *Tumpeng untuk Nenek Sumirah*, *Cuci Piring*, *Tujuh Belas Agustus*, and *Dadong Griya*. The fairy tales analyzed included *Bentihe di Hutan Lehi Kuihi*, *Rembulan dan Matahari*, *Nelayan dan Putrinya*, *Gelang Emas*, and *Laguna Sihir*.

2.3 Analytical Framework

The data analysis in this study was conducted through three interrelated stages. The first stage was structural analysis, which involved identifying intrinsic elements such as plot, characters, setting, and theme to determine the extent to which each story conformed to the characteristics of children's literature. The second stage was emotional intelligence analysis, which applied Goleman's (2006) five dimensions of emotional intelligence—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—further refined using Yusuf's (2011) model that had been modified by the researcher to clarify specific behavioral indicators. The third stage was synthesis and categorization, integrating the findings from the structural and emotional analyses to produce a comprehensive description of the narrative and psychological characteristics of the selected stories.

2.4 Procedure

Data were collected using reading and note-taking techniques (Ratna, 2011). The reading process was carried out in three levels: skimming to obtain an overview of the story's content and structure; comprehensive reading to identify relationships among the narrative elements; and critical-analytical reading to evaluate the coherence between structural and emotional components. All data obtained from these readings were subsequently coded, categorized, and organized into analytical matrices to enable cross-textual comparison and synthesis across the selected stories.

2.5 Trustworthiness

The credibility of the data was ensured through researcher triangulation, which included prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and theoretical triangulation (Moleong, 2018; Sugiyono, 2010). These

validation strategies ensured alignment between textual evidence and interpretative outcomes, thereby strengthening the validity and reliability of the findings.

Data analysis in qualitative research involves organizing the collected data systematically. The data are categorized and broken down into detailed units. The researcher then synthesizes the information, organizes it into specific patterns, and finally draws conclusions (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992). The emotional intelligence indicators (Goleman, 2006) in this study are analyzed using Yusuf's model (2011) which has been modified by the researcher through additions or reductions of certain criteria to refine the behavioral characteristics, as presented in the following table.

Table 1. Modified Emotional Intelligence Model (Yusuf, 2011) and Behavioral Indicators

No	Emotional Intelligence	Its Behavioral Characteristics
1	Recognizing Emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Able to sense certain emotions stirring within oneself b. Able to identify the types of emotions within oneself c. Able to label the emotions one is experiencing d. Able to recognize the influence of emotions on one's actions
2	Managing Emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Able to appreciate the presence of every emotion within oneself b. Able to cope with internal tension c. Able to express both negative and positive emotions proportionally d. Able to control aggressive behavior that may harm oneself or others e. Has positive feelings toward oneself, family, school, and social environment
3	Motivating Oneself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Able to think clearly to find solutions for negative emotions within oneself b. Able to transform anticipatory anxiety when facing challenging situations c. Able to remain optimistic in facing challenges d. Able to strengthen self-efficacy e. Has self-confidence to recover from failure
4	Recognizing Others' Emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Able to read others' emotions b. Able to be sensitive to others' emotions c. Able to accept others' perspectives d. Able to respond to others' emotions proportionally e. Able to show concern for others' emotions
5	Maintaining Relationships with Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Able to manage others' emotions b. Able to understand and analyze relationships with others c. Able to mobilize and inspire others d. Able to develop more intimate relationships e. Able to persuade and influence others f. Able to make others feel comfortable g. Able to think positively of others h. Able to be friendly and sociable i. Able to be considerate and show concern for others j. Demonstrates a democratic attitude in social interactions k. Able to control emotions and investigate a situation or event before deciding on a response or taking action l. Able to express personal feelings appropriately, knowing which feelings can be shown and when m. Able to resolve problems or conflicts with others n. Displays a willingness to share and cooperate o. Shows concern for social interests (enjoys helping others) and lives harmoniously within a group

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Structural Analysis of Short Stories and Folktales

