

Integrating Literature in EFL to Foster Moral Growth and Character Development: A Study of *The Jungle Book*

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ABSTRACT

Education plays an important role in shaping human character and the selection of appropriate learning materials significantly contributes to students' personal and moral development. This study attempts to explore the integration of Rudyard Kipling's The Jungle Book in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, focusing on its potential to foster moral literacy through ethical sensitivity, logical reasoning, and moral imagination. Using a qualitative descriptive methodology and drawing on Nancy Tuana's framework of Moral Literacy, the research seeks to examine how the novel's themes can contribute to the moral growth of the junior high school students. The findings reveal how the ethical sensitivity is conveyed through its themes of brotherhood and acts of heroism, while moral reasoning is exemplified by the emphasis on gratitude and the consequences of revenge. Additionally, the moral imagination is demonstrated through camaraderie and self-preservation efforts. Therefore, the study concludes that The Jungle Book offers valuable material for promoting moral literacy, making it a rich pedagogical resource in EFL contexts. Besides, it emphasizes the dual role of literature in both enhancing language skills and promoting moral values, thereby offering a holistic approach to education that nurtures both linguistic competence and ethical development of the young learners.

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1. Introduction

Literary works serve as valuable resources for both intensive and extensive reading in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. They offer rich narratives that engage students not only in language learning but also in deeper cognitive and emotional development. One such literary classic is *The Jungle Book* (1894) by Rudyard Kipling, a timeless story that continues to captivate readers with its vivid portrayal of Mowgli's journey to survive in the harsh Indian jungle. Through Mowgli's experiences, the novel explores themes of survival, identity, friendship, and the struggle between good and evil. These themes provide ample opportunities for emotional and moral growth, enabling students to subconsciously engage with the idea of moral literacy.

Moral literacy is in fact a key component of holistic education that refers to the ability to recognize, reflect upon, and make decisions about ethical issues in one's life. It encourages students to develop a sense of responsibility, empathy, and critical thinking (Abbas et al., 2023; Rahman, 2018; Junaid et al., 2025). Although literature has been a long-standing tool for EFL instruction, selecting texts that align with moral literacy goals for students can be a challenge. Educators must carefully choose works that not only enhance linguistic skills but also foster moral reasoning and ethical reflection (Rahman & Amir, 2019; Mahdori et al., 2025; Nahdhiyah et al., 2022). *The Jungle Book* offers a unique opportunity to explore moral themes such as loyalty, justice, respect for nature, and the consequences of one's actions.

This study aims to examine *The Jungle Book* for its potential to foster moral literacy in EFL education, focusing on its moral lessons and educational potentials for junior high school students. By analyzing the novel's characters, plot, and underlying ethical themes, the research seeks to demonstrate how this literary work can be integrated into EFL curricula to enhance both language acquisition and moral development. Through this exploration, the study will highlight the ways in which Kipling's narrative can serve as a powerful tool for cultivating not only language proficiency but also a deeper understanding of moral values, which are essential for students' personal and social growth.

This research emphasizes the importance of using literature in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms for secondary school students in Bangladesh. Literature, such as *The Jungle Book*, enhances language skills, promotes cultural awareness, and encourages critical thinking. By integrating literary works, educators can improve students' language proficiency while fostering moral literacy and ethical reflection. This study explores how *The Jungle Book* can serve as a valuable tool for both language acquisition and character development in EFL learning.

1.1 Importance of Literature in EFL Learning

The integration of literature in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms has been widely recognized for its ability to enhance language learning and foster cultural awareness. Aghagolzadeh and Tajabadi (2012) emphasize the significance of learning materials in foreign language teaching programs, noting that literature-based materials can enrich students' understanding of language while promoting critical thinking and cultural awareness. Nurgiyantoro (2007) also argues that authentic literary materials, such as novels, provide opportunities for students to engage with real-world language and ideas, thereby improving their linguistic and cognitive skills. Similarly, Ihejirika (2014) highlights the symbiotic relationship between literature and language acquisition, suggesting that literature serves as a tool to deepen students' understanding of both language and culture. In line with these perspectives, Siaj and Farrah (2018) advocate for the use of novels in EFL classrooms, asserting that they not only motivate students but also enhance their linguistic abilities and broaden their cultural understanding. This study, therefore, explores the potential of using *The Jungle Book* as a tool for EFL learning, building on the existing literature that underscores the importance of literature in language education.

