

# The Influence of Readers' Cultural Values on the Interpretation of Indonesian and English Folktales

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## Abstract

This study examines readers' responses to two folktales Timun Mas (Indonesia) and Jack and the Beanstalk (England) with the objective of identifying how cultural values shape intellectual and emotional engagement with narrative texts. Data were collected from 30 undergraduate students majoring in English literature. Employing an experimental approach, participants read both folktales and responded through structured questionnaires and open-ended written reflections. The findings reveal notable variations in readers' interpretations of the two stories. In Timun Mas, participants expressed both positive and negative responses influenced by their cultural backgrounds. Many appreciated the integration of Javanese cultural elements such as the naming of characters, the inclusion of traditional objects like terasi (shrimp paste), and references to takhyul (superstition) which contributed to the story's cultural richness and authenticity. Readers also admired Timun Mas's perseverance in confronting adversity, reflecting cultural values of resilience and moral strength. Conversely, some participants criticized the character of Mbok Sini for breaking her promise to the giant, viewing this act as inconsistent with ethical principles valued in their own culture. In contrast, responses to Jack and the Beanstalk were predominantly negative, with readers interpreting Jack's actions as morally questionable. Many described him as greedy, deceitful, and unjustified in killing the giant. Several participants suggested that the story should have concluded with a tragic ending in which Jack faces the consequences of his actions. Overall, the study underscores the profound influence of cultural background on readers' moral evaluations, emotional responses, and interpretive engagement with folktales across different cultural traditions.

**Keywords:** *reader, interpretation, folktales, cultural values*

## Introduction

Folktales remain a vital component of cultural heritage, offering profound insights into societal values, ethical frameworks, and communal identities. As part of folklore, folktales reflect the beliefs, traditions, and social norms of a community, making them an important means of understanding how people perceive the world around them. Reading

folktales is therefore not only interesting but also meaningful, as they preserve and transmit cultural knowledge from one generation to the next. Moreover, as a form of literary expression, folktales play a significant role in shaping cultural identity and serve as a mirror of society revealing its aspirations, moral lessons, and collective worldview.

In recent educational and cultural research, a folktale is often described as a traditional narrative passed down orally from one generation to another, typically without a known author and originally intended for community sharing (Aini & Mellai Xyza Sarian, 2025). Another study characterizes folktales as cultural resources encompassing imaginative stories that carry moral, social, and value-laden meanings, reflecting and preserving community worldviews (Rachmijati & Cahyati, 2023). Together, these definitions underline that folktales are not static artifacts but dynamic vehicles of cultural transmission, engaging communal memory, value systems, and imaginative narration.

As a cultural product of a particular region, folklore naturally carries its own uniqueness. This study focuses on two types of folktales from Indonesia (*Timun Mas*) and England (*Jack and the Beanstalk*). Comparing these two works is considered interesting, as they represent different cultural products Indonesian and English folklore that historically have little direct connection, yet display notable similarities in terms of characters, plot, and theme.

*Timun Mas* tells the story of a widow who longs for a child. In a dream, she encounters a giant who instructs her to take a cucumber seed from the forest. Following the giant's advice, she plants the seed, which eventually grows into the child *Timun Mas*. However, as part of the bargain, Mbok Sini agrees to give *Timun Mas* to the giant once she grows up. The story culminates in Mbok Sini and *Timun Mas* resisting this fate, ultimately defeating the giant so that *Timun Mas* can live freely with her mother.

The story of *Timun Mas* shares several similarities with *Jack and the Beanstalk*. This English tale tells of a poor widow and her son Jack, who are forced to sell their only cow to survive. On the way to the market, Jack meets a man who persuades him to trade the cow for some magic beans. Jack accepts, plants the beans, and they grow into a giant beanstalk reaching the sky. When he climbs it, Jack discovers the home of a giant and cunningly steals some of the giant's treasures. Eventually, the giant discovers Jack's theft and chases him, but Jack escapes by cutting down the beanstalk, causing the giant to fall to his death.

