Communication Competence in Storytelling : Constructing Moral Meaning for Children

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Abstract
Storytelling is a communication practice that functions not only as entertainment but also as a means of constructing and communicating moral meaning to child audiences. This study aims to examine how storytellers practice storytelling as strategic communication in constructing, adapting, and communicating moral meaning to children. This study employed a qualitative approach, with data collected through interviews and observations involving four active storytellers and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. The analysis was guided by Strategic Communication, Audience Adaptation, Communication Competence, and Aristotelian Rhetorical Theory. The findings demonstrate that storytelling as strategic moral communication involves an interconnected process of message construction, audience adaptation, communication competence, and rhetorical performance. Storytellers construct moral messages through the selection, creation, and modification of stories, adapt them according to children's age, characteristics, context, and responses, and realize these adaptations through communication competence involving knowledge, motivation, and skills. Moral meaning is further enacted through rhetorical performance involving logos, pathos, and ethos, supported by verbal and nonverbal communication, improvisation, and supporting media. These findings demonstrate that children are not merely recipients of moral messages, as their characteristics and responses influence how messages are constructed, adapted, and enacted. Thus, storytelling constitutes strategic moral communication in which moral meaning is constructed through narrative decisions, adapted to child audiences, and enacted through communication performance.

Keywords: Audience Adaptation, Communication Competence, Moral Meaning, Rhetorical Theory, Storytelling, Strategic Communication

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of digital technological development has changed children's patterns of interaction and communication in everyday life. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) on December 13, 2024, showed that 39.71% of young children in Indonesia had used mobile phones and 35.57% had accessed the internet. Among children aged 5–6 years, the percentages reached 58.25% for mobile phone use and 51.19% for internet access (Ramadhan, 2026). Earlier and longer exposure to digital devices may reduce time for verbal interaction or direct communication (Anak & Dini, 2023), although children's communication development also occurs through responding, imitating expressions, interpreting body movements, and receiving direct feedback (Agustina et al., 2026). This condition indicates changes in children's communication environment, creating a need for communication that maintains direct interaction while adapting message delivery to child audiences. In this context, storytelling is one form of communication that enables messages to be delivered directly and interactively while involving children as audiences.

Storytelling is an Indonesian oral cultural practice passed down through generations, including the transmission of folk stories (Indrawati et al., 2023). Storytelling uses narratives and verbal and nonverbal elements, enabling direct and interactive communication (Etri Prabowo & Nurdiarti, 2021). Message selection and the use of communication resources need to be adapted to communication goals and audiences (Fatonah, 2020). These considerations indicate that storytelling is not merely an activity of telling stories but also involves communicative decisions regarding what is communicated, how the message is packaged, and to whom it is addressed. Based on these characteristics, storytelling can be understood as a strategic communication practice.

As a strategic communication practice, storytelling involves an intentional process of constructing and delivering messages by considering how messages are packaged, the channels used, and audience characteristics (Nabila Fauziah et al., 2025). This strategy can be realized through theme and plot selection, language use, duration, emphasis on particular parts, and verbal and nonverbal elements to build attention and engagement. Thus, effective message delivery depends not only on the content of the story but also on the communicator's decisions in constructing and adapting the message. This process is an important part of the storyteller's role (Ilmiyah Fahmi, 2022).

A storyteller is someone who orally delivers stories to an audience (Fardani et al., 2024). Their role as a communicator is not limited to delivering stories but also involves determining how messages are constructed and interpreted through the stories selected and delivered (Andayani et al., 2024). The storyteller's role as a communicator is important to examine because storytellers actively make communication decisions when constructing and delivering messages, including selecting stories, emphasizing particular parts, modifying plots, and using verbal and nonverbal elements to direct messages toward audiences. One message that can be constructed through storytelling is moral meaning. Moral values can be represented through characters, conflicts, actions, dialogue, and story resolutions, rather than only through direct statements (Maghfiroh et al., 2024). Therefore, delivering moral meaning also involves how storytellers package messages according to audience characteristics, particularly children (Rantikasari, 2025).

Children differ from adult audiences in age, language comprehension, attention span, experience, and responses to messages (Amiliya & Hasanah, 2026). Therefore, the delivery of moral meaning cannot be carried out uniformly but requires adaptation to audience conditions. Such adaptation can be achieved through selecting language and stories appropriate to children's age and level of understanding, simplifying plots or conflicts, adjusting duration, and using intonation, expressions, gestures, eye contact, music, and props (Tuanakotta & Indianti, 2018). Audience adaptation is an important part of strategic communication because it allows moral messages to remain directed toward communication goals while being packaged appropriately for child audiences (Anggraini et al., 2025). However, such adaptation does not stop at decisions regarding the story or message form but also needs to be realized through the storyteller's communication behavior. This makes communication competence important for explaining how knowledge, motivation, and skills are used to implement communication decisions in storytelling practices.

Communication Competence Theory helps explain how communication goals and understanding of audiences are translated into communication behavior through communicators' knowledge, motivation, and skills. Thus, the issue in storytelling lies not only in how moral meaning is constructed and adapted but also in how storytellers realize these decisions through appropriate communication actions. Storytellers are important to examine because they actively determine and implement communication forms to construct, adapt, and deliver moral meaning to children.

Several previous studies have discussed the use of storytelling, narratives, and value communication in communication processes involving audiences. Putranto (2010) examined the communication of play-related values in an educational context, Arindita (2020) discussed brand storytelling in the #BodyProudMums campaign, while Faris (2022) examined the use of comics to develop Big Data literacy. These studies indicate that the delivery of values or information through narrative forms is related to how messages are packaged and delivered to audiences. However, these studies have not specifically explained how storytellers as communicators translate communication goals and an understanding of audience characteristics into message construction, adaptation, and communication behavior during storytelling. The use of communicators' knowledge, motivation, and skills to realize messages that have been constructed and adapted has also not been a primary focus.

Based on this gap, this study examines how storytellers as strategic communicators construct and adapt moral meaning according to child audience characteristics and realize it through communication competence. This study positions storytelling as a strategic communication practice involving four perspectives: strategic communication, audience adaptation, communication competence, and rhetorical theory. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of these four perspectives to understand an interconnected process, ranging from message construction based on communication goals, adaptation to child audiences, and the translation of communication decisions into communication behavior, to their realization in message delivery. This integration provides a comprehensive understanding of storytellers as strategic communicators in delivering moral meaning to

children. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how storytellers construct, adapt, and deliver moral meaning to child audiences through the strategic communication practice of storytelling. The research question is: "How do storytellers construct, adapt, and deliver moral meaning to children through the strategic communication practice of storytelling?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Strategic Communication

Strategic communication refers to the purposeful use of communication to achieve specific goals. Hallahan et al. (2007) define strategic communication as "the purposeful use of communication" to fulfill particular goals or missions. Thus, its strategic nature lies not only in message delivery but also in communication objectives and decisions concerning how messages are constructed, delivered, and directed toward target audiences. Strategic communication therefore involves deliberate choices regarding messages, channels, forms, and communication approaches based on objectives and audience characteristics (McGreavy et al., 2022).