1.2 Analysis of The Jungle Book and Its Themes

Several studies have analyzed *The Jungle Book* from different angles, offering valuable insights into its themes and relevance in both literary and educational contexts. Mette (2011) interprets the novel as a reflection of Victorian values and a symbol of the British Empire's ideals, which can serve as a point of discussion in the EFL classroom regarding cultural history and imperialism. Besides, Selian, Suhadi, and Manugeran (2017) focus on the theme of heroism in *The Jungle Book*, particularly through the character of Mowgli, whose journey reflects the development of personal strength and moral courage. Eripuddin (2017) also explores the narrative's emphasis on the "law of the jungle," advocating for unity and harmony over brute strength, a theme that can be used to foster discussions on ethical behavior and societal norms. Therefore, these studies will contribute to understanding the novel's moral dimensions, which this research further investigates by examining the moral values conveyed through the characters and their relevance to moral literacy in EFL learning.

1.3 Moral Literacy and Its Relevance in EFL Education

Moral literacy, a concept that encompasses the development of ethical sensitivity, reasoning, and imagination, plays a crucial role in character development and education (Suma et al., 2023; Rahman & Weda, 2019; Junaid & Andini, 2025). Begley and Tuana (2007) define moral literacy as the ability to recognize ethical issues, reason about them, and imagine alternative moral scenarios, skills that are essential for personal growth and maturity. Rizzo and Bajovic (2016) argue that educators must promote moral literacy to prepare students for meaningful contributions to society, emphasizing the importance of ethical awareness, critical thinking, and creativity in education. In the context of EFL, integrating moral literacy into language instruction can provide students with the tools to reflect on their values and behaviors. This study explores how *The Jungle Book* can be used to promote moral literacy by analyzing the moral lessons embedded in the novel's themes, such as friendship, loyalty, and the struggle between civilization and nature.

1.4 Integrating Literature in EFL Classrooms

The integration of literature into EFL classrooms also serves as a powerful pedagogical approach that enhances language skills while fostering cultural understanding. According to Zhu (2018), literature offers students the opportunity to engage with complex themes and character dynamics that provoke critical thinking and discussions, which are vital for language development. Ainul Aishah Awang et al. (2024) further emphasize that contemporary children's literature (CCL), such as *The Jungle Book*, aligns with curricular goals and significantly enhances various language skills, including reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. The emotional and imaginative engagement prompted by literary texts can also increase students' motivation and retention, creating a dynamic and enriching learning environment. By incorporating literature into EFL instruction, educators can not only improve students' language proficiency but also nurture a lifelong appreciation for reading and exploration of different cultures.

1.5 The Jungle Book as a Tool for EFL Learning

Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894) provides a rich tapestry of themes that resonate deeply within both literary and educational contexts. At the heart of the novel is the exploration of identity, particularly through the character of Mowgli, a human boy raised by wolves. His journey symbolizes the universal quest for belonging and self-discovery, which can serve as a valuable discussion point in EFL classrooms. The novel also delves into the tension between civilization and nature, providing opportunities for students to engage with moral and ethical dilemmas. Moreover, the interactions among the animal characters offer a lens through which students can examine societal norms, power dynamics, and ethical choices. This study builds on the existing body of literature by exploring how *The Jungle Book* can be used to enhance both language acquisition and moral literacy in EFL classrooms.