The short stories and folktales were analyzed for their fictional structure using Stanton's theory (2007). The structure of the short stories and folktales follows a simple and easy-to-understand narrative structure. The storyline is mostly progressive (linear) or tightly plotted. The main characters are generally children or animals that behave or possess human-like traits. The settings used are close to the child's world, commonly at home or school. The time setting is brief, usually occurring within one or two days. The atmosphere varies, generally evoking sadness, emotion, frustration, and joy. The chosen titles reflect the main topics of the stories. The point of view used is first person, third-person omniscient, or third-person limited. The style is straightforward, simple, and mostly conveyed through dialogue between characters. The tone typically shifts from gloomy or sad to cheerful, happy, or grateful. The symbolism used consists of concrete objects. The irony appears as a contrast between physical conditions and psychological or sociological conditions. The themes raised include friendship, family affection, gender justice, honesty, and heroism.

3.2 Categorization as Children's Literature

The results of the structural analysis show that out of the 13 stories whose structures were analyzed using Stanton's (2007) theory of prose fiction, 8 stories can be categorized as children's literature. Two stories are less suitable to be categorized as children's literature, and three stories cannot be categorized as children's literature. These results were obtained by aligning the structural analysis with the characteristics of children's literature. More detailed data are presented in Table 2. Categorization of Short Stories and Folktales as Children's Literature.

Tabel 2. The Categorization of Short Stories and Folktales as Children's Literature

No	Title	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	<i>Terima Kasih Tuhan</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√
2	<i>Rini Tidak Malang</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√
3	<i>Cuci Piring</i>	√	√	-	-	√	√
4	<i>Saat untuk Menjadi Kuat</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√
5	<i>Tujuh Belas Agustus</i>	√	√	-	√	√	√
6	<i>Dadong Griya</i>	√	√	-	√	√	√
7	<i>Gigi Rahasia Makhluk Aneh</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√
8	<i>Tumpeng untuk Nenek Sumirah</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√
9	<i>Rembulan dan Matahari</i>	-	√	-	√	-	√
10	<i>Bentihe di Hutan Lehi kuihi</i>	-	-	√	-	√	-
11	<i>Nelayan dan Putrinya</i>	-	√	-	√	-	-
12	<i>Gelang Emas</i>	-	-	√	√	-	-
13	<i>Laguna Sihir</i>	√	√	-	√	√	√

Notes:

1. Use of direct and simple language
2. Use of illustrations and pictures
3. Focus on action rather than narration
4. Simple plot and setting
5. Main characters are children or animals
6. Themes related to the world of children

*A check mark (√) indicates that the indicator is fulfilled.

*A dash (-) indicates that the indicator is not fulfilled.

3.3 Emotional Intelligence Analysis

The analysis of story characteristics from the perspective of emotional intelligence examines the presence of five levels of emotional intelligence in ten stories, including recognizing one's own emotions, managing one's own emotions, self-motivation, recognizing others' emotions (empathy), and maintaining relationships with others. The results of the analysis show that only the short stories *Terima Kasih Tuhan*, *Cuci Piring*, *Saat untuk Menjadi Kuat*, and *Gigi Rahasia Makhluk Aneh* fulfill all five levels of emotional intelligence. The short story *Rini Tidak Malang* meets four levels of emotional intelligence. The folktale *Laguna Sihir* fulfills three levels of emotional intelligence. The short story *Tumpeng untuk Nenek Sumirah* meets two levels of emotional intelligence. The short stories *Tujuh Belas Agustus* and *Dadong Griya*, along with the folktale *Rembulan dan Matahari*, fulfill only one level of emotional intelligence, as presented in the following Tabel 3. Levels of Emotional Intelligence in Short Stories and Folktales as Children's Literature Based on Goleman (2006).

Tabel 3. Levels of Emotional Intelligence in Short Stories and Folktales as Children's Literature Based on Goleman (2006)

No	Title	1	2	3	4	5
1	<i>Terima Kasih Tuhan</i>	√	√	√	√	√
2	<i>Rini Tidak Malang</i>	√	√	√	√	-
3	<i>Cuci Piring</i>	√	√	√	√	√
4	<i>Saat untuk Menjadi Kuat</i>	√	√	√	√	√
5	<i>Tujuh Belas Agustus</i>	√	-	-	-	-
6	<i>Dadong Griya</i>	√	-	-	-	-
7	<i>Gigi Rahasia Makhluk Aneh</i>	√	√	√	√	√
8	<i>Tumpeng untuk Nenek Sumirah</i>	√	√	-	-	-
9	<i>Rembulan dan Matahari</i>	√	-	-	-	-
10	<i>Laguna Sihir</i>	√	√	√	-	-

Notes:

1. Recognizing Emotions
2. Managing Emotions
3. Motivating Oneself
4. Recognizing Others' Emotions
5. Maintaining Relationships with Others

*A check mark (√) indicates that the indicator is fulfilled.