In storytelling, strategic communication is reflected in how storytellers consciously select and construct story elements to achieve communicative goals. Characters, plots, conflicts, dialogue, actions, and resolutions can be organized to direct audience attention and construct particular meanings or values (van Ruler, 2018). Moral messages are therefore not understood as meanings automatically embedded in stories, but as meanings constructed through the selection and organization of narrative elements and the way they are communicated to audiences (Wahyudi et al., 2025)

The strategic nature of storytelling is also audience-oriented because constructed messages need to be adapted to audience characteristics to achieve communication goals (Siti Fatima & Mad Sa'i, 2025). Age, comprehension, attention, prior knowledge, and emotional responses may influence how messages are packaged and delivered. Accordingly, storytelling as strategic communication involves determining communication goals, constructing messages, and adapting messages and delivery to audience characteristics. This orientation provides the basis for audience adaptation in strategic communication.

2.2. Audience Adaptation

Audience adaptation refers to adjusting messages and delivery according to audience characteristics. Fendi Rahmat Widiant (2015) explains that communication should consider message recipients' characteristics to facilitate effective understanding. Giles (2016) argues that communicators may adjust their communication behavior according to the characteristics and responses of their interlocutors, while Seiter & Gass (2007) describe audience adaptation as involving analysis of audiences' values, demographics, personalities, needs, and communication situations. Thus, audiences are not merely recipients but also considerations in determining how communication should be conducted.

Adaptation may involve changes in language, delivery style, message complexity, and interaction. It requires communicators to consider audiences' knowledge, beliefs,

perspectives, needs, and responses when determining relevant explanations and content (Avis & Aminudin, 2026; Löhmann & Hanusch, 2026; Takmaz et al., 2023) Adaptation therefore concerns not only changes in message form but also how communicators interpret audience characteristics and responses to determine appropriate communication strategies (Iberri-Shea, 2017).

In storytelling for children, audience adaptation is important because children differ in comprehension, attention, experience, and emotional capacity (Rohmah, 2026). Storytellers need to consider age, language and plot comprehension, attention span, prior experience, and emotional or interactional responses. These considerations may influence story selection, language simplification, plot complexity, duration, and the use of verbal and nonverbal elements. Adaptation can also occur dynamically when storytellers respond to children's confusion, declining attention, enthusiasm, or engagement through changes in intonation, facial expressions, body movements, questions, humor, repetition, or additional explanations. In this study, audience adaptation is understood as a strategic process in which storytellers use their understanding of children's characteristics and responses to determine how moral messages are packaged and delivered while maintaining the intended moral value.

2.3. Communication Competence Theory

Communication competence refers to a communicator's ability to produce communication behavior that is appropriate and effective within a particular interactional context. Cupach & Spitzberg (1983) define communication competence in terms of appropriateness and effectiveness in relation to communication contexts and goals. Competence therefore involves not only the ability to convey messages but also the ability to select and perform communication behaviors appropriate to the situation, objectives, and participants.

Spitzberg and Cupach identify motivation, knowledge, and skills as key components of competent communication (Dalib et al., 2023). Motivation concerns the willingness to engage in communication and achieve its goals; knowledge involves understanding what should be done and how to do it; and skills refer to the ability to translate knowledge into communication behavior (Spitzberg, 2013). Together, these components enable communicators to determine appropriate responses according to situations and audience characteristics (Littlejohn et al., 2016).

In storytelling, a storyteller's communication competence is reflected not merely in speaking ability or mastery of the story, but in the ability to use knowledge, motivation, and skills to achieve storytelling goals appropriately and effectively. Knowledge enables storytellers to understand the story, its moral values, and the characteristics of child audiences, motivation supports audience engagement and communication goals, while skills are expressed through language, intonation, facial expressions, body movements, character voices, questions, and other forms of interaction.

Communication competence is closely related to audience adaptation because understanding audience characteristics and responses must be translated into appropriate

communication behavior (Susana et al., 2023). In this study, communication competence refers to storytellers' capacity to integrate knowledge of the story and audience, motivation to achieve communication goals, and verbal and nonverbal skills when adapting the storytelling process. It is therefore not treated as an isolated category but as a capacity that enables storytellers to implement communication strategies effectively in conveying moral meaning to children.

2.4. Storytelling

Storytelling is a form of narrative communication that presents stories through characters, events, conflicts, and resolutions (Mardiah et al., 2025). In communication contexts, stories serve not only as entertainment but also as a means of conveying ideas, experiences, and values. This process involves selecting and organizing story elements so that messages can be understood by audiences (Cristina Oktavianisa Simamora et al., 2023). Storytelling can therefore be understood as a narrative communication practice through which storytellers construct and convey meaning by organizing story elements.

Moral meaning can be constructed through the representation of values in narrative elements, including characters' actions, conflicts, consequences, dialogue, and resolutions. Values do not always have to be communicated through direct advice; they can emerge through characters' experiences and actions that facilitate meaning-making. The selection and organization of story elements are therefore part of the storyteller's process of determining how moral meaning is represented and understood. The constructed meaning is then realized through the way storytellers deliver the story to audiences.

2.5. Rhetorical Theory

Aristotle's rhetorical theory (2007) views rhetoric as the ability to identify available means of persuasion within a communication situation. In Rhetoric, Aristotle identifies three means of persuasion: ethos, pathos, and logos, relating respectively to the communicator's character, the audience's emotional state, and argument or message content (Huang et al., 2022). These elements indicate that effective message delivery depends not only on what is communicated but also on who communicates it and how the message is directed toward the audience (Griffin et al., 2015).

Ethos concerns the communicator's character or credibility. In storytelling, it may be reflected in how storytellers build trust and closeness with children through attitudes, expressions, and interaction. Pathos concerns influencing the audience's emotional state and may be expressed through intonation, facial expressions, changes in voice, and emotionally depicted situations within the story. Meanwhile, logos concerns argument or message content, which in storytelling can be reflected through plot coherence, cause-and-effect relationships, and characters' actions and consequences.

For children's storytelling, these three elements may operate together to support the communication of moral meaning. Storytellers may establish credibility through ethos, create emotional engagement through pathos, and facilitate understanding of actions, consequences, and moral values through logos. Therefore, Aristotelian rhetorical theory is

used in this study to examine how storytellers employ ethos, pathos, and logos to communicate moral meaning through storytelling.