1.6 Benefits of Using “The Jungle Book” in EFL Classrooms

Integrating *The Jungle Book* into EFL classrooms offers numerous pedagogical benefits. First, the novel's themes of identity, belonging, and the relationship between civilization and nature provide rich opportunities for cross-cultural understanding and critical thinking. According to Ainul Aishah Awang et al. (2024), literature like *The Jungle Book* can improve students' motivation and engagement with English, tapping into their natural curiosity and imagination. Studies have shown that contemporary children's literature (CCL) not only enhances language skills but also aligns with curricular goals, promoting reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and cultural literacy (Zhu, 2018). Additionally, the novel's adventurous narrative and moral lessons can stimulate discussions that encourage students to reflect on their values and behaviors, fostering both language development and character growth.

1.7 Challenges in Integrating Literature into EFL Classrooms

Despite the benefits, integrating literature into EFL curricula presents several challenges. One notable issue is the disparity between the literary texts available in educational materials and those actually engaged in classrooms (Muslimat et al., 2023; Cahyani et al., 2025; Junaid et al., 2026). Degwale, Gashaye, and Simachew (2020) note that while literary forms such as poems are prevalent in Ethiopian secondary school textbooks, novels are often underrepresented. This imbalance can limit students' exposure to diverse narratives and hinder their language acquisition and cultural understanding. Furthermore, teachers may face difficulties in effectively delivering literary content due to inadequate training or students' varying levels of motivation and proficiency (Al-Busaidi & Tuzlukova, 2015). Overcoming these challenges requires educators to develop strategies that align literary texts with students' interests and proficiency levels, ensuring that literature integration is both effective and engaging.

The integration of literature, particularly *The Jungle Book*, into EFL instruction offers a multifaceted approach to language acquisition that transcends vocabulary and grammar. By engaging with the novel's rich narrative, students not only develop linguistic skills but also gain insights into cultural nuances and moral complexities. This classic text serves as a powerful tool for stimulating discussion, critical thinking, and empathy, fostering an immersive learning environment that enhances both language proficiency and moral literacy. Ultimately, incorporating literature like *The Jungle Book* in EFL classrooms cultivates a deeper understanding of the English language and its broader cultural context, promoting fluency and a lifelong love of reading. Therefore, the study examines the moral values depicted in *The Jungle Book* and their relevance to EFL learning.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design using a content analysis approach. As Creswell (2014, p. 153) explains, qualitative research involves examining and interpreting the meanings attributed to social or humanitarian issues by individuals or groups. The primary objective of this research is to analyze the representation of moral literacy in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. The descriptions and findings are derived from data relevant to the study's focus. The research applies a moral literacy framework to identify the moral skills depicted through the characters' attitudes, thoughts, and dialogues in the novel. Ultimately, the study provides an in-depth analysis of *The Jungle Book* as a resource for moral literacy in EFL learning.

The data collection process comprises two key components: techniques for gathering data and instruments used for data collection. These elements ensure a structured and systematic approach to examining the novel's moral themes and their relevance to EFL contexts. The research study follows the APA 7th manual for the citation and references of the works and quotations used in this paper.



Figure 1. Methods in Analyzing Moral Literacy in Literature

3. Results and Discussion

This section explores the key findings of the study on moral literacy in *The Jungle Book* and its implications for enhancing literature-reading skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. The discussion revolves around how the novel embodies ethical sensitivity, ethical reasoning, and moral imagination through its characters, particularly Mowgli, and how these components contribute to the development of moral literacy in readers.

3.1 Moral Literacy in The Jungle Book

Moral literacy in literature encompasses three essential elements: ethical sensitivity, ethical reasoning skills, and moral imagination. These components are vital not only for literary studies but also for fostering moral growth.