*A dash (-) indicates that the indicator is not fulfilled.

3.4 Interpretation and Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study indicate that the majority of the analyzed short stories and folktales follow a linear narrative structure, featuring chronological sequences of events. This structural pattern aligns with the fundamental principle that children's literature should be easily understandable and cognitively appropriate for young readers (Nurgiyantoro, 2004; Norton & Norton, 2010). Although flashback techniques are used occasionally, their application is limited, which is suitable given that children's comprehension skills are still developing.

The short stories in the corpus tend to feature a limited number of characters and familiar settings drawn from children's everyday environments—such as the home, school, or neighborhood. The diction used is generally simple, with short, direct sentences that support readability and reader engagement among young children (Lukens, 1999). Several stories also incorporate symbolic elements and irony in forms that are accessible to children, such as contrasts between appearance and character in *Dadong Griya*, or challenges to gender stereotypes in *Cuci Piring*.

Dominant themes across the corpus include friendship, family affection, honesty, courage, and gender equality—all of which are appropriate for children and important in supporting character education (Sarumpaet, 2009). However, some narratives are disrupted by adult-centered perspectives, especially in folktales like *Bentihe in the Forest of Lehi Kuihi* and *The Golden Bracelet*, which portray explicit violence or socioeconomic conflict—topics that are largely outside the psychological range of young readers (Zipes, 2007; Nodelman, 2008).

From the standpoint of emotional intelligence, only a few stories reflect all five competencies outlined by Goleman (2006): self-awareness, emotion regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills. Stories such as *Thank You, God*, *The Mysterious Creature's Tooth*, and *A Time to Be Strong* successfully portray all five dimensions. However, most of the remaining stories only demonstrate one or two components. These findings underscore the need for greater attention by writers and editors of children's literature to incorporate emotional and psychological depth into stories intended for young audiences.

Children's literature serves not only as entertainment and a source of imaginative pleasure but also as a vehicle for developing children's emotional and social competencies (Faizah & Oemiati, 2020; Alegre, 2011). Stories that reflect emotional intelligence can play an important role in helping children build self-awareness, manage their emotions, and relate better to others—skills that are increasingly vital in 21st-century education.

That said, this study is subject to several limitations. The corpus was limited to 13 texts, all sourced from a single publication (Bobo Magazine) and confined to a narrow time frame (1993–2003). These constraints limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader field of Indonesian children's literature, which is far more diverse across genres, formats, and periods. Therefore, this research should be viewed as an exploratory study, offering a focused yet preliminary insight into how emotional intelligence is represented in a specific subset of children's texts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moleong, 2018). Future studies are encouraged to expand the corpus, diversify the data sources, and adopt comparative or reader-response approaches to build a more comprehensive understanding of emotional content in children's literature.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, this study concludes that the analyzed short stories and folktales from *Bobo Magazine* exhibit simple, coherent narrative structures and fulfill key characteristics of children's literature, such as direct language, accessible themes, relatable settings, and child or animal protagonists. While the majority of texts align with the structural conventions of the genre, only a few successfully portray all five dimensions of emotional intelligence as proposed by Goleman, with most focusing primarily on emotional recognition and regulation, and lacking deeper representations of motivation, empathy, and social relationship management. A key limitation of this study is its narrow corpus, which includes only 13 texts drawn from a single media source and time period (1993–2003), restricting the generalizability of the findings. Future research is encouraged to broaden the corpus across diverse publications, genres, and timeframes, and to employ alternative approaches—such as comparative, reader-response, or sociocultural analysis—to more comprehensively explore how emotional intelligence is reflected in Indonesian children's literature.

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