2.6. Previous Studies and Research Gap

Previous studies indicate that communicating values, ideas, and information involves selecting and packaging messages through particular forms of communication. Putranto,(2010) examined how play-related values are communicated in educational contexts and associated with children's character development. The study demonstrates the importance of communicating values in education, but does not specifically examine how storytellers construct and adapt moral messages according to child audiences. The present study extends this discussion by examining the strategic processes used by communicators to construct moral messages.

Arindita (2020) examined the use of brand storytelling in the #BodyProudMums campaign on Instagram and showed that storytelling can communicate values, build audience engagement, and encourage audience action. However, the study focuses on brand communication through social media, whereas the present study examines direct storytelling practices between storytellers and children. This contextual difference allows the present study to extend discussions of storytelling by positioning audience adaptation as an important process in constructing and delivering moral meaning.

Faris (2022) examined storytelling and comics as communication tools for conveying information about Big Data to the wider public. The study demonstrates the importance of message form and packaging in generating audience engagement, but focuses on knowledge communication and Big Data literacy rather than the construction of moral meaning in storytelling interactions with children. The present study extends this concern by examining how storytellers construct messages, respond to audience reactions, and adapt delivery so that moral values can be communicated to children.

Overall, previous studies demonstrate that value communication, storytelling, and message packaging can support audience meaning-making and engagement. However, limited attention has been given to the relationship between communicative goals, audience adaptation, communication competence, and moral meaning construction in storytelling for children. This gap highlights the need to position storytellers not merely as story deliverers but as communicators who deliberately design messages and adapt communication according to audience characteristics to achieve particular goals.

Based on this gap, the present study positions storytelling as strategic moral communication, with audience adaptation as an important communicative process in conveying moral meaning. By integrating Strategic Communication, Audience Adaptation, Communication Competence, and Aristotelian Rhetorical Theory, the study examines how storytellers select and construct messages, understand children's characteristics and responses, and adapt communication to audience conditions. Its contribution lies in understanding storytelling as a strategic communication practice that connects moral message construction with adaptation to child audiences.

2.7. Relevance of the Literature to the Present Study

Based on the theoretical discussion, storytelling in this study is understood as a strategic communication practice involving communicative goals, message construction, audience understanding, and choices regarding delivery. Strategic Communication provides the basis for examining storytellers' goals and intentionality in designing and communicating moral messages, while Audience Adaptation explains how children's characteristics and responses become considerations in determining message form and delivery. Together, these concepts demonstrate that storytelling involves deliberate consideration of both communication objectives and audiences.

Adaptation requires Communication Competence, namely the ability to use knowledge, skills, and motivation to produce appropriate and effective communication behavior. This competence enables storytellers to translate their understanding of children into choices involving language, expressions, intonation, movements, interaction, and other delivery techniques. Meanwhile, Aristotelian Rhetorical Theory examines how designed and adapted messages are realized through ethos, pathos, and logos. These four concepts are interconnected in explaining how storytellers design, adapt, and deliver moral messages to children.

The relationship among these concepts begins with the storyteller's communicative goals, followed by an understanding of child audience characteristics as the basis for message adaptation. This understanding is translated through communication competence into appropriate communication choices and behaviors, while rhetorical strategies help package and deliver messages persuasively and engagingly. The overall process enables storytellers to construct and communicate moral meaning through both story elements and delivery practices. Thus, the four theoretical perspectives are not treated as separate categories but as interconnected concepts for understanding storytelling as strategic moral communication.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach to obtain an in-depth and contextual understanding of storytellers' communication practices in constructing, adapting, and delivering moral messages to children (Charismana et al., 2022). The approach describes phenomena based on field conditions without manipulating the research object (Septiani & Wardana, 2022). It is used to examine how communication goals, message construction, audience considerations, and delivery methods are manifested in storytelling practices.

The subjects were storytellers who actively conduct storytelling activities for children, as they are the communicators examined in relation to the construction and delivery of moral messages. Informants were selected purposively based on following criteria: actively conducting storytelling for children, having direct experience telling stories to child audiences, and being involved in determining and adapting delivery methods during storytelling. Four informants who met these criteria participated in the study. Their characteristics, backgrounds, and involvement in storytelling are presented in Table1.

Table 1. Informant Characteristics

Informant	Background	Involvement in Storytelling	Relevance to the Study
Informant 1	Member of the Kampung Dongeng community	Actively involved in storytelling activities for children	Has direct experience in delivering stories and interacting with child audiences
Informant 2	Active storyteller in Semarang City	Actively conducts storytelling activities for children	Provides information regarding moral message construction and the adjustment of delivery methods based on child audience characteristics
Informant 3	Storyteller who participated in Indonesia's Got Talent	Has experience demonstrating storytelling skills before an audience	Provides information regarding the process of delivering stories, the use of communication methods, and adaptation of delivery to the audience
Informant 4	Head of the Kampung Dongeng community	Actively involved in storytelling activities for children	Has experience managing and conducting storytelling activities and delivering messages to child audiences

The data consisted of primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through interviews with the four informants and observations, while relevant journals and books served as supplementary secondary sources. Interviews explored the storytellers' experiences, considerations, and communication practices, including moral message construction, audience characteristics, and the use of verbal, nonverbal, and rhetorical elements. Before each interview, the researcher explained the study's purpose and obtained the informants' willingness to participate and permission to record the interview. Each informant was interviewed once for 60–90 minutes between February 11 and 18, 2026, and the recordings were transcribed into text for analysis. Observations were conducted upon invitation and with the informants' knowledge to examine communication practices during storytelling. The observations focused on language, intonation, facial expressions, body movements, audience interaction, and adaptations to children's characteristics and responses. The observations were recorded and used as supporting data to examine how communication considerations described in the interviews were manifested in storytelling practices.

Interview and observation data were analyzed using thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) through six stages: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) coding, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing and developing themes, (5) defining themes, and (6)

reporting the findings (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The analysis involved repeatedly reading transcripts and observation records, coding relevant data, identifying patterns, and developing themes representing the findings. The analysis focused on communication competence, audience adaptation, moral message construction, rhetorical resources, and the relationships among communication goals, audience understanding, message adaptation, and delivery strategies.

At the interpretation stage, interview and observation data were integrated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of storytellers' communication practices. Interviews were used to examine communicators' reasons and considerations, while observations showed how these choices were manifested in storytelling practices. Strategic Communication, Communication Competence Theory, Audience Adaptation, and Aristotelian Rhetorical Theory were used complementarily as analytical perspectives for understanding storytelling as a strategic communication process in constructing and communicating moral meaning to child audiences.