3.2 Ethical Sensitivity in The Jungle Book

Ethical sensitivity refers to the ability to discern ethical challenges and address them thoughtfully. This ability includes recognizing moral dilemmas, evaluating their significance, and understanding the core values inherent in the situation. In *The Jungle Book*, ethical sensitivity is depicted through the following instances:

a. Heroic Acts

Demonstrating care and protection for vulnerable individuals reflects a heroic attitude rooted in ethical sensitivity. This is evident in the actions of Father Wolf, who protects young Mowgli when he is first brought into the cave and pursued by Shere Khan. Despite being a predator, Father Wolf acts against his nature, safeguarding Mowgli without harming him. As Kipling writes:

A wolf accustomed to moving his own cubs can, if necessary, mouth an egg without breaking it, and though Father Wolf's jaws closed right on the child's back, not a tooth even scratched the skin, as he laid it down among the cubs. (Kipling, 2000, p. 18)

Here, Father Wolf's protective actions illustrate his ethical sensitivity, as he prioritizes Mowgli's safety over his instinctive behavior as a predator, displaying a significant moral capability.

b. Brotherhood and Friendship

The bond between Mowgli and Bagheera exemplifies the strength of friendship and the sense of responsibility that stems from it. Their relationship nurtures a heroic spirit, as they protect and support each other amid the dangers of the jungle. We notice Kipling's description about Bagheera:

Bagheera is the black panther with inky black all over, but in a certain light his hair glossy like watered silk. He is as cunning as a jackal, as bold as a wild buffalo, and as reckless as a wounded elephant. He is born among men and his mother dies among men too. He loves Mowgli very much. (Kipling, 2000, p. 43)

Here, we notice that Bagheera serves as Mowgli's steadfast guardian, demonstrating selflessness without seeking recognition. His gestures, including paying a price to secure Mowgli's freedom, exemplify the moral awareness nurtured within their bond. This depiction of friendship provides a literary example that can encourage the development of ethical sensitivity in real-world interactions.

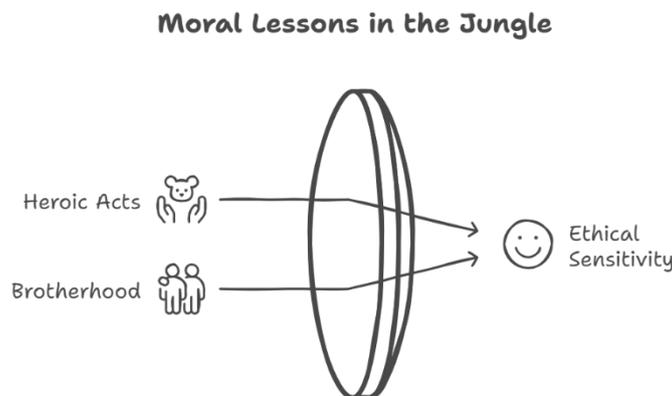


Figure 2. Moral Lessons in The Jungle Book

3.3 Ethical Reasoning Ability

Ethical reasoning involves the ability to evaluate ethical situations by understanding different ethical frameworks, assessing the validity of facts, and weighing values. In *The Jungle Book*, ethical reasoning is illustrated through characters' actions and decisions, showcasing the implications of gratitude and revenge.

a. Gratitude and Ethical Reflection

Mowgli demonstrates gratitude toward his adoptive parents, Father Wolf and Mother Wolf, who saved him from Shere Khan and raised him as one of their own. This expression of gratitude reflects Mowgli's acknowledgment of their sacrifices and care. As Mowgli says:

"We be on blood thou and I," Mowgli said to his adopted parents. "I took my life from thee, Father and Mother. Without you both, I am no meaning. My life is gone. I owe you much. I must repay all your kindness... Your lessons are great. All because of you. Never in my life shall I forget thee all." (Kipling, 2000, p. 87)

The above heartfelt statement of Mowgli underscores his understanding of the value of reciprocity and ethical reasoning. Despite being human, he considers himself bound to his wolf parents by an unbreakable bond of gratitude. Their sacrifices and teachings have deeply influenced Mowgli's sense of responsibility and morality, prompting him to express his gratitude through thoughtful actions. This demonstrates how ethical reasoning can emerge from critical reflection on the impact of others' kindness and the subsequent moral obligations it creates.