Folktales do not exist as fixed artifacts; their meaning is completed in the moment of reading or listening, where readers and audiences actively interpret, negotiate, and sometimes transform the story. Community readers are not passive recipients but interpretive agents whose responses influence a tale's social function and longevity (Anggawirya & Floriani, 2024). Recent studies reinforce this perspective by demonstrating that the interpretation of narrative texts is shaped by readers' cultural backgrounds, expectations, and lived experiences. Through a systematic review of reader-response research published in the last decade, emphasize that meaning-making is always a transactional and culturally mediated process, in which readers actively construct the significance of a text rather than merely receiving it (Kunjanman & Aziz, 2021).

More specifically within the context of folktales, several contemporary studies show that cultural values significantly shape how readers interpret traditional narratives. Readers of folklore interpret symbols, character motivations, and moral teachings through the lens of their indigenous cultural worldview, resulting in multiple, community-specific readings of the same tale (Anggawirya & Floriani, 2024). Similarly, (Nur et al., 2024) finds that readers of Makassar folktales negotiate pragmatic and cultural values

when constructing meaning, suggesting that the interpretation of moral messages varies according to the readers' sociocultural backgrounds. These findings indicate that folktales function as culturally adaptive narratives texts whose meanings evolve as they are reinterpreted across generations and cultural contexts.

Existing studies mostly remain focused on single-cultural contexts examining how readers within one cultural group respond to their own local folktales. Research comparing cross-cultural interpretations is still limited, particularly comparisons between Indonesian readers responding to English folktales. This indicates a significant research gap, especially as folktales increasingly cross cultural boundaries through global media landscapes. It can be concluded that there are two major gaps: first, the lack of cross-cultural comparative studies that examine how readers from different cultural backgrounds interpret folktales from different traditions; and second, the limited empirical analysis connecting readers' specific cultural value dimensions to their narrative interpretation patterns. This study aims to address both gaps by comparing the interpretations of readers from two different cultural groups regarding folktales from Indonesian and English traditions, and by measuring how readers' cultural value dimensions such as collectivism, power distance, or moral orientation influence their interpretations.

Recent developments in reader-response scholarship continue to emphasize the central role of readers' cultural backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences in shaping textual interpretation. Studies consistently affirm Rosenblatt's foundational view that meaning emerges through the transaction between reader and text, yet contemporary research expands this concept by investigating how sociocultural variables influence that transaction in diverse reading contexts. For instance, (Ilyas et al., 2025) demonstrate that reader-response-based activities prompt EFL students to draw on their personal and cultural experiences when interpreting literary works, resulting in varied meanings across individuals. Similarly, a study in *Frontiers in Psychology* (2024) shows that emotional, cognitive, and evaluative responses to narrative texts differ significantly depending on readers' backgrounds, providing empirical evidence that interpretation is a culturally mediated process rather than a universal one (Tilmantine et al., 2024)

This research adopts reader-response theory in literary analysis. Reader-response theory holds a significant place in literary studies because it emphasizes the active role of readers in determining textual meaning. In contemporary literary studies, reader-response (reception) theory asserts that the meaning of a text is neither fixed nor singular, but is formed through the interaction between the reader and the text within their sociocultural context (Benharrousse, 2022). In the context of folktales or traditional narratives, the application of reader-response theory shows that readers bring their cultural backgrounds, values, and lived experiences into the reading process, resulting in varied interpretations. Furthermore, recent studies in education and reading literacy use the reader-response framework to explain how young readers or students connect their cultural identities to the narratives they read. For example, (Aulia Risky Harlina et al., 2024) analyzed reader reviews on an online platform and found that readers expressed emotional, cognitive, and social responses that were influenced by their cultural contexts and lived experiences.

Studying folktales from Indonesia (Timun Mas) and England (Jack and the Beanstalk) is interesting because both have endured across generations and are still widely discussed, even regarded as cultural products worth preserving. However, new questions arise: Are these folktales still relevant to contemporary life? How do the cultural values of today's readers influence their interpretation of these stories? These questions

become foundation of this research, which aims to explore the influence of readers' cultural values on the interpretation of Timun Mas from Indonesia and Jack and the Beanstalk from England.

## Method

### Study Design

This study compares two objects by applying a mixed-method design to analyze readers' interpretations of Indonesian and English folklore. The use of a mixed-method approach provides significant benefits for research rooted in reception theory. Recent research on mixed-methods methodology underscores how integrating quantitative and qualitative data can yield a richer, more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena a methodological fit for studies that examine not only "what" happens but "why" and "how" it happens. Quantitative instruments, such as close-ended questionnaires, enable the researcher to capture broad patterns of readers' responses, while qualitative data collected through open-ended questions allow for deeper personal interpretations and cultural meanings.