Data trustworthiness was considered through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened by comparing information obtained through interviews with practices observed during storytelling. Transferability was supported by describing informant characteristics, research context, and observed communication practices, allowing readers to consider the applicability of findings to similar contexts. Dependability was maintained through systematic procedures covering interviews, transcription, observation, coding, and theme development, while confirmability was supported by grounding interpretations in empirical interview and observation data.

Because the study involved only four informants, the findings are not intended to be generalized to all storytellers. Transferability is therefore limited to contexts with characteristics similar to those of the informants and research situation. The findings may be used to understand storytellers' communication practices in similar contexts while considering audience characteristics, storytellers' experience, and storytelling situations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interview and observation data were analyzed using thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis process involved several stages, namely familiarization with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and reporting the findings. Through this process, data obtained from the experiences and practices of the four storytellers were identified based on communication patterns that emerged during storytelling. Codes with similar meanings were then grouped and developed into themes representing the processes of message construction, audience adaptation, communication competence, and rhetorical performance.

Table 2. Summary of Interviews Findings

Aspect	Informant 1	Informant 2	Informant 3	Informant 4
Story Selection and Development	Selects and modifies stories, including stories with religious or prophetic themes, using the ATM (Amati, Tiru, Modifikasi) method.	Creates original stories to clearly identify the messages to be conveyed.	Creates original stories by focusing on the main points to be conveyed and developing the story through improvisation.	Creates original stories by combining existing stories with local cultural elements and fictional characters familiar to children.
Story Adaptation to the Audience	Adapts stories to the requested theme, audience age, and background.	Adapts stories to the audience's age, background, and requests while considering universal values.	Adapts stories to the characteristics of children from kindergarten to elementary school to ensure age relevance.	Adapts stories to the audience's age and needs, including their attention span
Storytelling Delivery	Uses ventriloquism and music at the beginning of the story, followed by direct narration and ice-breaking activities to engage children in the story.	Uses gestures, eye contact, stage blocking, improvisation, and voice modulation to differentiate characters.	Emphasizes the message at the end of the story and employs a multimodal approach to storytelling	Uses a simple approach involving puppets and music, along with message reinforcement at the end of the story.

Use of Media and Supporting Elements	Uses ventriloquism and music as part of the opening and storytelling process.	Relies on nonverbal communication, such as gestures, eye contact, and stage movements.	Uses shadow puppets, hand puppets, ventriloquism, and elements of Indonesian culture.	Uses puppets and music as storytelling aids.
Message Management	Emphasizes messages through positive examples and avoids presenting overly negative stories.	Emphasizes messages through self-created stories adapted to the audience.		

Source: Researcher's interview data, 2026.

Table 3. Coding Framework

Initial Code	Category	Theme	Theoretical Interpretation
Story selection	Story construction	Strategic Construction of Moral Messages	Strategic Communication
Story modification	Story construction	Strategic Construction of Moral Messages	Strategic Communication
Self-created stories	Message construction	Strategic Construction of Moral Messages	Strategic Communication
Examples of positive behavior	Moral framing	Strategic Construction of Moral Messages	Message construction/framing
Age consideration	Audience characteristics	Audience Adaptation in Storytelling	Audience Adaptation
Audience background	Audience characteristics	Audience Adaptation in Storytelling	Audience Adaptation
Universal themes	Message adaptation	Audience Adaptation in Storytelling	Audience Adaptation
Attention/concentration	Audience needs	Audience Adaptation in Storytelling	Audience Adaptation

Gesture	Nonverbal skills	Communication Competence in Message Delivery	Skills
Eye contact	Interactional skills	Communication Competence in Message Delivery	Skills
Voice variation	Verbal/performative skills	Communication Competence in Message Delivery	Skills
Knowledge of the story/message	Communicative knowledge	Communication Competence in Message Delivery	Knowledge
Motivation to engage children	Communicative motivation	Communication Competence in Message Delivery	Motivation
Narrative structure	Logical organization	Rhetorical Performance in Communicating Moral Meaning	Logos
Emotional expression	Emotional engagement	Rhetorical Performance in Communicating Moral Meaning	Pathos
Storyteller's experience/credibility	Communicator credibility	Rhetorical Performance in Communicating Moral Meaning	Ethos

Table 4. Main Themes and Analytical Findings

Main Theme	Analytical Findings
Strategic Construction of Moral Messages	Storytellers construct moral meaning through determining communicative goals, selecting, creating, and modifying stories, as well as organizing and framing narrative elements.
Audience Adaptation in Storytelling	Storytellers adapt stories and message representations based on the age, background, needs, requests, and conditions of child audiences.

Communication Competence in Message Delivery	Storytellers translate constructed and adapted messages into communication behaviors through knowledge, motivation, and skills.
Rhetorical Performance in Communicating Moral Meaning	Storytellers actualize moral meaning through logos, pathos, and ethos, manifested through narrative structure, emotional expression, performative elements, supporting media, and communicator credibility.

The results of the coding process and theme review show that the four main themes are interconnected in describing storytelling as a strategic communication practice. The first theme, strategic construction of moral messages, demonstrates how storytellers determine goals and moral meaning and then select, create, or modify stories to package those messages. The second theme, audience adaptation in storytelling, demonstrates how the constructed messages are further adapted based on the characteristics, needs, and responses of child audiences so that moral meaning can be communicated in a relevant manner. The third theme, communication competence in message delivery, describes the storytellers' ability to translate considerations of the audience into communication behaviors through the knowledge, motivation, and skills used during storytelling. The fourth theme, rhetorical performance in communicating moral meaning, demonstrates how constructed and adapted moral messages are subsequently realized through rhetorical resources such as logos, pathos, and ethos, allowing moral meaning to be understood, felt, and trusted by the audience. The four themes are not understood as separate processes, but as an interconnected sequence in which communicative goals drive message construction, understanding of the audience influences message adaptation, communication competence enables such adaptation to be realized in interaction, and rhetorical performance strengthens the enactment of moral meaning in storytelling delivery.

The four themes were subsequently analyzed using the four theoretical perspectives established in this study. Strategic Communication was used to understand how storytellers' communicative goals were translated into the processes of selecting, creating, and organizing stories as moral messages. Audience Adaptation was used to analyze how considerations of child audience characteristics and responses influenced story adaptation and delivery methods. Communication Competence Theory was used to interpret how storytellers' knowledge, motivation, and skills were manifested in communication behaviors during storytelling, while Aristotelian Rhetorical Theory was used to analyze how logos, pathos, and ethos were employed in actualizing moral messages through story delivery. Thus, the four theoretical perspectives were used complementarily to analyze storytellers' ability to construct, adapt, and deliver moral meaning to child audiences. The theories were not used as standalone themes, but as analytical perspectives that helped interpret patterns identified from the interview and observation data and explain how the processes of constructing, adapting, and delivering moral meaning took place in storytelling practices.