b. The Impact of Shere Khan's Vengeance

The conflict between Mowgli and Shere Khan stems from an old grudge harbored by the tiger. Shere Khan's animosity toward humans began when a group of people rested in a forest cave, leading to a confrontation between humans and the tiger. The Law of the Jungle explicitly forbids killing humans unless done as a lesson for young animals, emphasizing the tiger's violation of this principle. Kipling writes in this connection:

Faugh! Are there not enough beetles and frogs in the tanks that he must eat Man, and on our ground too! The Law of the Jungle, which never orders anything without a reason, forbids every beast to eat Man except when he is killing to show his children how to kill, and then he must hunt outside the hunting grounds of his pack or tribe. (Kipling, 2000, p. 6)

Thus, Shere Khan's obsessive hatred for humans, and by extension Mowgli, leads him to a life consumed by anger and vengeance. His attempts to harm Mowgli only escalate his feelings of fear, anxiety, and dissatisfaction, highlighting the destructive nature of revenge. This portrayal serves as a cautionary tale about the corrosive effects of hatred and vengeance, which disrupt not only the lives of those targeted but also the peace of mind of those consumed by such emotions.

Exploring Ethical Dimensions in "The Jungle Book"

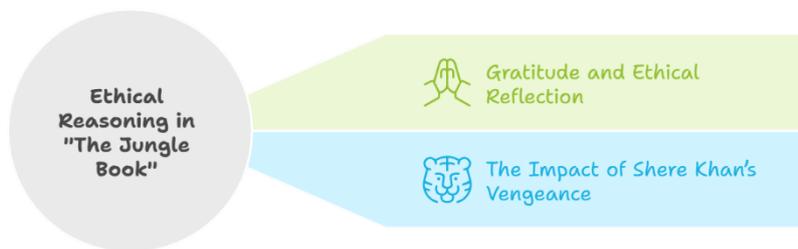


Figure 3. Exploring Ethical Dimensions in The Jungle Book

3.4 Moral Imagination

Moral imagination involves envisioning potential responses to complex situations and considering their impacts, blending logical reasoning with emotional understanding. In *The Jungle Book*, moral imagination is reflected in Mowgli's actions and relationships, demonstrating his sense of belonging to the jungle and his efforts to navigate conflicts ethically.

a. Mowgli's Love for the Jungle

Mowgli's deep connection to the jungle stems from the ten years he spent immersed in its community. His bonds with the animals forged his courage and knowledge of the jungle's intricacies, making him feel inseparable from the environment and its inhabitants. Mowgli proclaims thus:

"And what is a man that he should not run with his brothers?" said Mowgli. "I was born in the jungle. I have obeyed the Law of the Jungle, and there is no wolf of ours from whose paws I have not pulled a thorn. Surely they are my brothers!" (Kipling, 2000, p. 14)

This statement captures Mowgli's belief that his life is intertwined with that of the jungle and its creatures. It reflects his moral imagination in recognizing his role within the jungle family, treating it as an extension of his identity and inspiring his determination to protect it despite looming dangers.

b. Mowgli's Internal Conflict and Perception of Family

Mowgli identifies as part of the wolf pack that raised him, despite knowing he is human. His upbringing among wolves led him to see himself as one of them, creating a profound sense of loyalty and belonging. Kipling states in this regard:

"But though a young wolf would have remembered that advice every hour, Mowgli forgot it because he was only a boy. Bagheera, who had eyes and ears everywhere, knew something of this, and once or twice he told Mowgli in so many words that Sheer Khan would kill him someday. Mowgli would laugh and answer: 'I have the Pack and I have thee; and Baloo, though he is so lazy, might strike a blow or two for my sake. Why should I be afraid?'" (Kipling, 2000, p. 13)

Mowgli's internal conflict arises from his dual identity. While he is human, his moral imagination drives him to act as if he is a wolf, drawing strength from his jungle family and their collective support to face Sheer Khan's threat.