This study adopts a mixed-methods experimental design to investigate how readers' cultural values shape their responses to two folktales from different cultural traditions Timun Mas (Indonesia) and Jack and the Beanstalk (England). A mixed-methods approach is employed because it allows the integration of quantitative data, derived from structured questionnaires measuring emotional, moral, and interpretive reactions, and qualitative data, collected through open-ended written reflections that capture readers' nuanced interpretive processes. As (Creswell, 2020) explain, mixed-methods designs enable researchers to obtain a more comprehensive and contextualized understanding of a phenomenon by merging numerical trends with rich narrative insights.

The study uses an experimental reading procedure, in which all participants engage with both folktales under the same controlled reading conditions. Thirty undergraduate students majoring in English Literature were purposively selected, as they possess sufficient literary background to articulate interpretive judgments while still representing diverse cultural perspectives. Participants were first instructed to read Timun Mas and Jack and the Beanstalk, after which they completed two instruments:

- (1) a structured questionnaire assessing intellectual and emotional aspect
- (2) an open-ended written reflection designed to elicit deeper reader interpretations, allowing cultural values to emerge naturally through narrative expression.

By employing a mixed-methods experimental framework, the study provides a systematic and culturally informed understanding of how readers evaluate moral actions, relate emotionally to characters, and negotiate meaning across cross-cultural narrative contexts.

### Sample Population

The sample of this study consists of 30 students from the English Literature Program at Hasanuddin University. They were selected because they meet three main criteria: (1) basic knowledge of reading folklore, (2) competence in literary analysis, and (3) prior experience with the stories Timun Mas and Jack and the Beanstalk. Selecting literature students is supported by recent reader-response research, which shows that readers with literary training demonstrate higher levels of interpretive awareness and

are better able to articulate cultural, moral, and symbolic meanings in narrative texts (Benharousse, 2022). Likewise, (Anggawirya & Floriani, 2024) emphasize that participants familiar with local and foreign folklore provide richer cultural interpretations, making them suitable respondents for studies on cross-cultural narrative reception. In addition, (Aulia Risky Harlina et al, 2024) highlight that respondents with previous exposure to specific stories are more capable of offering reflective and evaluative responses rather than passive retellings. Therefore, the chosen participant group ensures that the data collected reflects thoughtful, critical, and culturally informed reader responses.

### **Data Collection Techniques and Instruments**

Data were collected using a questionnaire as the primary instrument. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: close-ended items and open-ended items. The close-ended questions were designed to measure readers' intellectual responses (including theme, setting, characterization, plot, language, and conflict) and emotional responses (including emotional involvement, new perspectives, narrative truth, expected ending, motivation, and overall emotional effect). These items were measured using a Likert scale. Meanwhile, the open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate on their interpretations in their own words, focusing on aspects such as familiarity with the story, moral values, and cultural elements embedded in the texts.

The data collection procedure was conducted in three stages. First, participants were provided with selected folklore texts from Indonesia (Timun Mas) and England (Jack and the Beanstalk). Second, they completed the close-ended questionnaire, which aimed to capture broad patterns in intellectual and emotional responses. Finally, participants responded to the open-ended questions, which offered opportunities to express personal and cultural interpretations of the stories. This combined approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of readers' receptions by integrating both quantitative and qualitative data.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The data in this study were analyzed using two main approaches (quantitative and qualitative) corresponding to the structured questionnaires and open-ended written reflections used as research instruments.

#### **Descriptive Quantitative Analysis**

Data obtained from the structured questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The analytical steps included:

- a. Calculating frequencies and percentages for each item related to intellectual and emotional responses
- b. Comparing response patterns between the two folktales to identify trends of positive or negative evaluations.

#### **Thematic Qualitative Analysis**

Qualitative data came from students' open-ended answers and written reflections. The analysis involved the following steps:

- a. Transcribing and organizing the data, compiling all written reflections from participant
- b. Open coding, identifying key words, phrases, or statements that represented intellectual, emotional, or moral reactions to the stories.