4.1. Strategic Construction of Moral Messages

The research findings indicate that the four storytellers placed communicative goals as an initial consideration in constructing moral messages through storytelling. Informant 1 tended to use stories modified from prophetic or religious narratives, as he stated, "*saya lebih suka senggol-senggol lagi tentang kisah nabinya atau mungkin tentang teladan-teladan nabi*", while Informant 2 and Informant 3 preferred to create their own stories so that they could directly determine the messages to be conveyed. Meanwhile, Informant 4 used stories through a process of collaboration or modification while retaining the important points of the story, as she explained, "*Biasanya kolaborasi sih. Misalnya saya ambil dari buku atau dari apa tetapi tetap dikembangkan sendiri. Jadi nggak pernah yang plek-ketik-plek dengan cerita atau yang ada di buku yang kita baca. Pasti kita kembangkan, ditambahin ini, ditambahin itu. Atau disesuaikan dengan kondisi kelokalan kita.*" Although the four storytellers used different sources and approaches to developing stories, they demonstrated a similar pattern in which stories were positioned as materials that could be selected and processed based on the message to be communicated. Thus, storytelling did not begin merely with the intention to tell a particular story, but with consideration of the moral meaning to be constructed through that story.

In pursuing these communicative goals, the selection, creation, and modification of stories formed part of the storytellers' process of controlling how moral messages were packaged within narratives. Existing stories were not always used in their original forms, but could be modified, developed, or combined with other elements to support the message being presented. For storytellers who created their own stories, this process provided greater room to directly determine the main points, characters, actions, and plot to be used in conveying particular values. Meanwhile, the use of existing stories provided a narrative framework that could subsequently be redirected through the addition, reduction, or modification of story elements. Therefore, stories in storytelling were not treated as fixed texts, but as communicative materials that could be reconstructed according to the intended message.

The construction of moral messages subsequently took place through the organization of narrative elements, such as characters, actions, conflicts, and story resolutions. The findings show that the storytellers not only determined the values they wanted to convey, but also determined the characters' actions and narrative experiences used to represent those values. Moral values were therefore not always communicated in the form of direct advice, but could be constructed through the relationship between characters' actions, the situations they encountered, and the resolutions provided in the story. The way these elements were arranged allowed certain behaviors to be positioned as examples, while particular actions could be presented as behaviors that should be avoided. Thus, the story structure functioned as a medium for directing how a moral value was represented through the experiences of the characters, rather than merely as a sequence of events supporting the plot. This finding demonstrates that moral meaning in storytelling was formed through the process of selecting and organizing narrative experiences carried out by the storytellers.

The selection process was also evident in the tendency of all four storytellers to emphasize examples of positive behavior and avoid presenting negative consequences or punishment. This choice indicates that the storytellers did not present all possible representations of a particular moral value, but selected forms of experience considered capable of serving as the primary representation of the value being communicated. By positioning positive behavior as an example, the storytellers framed moral meaning through actions that could be observed and emulated within the story. Conversely, avoiding elements of punishment demonstrated a decision regarding the type of consequence that was considered unnecessary to place at the center of the narrative. This choice illustrates that the construction of moral messages also involved a process of framing, in which storytellers determined certain aspects of the story to be more prominent than others. In the context of strategic communication, this framing demonstrates that storytellers did not only determine which values would be communicated, but also determined the type of representation used so that those values could be presented through children's narrative experiences. Thus, the construction strategy was concerned not only with what moral value is communicated, but also with how that value was represented and which aspects were emphasized within the story.

The findings from the four storytellers reveal an interconnected pattern of message construction, although it was realized through different approaches to story production. The process began with the determination of communicative goals, which were then translated through the selection, creation, or modification of stories, followed by the organization and selection of narrative elements to form particular moral representations. This pattern demonstrates that moral messages were not content that was entirely predetermined and simply transmitted to audiences, but meanings constructed through a series of communicative decisions made by the storytellers. From the perspective of Strategic Communication, the findings show that the intentional and purposeful use of communication lies not only in the existence of a goal to convey moral values, but also in how that goal was translated into choices of material, story development, narrative element selection, and emphasis on particular aspects of the story. In other words, communication strategy in storytelling operated through a series of decisions concerning what needed to be conveyed, how the message should be packaged, and which aspects needed to be emphasized to support the predetermined communicative goals.

These findings extend the understanding of strategic communication by demonstrating that intentionality operates not only at the stage of establishing communication goals, but also at the level of message construction and representation. Within the concept of Strategic Communication, the purposeful and intentional use of communication positions goals as the basis of communicative action (Hallahan et al., 2007). However, the findings show that these goals did not remain as general orientations, but were translated into concrete decisions concerning the narrative materials used, the story elements retained or modified, and the moral representations emphasized. Thus, this study extends the understanding of strategic communication in the context of storytelling for children by demonstrating that the strategic nature of communication is also embedded in the process of constructing messages before they are delivered to audiences.

This process can be seen in Informant 1's selection of prophetic stories, Informant 2's and Informant 3's creation of stories, and Informant 4's modification of stories. These practices demonstrate that storytellers did not merely select a medium for delivering an already available message, but also shaped moral representations through the processing of story materials. Similarly, the tendency to emphasize examples of positive behavior and avoid emphasizing negative consequences indicates that framing formed part of the strategic process of determining which moral aspects were made more prominent for the audience. This finding does not merely illustrate the principle of Strategic Communication, but demonstrates how the concept of purposeful use of communication was realized at the level of message selection, modification, and framing in storytelling. Accordingly, the analytical contribution of this finding lies in understanding strategic communication in storytelling not only in terms of the goals to be achieved, but also in terms of how storytellers selectively shaped moral representations through the narrative materials they selected and processed. This construction should subsequently be considered in relation to the characteristics of the audience targeted by the communication, which is the focus of the discussion in the section on Audience Adaptation in Storytelling.

4.2. Audience Adaptation in Storytelling

The four storytellers did not treat child audiences as uniform recipients of messages, but instead considered audience characteristics when determining the form of the stories to be communicated. Informant 1 and Informant 2 considered age, background, and audience requests when selecting stories, while Informant 3 emphasized the use of universal themes, as he stated, "*Diupayakan secara tema biasanya tema yang universal*." Informant 4, meanwhile, considered the age and needs of the audience, including children's ability to maintain concentration. Although the aspects considered by each storyteller were not entirely the same, all four demonstrated a pattern in which audience characteristics became a basis for making decisions about the messages to be conveyed. This illustrates the concept of Audience Adaptation as a process in which communicators consider audience characteristics, needs, and context when determining the form of communication to be used, consistent with previous research discussing message adaptation based on audience characteristics. However, the findings of this study indicate a more specific context, namely that considerations of child audiences were applied from the stage of story selection and development, rather than only when the message was delivered. Thus, audience adaptation in storytelling for children was evident not only in adjustments to style or delivery, but also in initial decisions regarding the narrative materials used to represent moral meaning.