c. Survival Through Solidarity and Conflict Resolution

Mowgli's moral imagination also manifests in his ability to resolve conflicts and protect his friends. Despite being initially rejected by the villagers after killing Sheer Khan, Mowgli's actions highlight his moral commitment to safeguarding both the jungle and its inhabitants. Kipling describes:

The herd rounded up in the misty twilight, and when they got near the village Mowgli saw lights, and heard the conches and bells in the temple blowing and banging. Half the village seemed to be waiting for him by the gate. 'That is because I have killed Sheer Khan,' he said to himself. But a shower of stones whistled about his ears, and the villagers shouted: 'Sorcerer! Wolf's brat! Jungle demon! Go away!'... The old Tower musket went off with a bang, and a young buffalo bellowed in pain. (Kipling, 2000, pp. 59-60)

This scene underscores Mowgli's struggle to reconcile his actions with the villagers' fear and rejection. His imagination allowed him to envision outcomes and act in solidarity with his jungle companions, fostering resilience and reinforcing his moral commitment to justice and loyalty. Through these instances, Mowgli exemplifies how moral imagination guides individuals to navigate ethical dilemmas, balancing personal identity with collective responsibility and standing firm in the face of adversity.



Figure 4. Graphical Illustration of Mowgli's Moral Imagination

3.5 The Impact of Moral Literacy in Enhancing Literature Reading Skills in EFL Contexts

Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* offers readers a captivating fantasy centered on Mowgli, a boy raised in the Indian jungle by wolves. Kipling vividly portrays Mowgli's journey of growth, guided by the laws of the jungle and his unwavering loyalty to its community. As Mowgli navigates life among Jungle People, including cobras, a panther, a bear, and a tiger, his adventures not only sharpen his strength and intelligence but also inspire readers' imagination. By presenting Mowgli's harmonious life in a jungle that others perceive as dangerous, Kipling challenges preconceived notions. He demonstrates how one can overcome fear and stigma by fostering trust, building relationships, and learning to coexist. Through Mowgli's experiences, readers gain insights into essential life skills, such as discerning trustworthy individuals and adapting to challenging environments.

Here, the central characters such as Mowgli, Father Wolf, Mother Wolf, Hathi, and Bagheera exemplify bravery and heroism, highlighting virtues like protection, loyalty, and thankfulness. The story seamlessly weaves in aspects of ethical awareness, moral reasoning, and imaginative empathy—key components of moral literacy—positioning it as a valuable tool for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Incorporating *The Jungle Book* into EFL curricula can enhance students' literature-reading abilities while fostering moral and ethical awareness. The novel's layered narrative and universal values engage readers in both linguistic and moral exploration, enriching their language skills and character development simultaneously.

4. Conclusion

Thus, we observe that Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* serves as a valuable tool for fostering moral literacy within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, particularly for junior high school students. Through its compelling narrative, the novel presents numerous opportunities for students to engage with core components of moral literacy—ethical sensitivity, ethical reasoning, and moral imagination. The characters, particularly Mowgli, exemplify qualities such as courage, loyalty, gratitude, and justice, which not only contribute to their personal growth but also provide a rich context for moral reflection and development. By integrating *The Jungle Book* into the EFL curriculum, educators can encourage students to explore ethical dilemmas and moral values, helping them develop a deeper understanding of both language and character. The novel's emphasis on unity, friendship, and moral responsibility offers profound lessons that transcend cultural boundaries, making it an invaluable resource for character development in diverse educational settings.

Moreover, *The Jungle Book* reinforces the notion that literature is not only a means of language acquisition but also a tool for shaping ethical consciousness. Through thoughtful engagement with the text, students can cultivate moral literacy, which in turn can lead to more conscientious, empathetic, and reflective individuals. Thus, this study affirms that literature, particularly *The Jungle Book*, can play a pivotal role in enhancing EFL learners' reading abilities while nurturing their moral and personal development.

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