- c. Grouping codes into broader themes, such as: Appreciation cultural elements, moral, and ethical judgments of characters
- d. Interpretive analysis, examining how participants' cultural backgrounds shaped their evaluations and emotional engagement.
- e. Drawing thematic conclusions that illustrate how cultural values influence readers' interpretations across the two folktales.
- f. Data Triangulation. To enhance the validity of the findings, the study employed methodological triangulation by comparing results from the structured questionnaires with those from the written reflections. Convergences or divergences between the two data sources helped strengthen the final interpretation.
- g. Presentation of Findings

## Result

In reader response studies, readers' responses to a text generally emerge in two major dimensions, namely intellectual response and emotional response. This distinction is important because both illustrate how readers interact with the text in different but complementary ways. This chapter presents the findings of the study based on source of data which divided into intellectual and emotional with student general interpretation.

### Intellectual Aspect

#### Timun Mas

	Variable	Theme	Setting	Characterization	Plot	Language	Conflict
Intellectual	Positive %	87	100	90	97	100	100
	Negative %	13	0	10	3	0	0
	Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100

Based on the data of intellectual aspect above shows that the majority of readers responded positively (87–100%) to elements of intellectual aspect such as theme, setting, characterization, plot, language, and conflict. Readers stated that the theme was quite clear, especially with the support of magical elements within the story. Furthermore, they found the setting, characters, plot, and language easy to understand, particularly when intended for children. In addition, most readers also considered the conflicts presented to be engaging and suspenseful.

However, alongside these positive responses, there were also some negative reactions, though in smaller proportions (3–13%). Some readers found it difficult to determine the central theme, while others viewed the character of Mbok Sini as inconsistent initially perceived as a protagonist but later shifting into an antagonist role. Readers also expressed confusion with the plot, particularly due to the lack of explanation regarding the origin of the giant at the beginning of the story.

The predominantly positive reader responses toward the intellectual aspects of the folktale align with Reader-Response Criticism, which emphasizes how readers actively construct meaning based on their interpretation of a text (Fish, 1980). The clarity of the theme, especially with the support of magical elements, likely enhanced readers' engagement by providing a recognizable narrative structure and familiar motifs,

consistent with (Propp, 1968) morphology of folktales, where magical elements reinforce thematic clarity and plot progression.

Additionally, the ease of understanding setting, characterization, plot, and language corresponds with schema theory, which posits that readers use pre-existing cognitive frameworks (schemata) to comprehend new information (Rumelhart, 1980). Since the story is intended for children and uses simple language and familiar contexts, readers were able to efficiently activate relevant schemata, thus improving comprehension and intellectual appreciation. Readers' engagement with the conflicts in the story supports narrative theory, particularly (Todorov, 1977) concept of narrative equilibrium and disequilibrium, where conflict serves as a driving force to sustain intellectual interest by creating tension and suspense that encourages readers to mentally predict resolutions.

However, some negative responses relating to theme ambiguity and character inconsistency reflect issues in narrative coherence and character consistency (Herman, 2002). Difficulties in identifying a clear central theme and shifts in Mbok Srin's role may have disrupted the narrative coherence, hindering intellectual engagement by breaking expected patterns of character development and thematic progression.

Furthermore, confusion about the plot, especially the unexplained origin of the giant, highlights the importance of narrative closure and causality (Chatman, 1978). Missing exposition about key story elements can create gaps in understanding, leading to cognitive dissonance and reducing intellectual satisfaction for some readers.

### Jack and The Beanstalk

Variable	Theme	Setting	Characterization	Plot	Language	Conflict
Intellectual	Positive %	70	70	77	77	74
	Negative %	30	30	23	23	26
	Total %	100	100	100	100	100

The predominance of positive reader responses (70–74%) to intellectual aspects such as theme, setting, characterization, plot, language, and conflict reflects core principles of Reader-Response Theory, which highlights the active role of readers in making meaning from texts (Iser, 1978). The readers' appreciation of the clear structure of the theme, characters, and setting suggests that the narrative successfully activated readers' cognitive schemata, facilitating comprehension and imagination. Schema Theory posits that prior knowledge and mental frameworks help readers interpret and visualize textual elements, such as the detailed description of the giant's dwelling in the clouds, which stimulated imaginative engagement (Rumelhart, 1980). The clear presentation of conflict aligns with narrative theory's emphasis on conflict as the driving mechanism for narrative progression and reader engagement (Todorov, 1977). Conflicts that are well-articulated contribute to maintaining narrative tension, which keeps readers intellectually involved.