Age emerged as one of the main considerations used by the four storytellers when adapting stories to children's abilities. This adaptation was reflected in their attention to the characteristics of children from kindergarten to elementary school and differences in their ability to understand stories across these age groups. For younger audiences, storytellers tended to consider stories that were simpler and closer to children's experiences, whereas older audiences allowed for the development of stories with different levels of complexity. Consideration of age therefore indicates that storytellers did not merely adjust the topic of the story, but also anticipated the audience's capacity to

receive and understand the meaning being communicated. On this basis, age became one of the factors used to determine the level of complexity and form of message representation so that they would correspond to the characteristics of the message recipients. Within the concept of Audience Adaptation, this adjustment demonstrates that adaptation is not limited to changes in topic, but also includes adjustments to the form in which messages are represented based on audience characteristics.

Beyond age, background, needs, requests, and audience conditions also became considerations in determining the relevance of the messages being conveyed. Informant 1 and Informant 2 considered the audience's background and requests, while Informant 4 paid attention to children's needs and ability to maintain concentration. Informant 3 selected universal themes so that messages could be received by children with diverse characteristics. These considerations demonstrate that audience adaptation takes place by taking into account the social and situational context in which communication occurs, rather than demographic characteristics such as age alone. The storytellers took these conditions into account when determining stories or values considered relevant to the characteristics and context of the children. In this way, message relevance was constructed through the relationship between the meaning the storytellers intended to communicate and the conditions of the audiences receiving the message.

Audience adaptation, therefore, did not mean changing the moral objective to be communicated, but rather changing how the message was packaged so that it could be understood and received within a particular audience context. The same moral message could be realized through stories with different levels of complexity, settings, and contexts depending on the characteristics of the children being targeted. The selection of stories that were close to children's experiences, the use of universal themes, and consideration of children's ability to maintain concentration indicate a process of repackaging messages according to the conditions of the recipients. This demonstrates that storytellers engaged in a process of recontextualization, namely placing the moral meaning to be communicated within a story context that was more appropriate to the experiences and characteristics of the audience. Adaptation was therefore not merely a matter of simplifying stories, but a communicative process of maintaining the moral objective while adjusting its form of representation to the audience. This process shows that audience adaptation occurred alongside message construction because considerations of the audience also influenced the selection of stories, themes, levels of complexity, and contexts used to represent moral meaning. The findings thus provide a more specific understanding of audience adaptation in the context of storytelling for children, namely that adaptation is also embedded in the process of packaging and recontextualizing moral messages, rather than occurring only at the delivery stage.

Variations in the considerations made by the four storytellers from age, background, requests, and needs to concentration ability and the use of universal themes, demonstrate different ways of reading audiences while still leading toward the same objective of establishing a fit between the message and its recipient. In the perspective of Audience Adaptation, these variations demonstrate that communication adjustment is contextual because the form of adaptation depends on the characteristics and situation of the audience encountered by the storyteller. The findings do not indicate that adaptation

automatically produces communication effectiveness, but rather demonstrate how storytellers sought to establish a fit between the constructed moral messages and the conditions of child audiences. Storytelling as strategic communication is therefore dynamic because decisions concerning messages do not end with the construction process, but may be adjusted when placed within a particular audience context. These adjustments are subsequently translated by storytellers into communication behaviors during story delivery, which relates to the storytellers' communication competence.

4.3. Communication Competence in Message Delivery

The communication competence of the storytellers was reflected in their ability to transform constructed messages into forms of delivery that could be used in interactions with audiences. Based on the interviews, the storytellers used various communication skills, including vocal intonation, facial expressions, body gestures, eye contact, improvisation, and supporting media such as hand puppets, wayang, and music. These findings were primarily derived from the experiences and practices reported by the storytellers through interviews and were subsequently supported by observations of their communication practices during storytelling. Thus, communication competence in this study was identified based on the consistency between the practices reported by the informants and the practices observed, rather than through measurements of audience responses or communication effectiveness among children. Informant 2 explained, "*Komunikasi nonverbal yang biasa saya lakuin ya gesture tubuh, eye contact, blocking panggung dan improvisasi, serta perubahan suara*." Meanwhile, Informant 3 stated, "*Saya bawakan wayang kulit tapi dengan gaya sesuai usia mereka, mereka jadi kenal, mereka jadi tahu dan timbul rasa bangga*." Informant 4 also explained that she used puppets accompanied by background music when telling stories. Informant 1 similarly used ventriloquist techniques and music in delivering stories, particularly at the beginning before continuing with direct narration. These four experiences demonstrate that communication skills were used by considering their functions and the context of delivery, both through the management of body and voice and through the selection of media that could support children's understanding and engagement. These elements were not used separately from the messages being conveyed, but became part of how the storytellers built interactions with audiences during storytelling.



Figure 1. Observation of Kak Informant 2's Storytelling

The storytellers' communication skills were not used randomly, but were selected according to their communicative functions in the message delivery process. Changes in intonation and voice, for example, were used to distinguish characters or emphasize particular parts of the story, while gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and stage movements were used to support audience engagement throughout the storytelling process. The use of puppets, wayang, and music also formed part of the storytellers' approach to making the story more concrete and helping maintain audience attention. Communication skills therefore did not merely function as ornaments to make storytelling more engaging, but became resources used by storytellers to manage the interaction process and direct attention toward parts of the message considered important. The relationship between forms of communication and their functions indicates that competence lies in the storytellers' ability to determine communication behaviors that are appropriate to the purpose of delivery, rather than simply in the number of techniques they can use. In other words, a storyteller can be considered competent not because they use an increasing number of techniques, but because they are able to use those techniques functionally to support message communication.

In addition to skills, the communication competence of the four storytellers was also reflected in the knowledge underlying their communication decisions during storytelling. This knowledge included an understanding of the story material, the moral message to be conveyed, and how particular forms of communication could be used during the storytelling process. Understanding the material enabled the storytellers to maintain the direction of the story and the intended message even when improvisation occurred during the communication process. This indicates that improvisation does not mean the loss of message structure, but rather represents the ability to develop the delivery without losing the predetermined communicative objective. Therefore, the storytellers' knowledge did not merely function as mastery of the story content, but also served as a basis for making decisions during the storytelling process. In the context of these research findings, knowledge and skills demonstrate the storytellers' communication capacity as reflected in their reported and observed practices, rather than serving as direct measures of communication effectiveness among audiences. Knowledge and skills are interconnected because knowledge of the message and communication situation needs to be translated into concrete communication behaviors in storytelling practice.

Another aspect of communication competence concerns motivation, namely the storytellers' drive to establish and maintain interaction with audiences during storytelling. This motivation was reflected in their efforts to maintain audience engagement through various forms of communication rather than merely delivering stories in a one-way manner. In this study, motivation was understood based on the informants' explanations regarding their motivations and considerations in building interactions with audiences, as well as the communication practices observed during storytelling. Motivation is important because the communicator's drive to maintain audience engagement forms part of the considerations underlying the use of communication skills during the storytelling process. However, these findings are not intended to demonstrate that the storytellers' communication practices directly resulted in communication effectiveness, because audience communication effectiveness was not measured in this study. Thus, knowledge, skills, and motivation did not operate as separate elements, but formed complementary

aspects of communication capacity. Knowledge provided the storytellers with a basis for understanding what needed to be done, motivation encouraged them to maintain interaction, while skills enabled these decisions to be realized through communication behaviors. The integration of these three aspects demonstrates that the storytellers' communication competence lies in their ability to make decisions and act appropriately within storytelling situations.

The four storytellers' accounts reveal a common pattern in which communication competence functioned as a capacity to transform message designs into actual and interactional communication practices. Differences in the use of gestures, changes in voice, eye contact, improvisation, puppets, wayang, and music demonstrate variations in communication behaviors, yet all were directed toward supporting the delivery process and audience engagement during storytelling. Accordingly, communication competence cannot be understood merely as a technical ability to tell stories, but as the ability to integrate knowledge, motivation, and skills to produce communication behaviors that are appropriate to the goals and circumstances of the interaction. In this study, this understanding was based on a combination of practices reported by informants through interviews and communication practices observed during storytelling. The findings therefore demonstrate how communication competence was manifested in practice rather than measuring the communication effectiveness resulting from those practices. This reinforces the position of storytellers as strategic communicators because this capacity enables constructed and adapted moral messages to be concretely realized in the communication process. In other words, strategic construction and audience adaptation take practical form through the communication competence possessed by storytellers. This process can subsequently be examined through how moral messages are persuasively realized through the storytellers' rhetorical performance.

4.4. Rhetorical Performance in Communicating Moral Meaning

The delivery of moral messages in storytelling did not depend solely on messages that had been constructed and adapted to audience characteristics, but also on how those messages were enacted in the communication process. The use of logos, pathos, and ethos was evident in the ways the four storytellers organized story structures, built emotional engagement, and presented their credibility as communicators. These three elements emerged through the use of story plots, voice and expression management, gestures, supporting media, and the ways storytellers built relationships with their audiences. This demonstrates that rhetorical performance functioned as a mechanism that transformed moral messages into communication experiences that could be followed by children.

The element of logos was evident in how storytellers organized the characters' experiences through actions, conflicts, and story resolutions, allowing the relationship between behavior and its consequences to be understood by children. Through such a structure, moral values did not have to be presented as abstract advice, but could be understood through the experiences of the characters portrayed in the story. The strength of logos in storytelling therefore lies in the storytellers' ability to make the story plot a basis through which children can follow and understand the moral meaning being constructed. Narrative structure thus not only functions to maintain the flow of the story, but also helps

direct the audience's meaning-making process toward behaviors presented as good, worthy of emulation, or, conversely, behaviors that should be avoided.

This understanding is further reinforced through pathos, namely the use of communication elements that build the audience's emotional engagement with the experiences of the characters in the story. The four storytellers used variations in voice, intonation, expressions, gestures, music, puppets, and other media to create an atmosphere during storytelling. The use of these elements indicates that storytellers not only sought to keep children attentive to the story, but also directed how children experienced situations related to the moral message. When feelings of sadness, joy, tension, or emotion were created through the storytellers' performance, the moral meaning previously conveyed through the story structure acquired an emotional dimension for the audience. In this regard, pathos functioned to connect understanding of the message with children's emotional engagement, so that moral values did not remain limited to what was known, but could also be experienced through the storytelling process.

Alongside understanding and emotional engagement, the delivery of moral messages was also influenced by ethos, namely the storytellers' credibility as communicators. Their experience, mastery of the material, storytelling skills, and ability to interact with children shaped their position as communicators who carried and represented moral messages. This position is important because moral meaning in storytelling is present not only through the story itself, but also through the figure who selects, delivers, and emphasizes particular behaviors as examples to be followed. The findings indicate that, in rhetorical communication with children, ethos is not only related to credibility inherent in the storyteller, but is also realized through how storytellers demonstrate mastery of the story, manage interactions, and occupy the position of figures conveying moral values. Thus, the credibility of storytellers in this context emerged alongside the practice of message delivery, rather than existing merely as a standalone characteristic of the communicator. Thus logos, pathos, and ethos have complementary functions in communication practices with children. Logos concerns the organization of narrative experiences, pathos concerns the management of emotional experiences, while ethos concerns the position and credibility of storytellers as communicators.

The four storytellers' practices demonstrate that logos, pathos, and ethos worked together in actualizing moral meaning that had been constructed and adapted to child audiences. Logos organized narrative experiences so that messages could be followed through relationships among actions and events, pathos was used to create atmosphere and emotional experiences within the story, while ethos positioned storytellers as figures who carried and represented moral messages. This contributes to an understanding of rhetorical communication with children by showing that rhetorical functions in storytelling are not primarily realized through verbal argumentation or direct persuasive appeals, but are translated into forms of experience that can be followed, felt, and observed by child audiences. In other words, narrative structure functions as a form of logical organization, emotional performance and nonverbal elements serve as means of actualizing pathos, while storyteller credibility is manifested through mastery of the material, storytelling skills, and ways of building interactions with children as forms of ethos. This extends the understanding of rhetorical communication in the context of children by demonstrating

that logos, pathos, and ethos do not operate separately from the characteristics of the medium and interaction, but are integrated into how storytellers construct communication experiences through stories.

This contribution further indicates that, in the context of storytelling for children, rhetorical communication can be understood as a performative and contextual practice, because persuasion is not realized solely through the content or language used by the communicator, but also through how the message is enacted in interaction. In storytelling, storytellers do not merely provide reasons or give advice about particular behaviors, but construct narrative experiences through characters' actions, conflicts, emotional expressions, voice, gestures, supporting media, and their own position as communicators. Rhetoric therefore forms part of the process of actualizing moral meaning that has previously been constructed and adapted to the audience, rather than a stage that emerges only after the message has been fully formed. The findings demonstrate that the distinctive nature of rhetorical communication with children lies in the integration of how messages are organized, how emotional experiences are enacted, and how communicators demonstrate their credibility during interaction. Accordingly, storytelling as strategic moral communication does not end with determining moral meaning and adapting messages, but continues through the formation of communication experiences that enable such meaning to be realized narratively, emotionally, and performatively in interaction with children.