However, the negative responses concerning theme ambiguity, confusing time setting, unclear characterization, and difficult language relate to challenges in narrative coherence and processing fluency. (Herman, 2002) emphasizes that narrative coherence is essential for readers to form a consistent mental model of the story. When key elements such as the old man's description or the origin of magic beans are inadequately detailed, it creates cognitive gaps that hinder comprehension (Chatman, 1978). The difficulty some readers experienced with word choice and plot complexity also corresponds to the

cognitive load theory, which suggests that excessive complexity or unfamiliar language can overwhelm working memory and reduce understanding (Sweller, 1988).

Furthermore, the perceived cruelty of the main character Jack toward the giant's wife reflects a challenge in character consistency and moral alignment within the narrative (Sweller, 1988). Readers expect characters' behaviors to be coherent and justifiable within the story's moral framework; inconsistency here can disrupt engagement and interpretation.

The need for some readers to reread the story to grasp its meaning indicates a disruption in narrative fluency and coherence (van Dijk, 1983), which are crucial for smooth comprehension and intellectual engagement.

Overall, these findings illustrate that while clear narrative structures and vivid descriptions promote positive intellectual responses, ambiguities and inconsistencies in theme, characterization, and language pose significant challenges for reader comprehension and engagement.

## Emotional Aspect

### Timun Mas

Variabel		Emotional involvement	New perspective	Narrative truth	Expected Ending	Motivation	Emotional effect
Emotional	Positive %	100	70	7	73	47	67
	Negative %	0	30	93	27	53	33
	Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100

The pattern of emotional responses from readers, based on the data above, appears highly varied. The majority of readers gave positive responses (67–100%) in aspects such as emotional involvement, gaining new perspectives, an ending that met expectations, and overall emotional impact. Most readers expressed strong emotional engagement with the story, particularly in relation to the feelings of Timun Mas, Mbok Sini, and the Giant. They reported being able to empathize with Timun Mas's fear when facing the Giant, Mbok Sini's loneliness and deep longing for a child to ease her solitude, and even the Giant's anticipation as he awaited the moment to devour Timun Mas.

In terms of new perspectives, most readers noted that the story offered several insights, such as the depth of a mother's love for her child, the risks involved in making decisions, and a more critical view of Mbok Sini, who was seen as breaking her promise. Some readers even drew an analogy between the Giant and God, interpreting Mbok Sini as a symbol of humankind attempting to escape fate. When it came to the credibility of the story, however, a large majority (93%) responded negatively, arguing that it was purely imaginative since the magical transformations described could never occur in real life.

Regarding expectations of the ending, 73% responded positively, appreciating that Timun Mas managed to escape from the Giant. Still, a smaller group of readers felt the Giant should have succeeded in devouring Timun Mas, since both she and her mother had broken their promise to him. As for motivation, some readers admitted they did not feel inspired by the story and even considered Mbok Sini's character unappealing, since she relied solely on miracles and prayers to have a child, rather than resolving her loneliness in more realistic ways, such as adoption or marriage. Additionally, some readers felt the story was frightening and unsuitable for children, as it carried a questionable moral message about breaking promises. Nonetheless, in terms of overall emotional impact,

readers agreed that the story was emotionally moving, especially in the scenes where Timun Mas fought the Giant, which many found both engaging and humorous.

This study's findings show that readers' emotional responses to the story Timun Mas are highly varied, with the majority giving positive feedback regarding emotional involvement, new insights, a satisfying ending, and overall emotional impact. These findings align with the research by (Nikolajeva, 2001), who assert that folktales containing strong emotional conflicts and easily identifiable characters can enhance readers' emotional engagement.

The strong emotional involvement with characters such as Timun Mas and Mbok Sini also supports the theory of narrative empathy (Keen, 2007), where readers are able to feel and understand the emotional experiences of characters in the story. Symbolic interpretations, such as the analogy between the Giant and God, and Mbok Sini as a representation of humans attempting to escape fate, affirm that readers do not merely accept the story literally but also develop deeper interpretations, as also found in (Fish, 1980) study on active and constructive reading.

However, the negative responses related to the story's credibility, which was considered too imaginative, are consistent with (Hirsch, 1967) findings that readers, particularly adults, often expect narratives to have a certain level of verisimilitude to become emotionally engaged. This highlights a tension between the magical elements essential in folktales and readers' need for narrative realism. Furthermore, differing opinions about the ending, where some readers wished the Giant had succeeded, reveal complex moral dynamics in readers' interpretations, also noted in previous studies by (Zipes, 1999) on morality and ambiguity in folktales.

Finally, criticism of Mbok Sini's character as unrealistic and the moral message as controversial adds another dimension to readers' evaluation of the narrative, aligning with (Nikolajeva, 2001) argument that acceptance of moral messages in children's stories strongly depends on cultural context and individual readers' perceptions. Overall, these findings strengthen and expand previous research by highlighting the complexity of readers' emotional responses to folktales containing magical elements and ambiguous morals, as well as the role of active reader interpretation in shaping their reading experience.

### Jack and The Beanstalk

Variabel	Emotional involvement	New perspective	Narrative truth	Expected Ending	Motivation	Emotional effect
Emotional	Positive %	60	47	15	17	17
	Negative %	40	53	85	83	83
	Total %	100	100	100	100	100

In the case of Jack and the Beanstalk, readers showed varied emotional responses. The majority (53–85%) gave negative responses regarding the emotional aspects of the story, stating that it offered no new perspectives, was not believable, had an unsatisfactory ending, and failed to evoke emotional impact. Most readers expressed dislike toward Jack's character, describing him as easily influenced by a stranger's suggestion. Jack was also seen as greedy, since after obtaining the bag of gold, he returned to steal the Giant's golden hen and magic harp.

Readers also felt that the ending did not meet their expectations. Many believed Jack should have faced consequences for his actions (stealing and even killing the Giant)

such as falling from the beanstalk or being eaten by the Giant. Some also suggested that the Giant's wife should have taken revenge on Jack and his mother at the end of the story. Furthermore, the story was considered unrealistic, particularly since Jack ultimately married a princess, despite his questionable background.

Although most readers responded negatively, a smaller portion gave positive responses to certain emotional aspects of the story. While they disagreed with Jack's greed, they also disliked the Giant, who ate humans, and for this reason, some felt the ending was still acceptable. In terms of motivation, a few readers found the story inspiring because Jack showed curiosity and courage, which led him into a new world full of adventure. Moreover, despite being young, Jack was portrayed as responsible for his choices (trading the cow for magic beans) which ultimately brought fortune to him and his mother.

This study reveals that readers' emotional responses to the story Jack and the Beanstalk are quite varied, with the majority giving negative feedback concerning emotional aspects such as the lack of new perspectives, questioned credibility, an unsatisfactory ending, and insufficient emotional impact. These findings are consistent with previous research by (Zipes, 1999), who highlighted how classic folktales often present complex moral conflicts that cause reader dissatisfaction toward protagonists perceived as morally ambiguous.

The negative evaluation of Jack's character as easily influenced, greedy, and unethical reinforces the view of (Nikolajeva, 2001) regarding the importance of morally coherent characters in children's literature. Jack's behavior, which conflicts with expected moral norms, makes it difficult for readers to emotionally connect with him.

Readers' disappointment with the ending, which they felt did not meet expectations, as well as their desire for Jack to face consequences for his actions, confirms theories about moral expectations in narratives, as explained by (Herman, 2002). Readers tend to seek narrative justice, where characters' actions have logical consequences within the story.

Although most responses were negative, a small portion of readers gave positive feedback on certain emotional aspects, especially concerning Jack's courage and curiosity that motivated his adventures. This aligns with narrative empathy theory (Keen, 2007), which suggests that readers can feel and appreciate a character's internal motivations despite moral shortcomings.

Additionally, the ambivalent perception of the Giant who, though antagonistic, is also seen as a threat to human safety illustrates the moral complexity in readers' interpretations, as described by (Fish, 1980) in his concept of active and contextual reader interpretation. Overall, this study expands understanding of the dynamics of readers' emotional responses to folktales with protagonists possessing morally controversial traits, emphasizing the importance of balancing character motivation and narrative consequences in building readers' emotional engagement.

## Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the significant influence of personal experiences, religion, and cultural values on readers' interpretation of Timun Mas and Jack and the Beanstalk. This aligns closely with Reader-Response Theory (Iser, 1978), which emphasizes that readers' backgrounds shape how they make meaning from texts. The readers' greater familiarity with Timun Mas, a story embedded in Indonesian cultural

identity, supports this notion, as prior exposure and cultural context enhance interpretative engagement (Rumelhart, 1980).

The strong presence of Javanese cultural elements in Timun Mas, such as the character Mbok Sini and the integration of local superstitions, illustrates the role of cultural schemas in narrative comprehension (Bartlett, 1932). Readers' ability to relate Mbok Sini's experiences to contemporary Indonesian women also reflects the theory of cultural cognition, whereby individuals interpret narratives through the lens of their socio-cultural realities (Douglas, 1986).

Conversely, the unfamiliarity and weaker recognition of English cultural markers in Jack and the Beanstalk indicate that cultural distance can affect reader engagement and interpretation. This supports the argument by (Martinez, 2010) that cross-cultural differences influence how folktales are received, with foreign stories potentially lacking the immediate resonance of local folklore.

Regarding moral values, readers' negative responses to broken promises in Timun Mas and Jack's immoral actions in Jack and the Beanstalk align with Kohlberg's stages of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981), where internalized societal norms and family teachings guide ethical judgments. The importance placed on honesty and promise-keeping as core Indonesian values reflects (Hofstede, 2001) cultural dimensions theory, particularly collectivist cultures' emphasis on social harmony and trustworthiness.

Moreover, the readers' rejection of Jack's greed and deceit, grounded in religious and familial values, aligns with the notion that religion plays a central role in moral reasoning (Narvaez, 2010). This illustrates how cultural and religious frameworks provide a moral compass against which narratives are evaluated.

Interestingly, some readers interpreted Jack and the Beanstalk as metaphorically reflecting contemporary social and political issues in Indonesia. This supports (Bhabha, 1994) concept of cultural hybridity and the dynamic reinterpretation of texts within new contexts, demonstrating that readers actively negotiate meaning beyond the original narrative to address current realities.

In sum, these findings reinforce previous theoretical frameworks emphasizing that reader interpretation is a culturally situated, context-dependent process influenced by personal experiences, moral frameworks, and socio-political realities (Iser, 1978).

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that cultural values significantly shape readers' intellectual and emotional engagement with folktales from different cultural backgrounds. The responses to Timun Mas reveal an appreciation for the story's integration of Javanese cultural elements, which enhances its authenticity and resonance among Indonesian readers. The themes of perseverance and moral strength embodied by Timun Mas reflect culturally valued traits that foster positive emotional and intellectual connections. However, cultural expectations regarding ethics led some readers to criticize Mbok Sini's broken promise, highlighting how deeply ingrained moral principles influence narrative interpretation.

In contrast, Jack and the Beanstalk elicited predominantly negative emotional and moral evaluations. Readers perceived Jack's character as morally ambiguous—greedy and deceitful which conflicted with their cultural and ethical frameworks. The preference expressed by many for a tragic ending underscores the role of cultural norms in shaping expectations about justice and consequences within narratives.

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of cultural context in mediating readers' interpretive experiences. Cultural familiarity and value systems not only

influence how narratives are understood but also shape emotional involvement and moral judgments. This highlights the need for culturally sensitive approaches when analyzing reader responses and emphasizes the dynamic interplay between text, reader, and culture in shaping meaning.

## **Suggestion**

Based on the findings, it is suggested that folklore such as Timun Mas be utilized in educational settings as a resource to strengthen cultural identity while also encouraging students to critically reflect on the moral lessons embedded in the story. At the same time, the introduction of foreign folklore like Jack and the Beanstalk should be accompanied by proper cultural context to help readers build cross-cultural understanding and critical thinking. Future research may involve a larger and more diverse group of participants or explore other folklore genres, including modern adaptations, to capture broader perspectives on cultural influence and moral interpretation. In addition, the preservation and revitalization of local folklore through accessible media, alongside comparative studies with international folklore, are essential to ensure that traditional stories remain relevant and meaningful for future generations.

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