4.5. Integrated Discussion

The findings as a whole indicate that storytelling as moral communication takes place through a series of interconnected processes rather than through four separate communication practices. The process begins with the construction of moral messages, in which storytellers determine the values to be communicated and incorporate them into various elements of the story. At this stage, the Strategic Communication perspective helps explain the relationship between communicative goals and the storytellers' decisions in shaping messages. Once constructed, messages are adapted based on the characteristics and context of child audiences, which is analyzed through the Audience Adaptation perspective to examine how an understanding of the audience influences message packaging. These communicative decisions are then translated through communication competence, enabling storytellers to employ knowledge, motivation, and communication skills during interaction. Subsequently, Aristotelian Rhetorical Theory is used to understand how these decisions are enacted persuasively through logos, pathos, and ethos. However, the findings indicate that using the four perspectives separately does not fully explain how the formation of moral meaning takes place as an integrated process in storytelling practices with children. Strategic Communication explains intentionality and goal orientation, but the findings indicate that these goals do not only determine the message, they are also related to how storytellers interpret audience characteristics and determine how messages are enacted in interaction. Similarly, Audience Adaptation explains adjustments based on audience characteristics, but the findings show that adaptation does not occur only at the delivery stage, rather, it begins with the selection, creation, and packaging of stories. Meanwhile, Communication Competence and Aristotelian Rhetorical Theory help explain storytellers' abilities and performance, but the findings show that

these two perspectives function as connecting mechanisms that translate strategic and adaptive decisions into concrete communication practices.

The integration of the findings demonstrates that message construction does not end with determining values and organizing stories, but is related from the outset to the interpretation of the audience. Audience adaptation likewise does not stop at adjusting the message, but is translated through communication competence and realized through rhetorical performance. Thus, the theoretical contribution of this study lies not only in applying these four perspectives to the context of storytelling for children, but also in demonstrating that moral communication takes place through the interconnectedness of communicative goals, message construction, audience interpretation, communicator competence, and rhetorical performance. This interconnected pattern indicates that concepts previously used to explain different aspects of communication can be understood as one strategic process that mutually influences the formation of moral meaning for children. These findings extend the understanding of storytelling as strategic communication by showing that its strategic nature lies not only in communication goals, but also in how messages are constructed, recontextualized, translated, and enacted according to child audiences.

This interconnection also indicates that changes in one part of the process are related to other parts. The messages constructed by storytellers cannot be separated from audience characteristics because the way a value is represented is influenced by who receives the message. An understanding of the audience then determines how the message is translated into communication choices, while storytellers' competence enables these choices to be realized flexibly during interaction. Rhetorical performance subsequently becomes the space in which all of these decisions are actualized, allowing narrative structure, emotional engagement, and communicator credibility to work together in presenting moral meaning to children. This pattern demonstrates that the audience is not merely the final destination of communication, but also influences how messages are constructed and realized by storytellers.

The integration of these four findings establishes storytelling as strategic moral communication because storytellers consciously manage the relationship among goals, messages, audiences, and delivery in constructing particular moral meanings. From the perspective of Strategic Communication, the findings demonstrate that intentionality and audience orientation are reflected not only in determining messages, but also continue through the process of adaptation and the selection of delivery methods. The contribution of this study lies in explaining how strategic communication operates in storytelling: moral meaning is not merely transmitted through stories, but constructed through narrative decisions, recontextualized according to child audiences, translated through communication competence, and actualized through rhetorical performance. Thus, these four aspects constitute an integrated communication process that positions storytelling as a strategic practice for constructing and interpreting moral messages with child audiences.

From a practical perspective, the findings can serve as a basis for developing storyteller training that focuses not only on storytelling skills, but also on the ability to construct moral messages, interpret the characteristics of child audiences, adapt delivery

methods, and employ appropriate communication strategies during interaction. Based on the findings, such training can be directed toward several interconnected abilities, including establishing communication goals before storytelling, selecting or developing stories according to the intended moral meaning, adapting stories to the age and condition of the audience, and using language, intonation, expressions, movements, and supporting media according to interactional needs. The findings may also serve as a consideration in developing storytelling activities in early childhood education by positioning stories not only as entertainment, but also as part of a communication process designed to convey and construct the meaning of moral values. In the context of early childhood education, the findings can be considered when designing storytelling activities that take into account the alignment among moral message objectives, children's characteristics, story forms, and delivery methods, thereby providing storytellers or educators with a basis for adapting storytelling activities to the audience context they encounter. Thus, the findings can be utilized as a consideration in designing storytelling activities that account for the interconnectedness among messages, children's characteristics, storytellers' abilities, and delivery methods.

CONCLUSION

This study examines storytelling as a strategic communication practice in constructing and delivering moral meaning to child audiences. The findings show that this process involves interconnected stages of determining communicative goals, constructing moral messages through the selection, creation, and modification of stories, and adapting them to children’s characteristics, needs, contexts, and responses. This process is supported by communication competence through knowledge, motivation, and skills, and reinforced through the rhetorical use of ethos, pathos, and logos.

The findings further indicate that children are not merely recipients of moral messages, as their characteristics and responses influence how messages are constructed, adapted, and delivered. Storytelling is therefore understood not simply as a storytelling activity or medium for conveying values, but as strategic moral communication that manages the relationship among communicative goals, messages, audiences, communicator competence, and delivery methods. The contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that moral meaning is not merely transmitted through stories, but constructed through narrative decisions, adapted to child audiences, translated through communication competence, and actualized through rhetorical performance.

This study is limited by its four informants, and the findings are therefore not intended to be generalized to all storytellers. It also focuses on storytellers’ perspectives and communication practices, without directly examining children’s perspectives as recipients of moral messages. Future research may involve more storytellers from diverse backgrounds and contexts and incorporate children’s perspectives to examine how moral messages are received, interpreted, and responded to. Comparative studies across educational, community, and digital storytelling contexts may also broaden understanding of strategic communication in delivering moral meaning to children.

DECLARATION OF AI USE

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) as an AI-assisted tool to support language editing, including translating text from Indonesian into English, proofreading, and improving the clarity and readability of the manuscript. The use of AI did not involve generating or analyzing research data, conducting the research, interpreting empirical findings, or drawing research conclusions. The authors remain fully responsible for the content, accuracy, interpretation, and final version of the manuscript.

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