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## Analysis of Moral Values in the Novel *Negeri Bawah Air* by Ary Nilandari

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### ABSTRACT

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#### ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify, describe, and analyze the moral values contained in the novel *Negeri Bawah Air* by Ary Nilandari, motivated by the crucial role of literary works as a medium for transmitting moral values capable of shaping readers' character and ethical consciousness. A qualitative descriptive method with a literary studies approach was employed, with data collected through a comprehensive reading and note-taking technique and classified based on Bertens' (2013) theory of moral values encompassing three aspects: responsibility, conscience, and obligation. The findings reveal that all three moral values are present in an integrative manner through the characters' actions, speech, and thoughts, yielding 285 data points in total, with conscience emerging as the most dominant aspect (214 data points), followed by responsibility (174 data points) and obligation (123 data points), indicating that internal moral conflict and deliberation constitute the central axis of the novel's narrative. This study concludes that *Negeri Bawah Air* functions not merely as an adventure narrative but as a vehicle for contextually relevant moral messages, contributing to the understanding of how moral values operate in an integrative and interconnected manner within literary texts and affirming the novel's significance as a medium for character formation.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Literary works represent one of the most significant forms of human cultural expression, embodying lived experience, thought, emotion, and worldview through an aesthetic and imaginative use of language. Within contemporary literary studies, literature is no longer regarded solely as a source of entertainment; it has evolved into an educative vehicle that systematically transmits values to its readers. Contemporary Indonesian literature holds considerable potential for enriching readers' inner repertoire through the moral dimensions embedded in texts, encompassing transcendental values, social responsibility, and ethical conduct (Al-Ma'ruf et al., 2024). These values generally span social, cultural, religious, and moral dimensions pertaining to the distinction between good and evil in human life.

Moral values in literary works occupy a strategic role, functioning as normative guidelines for readers in their attitudes and conduct. Through the presentation of complex narratives, readers are not merely invited to enjoy the dynamics of plot and conflict; they are also prompted to internalize implicit and explicit moral messages. Literary works have been shown to effectively convey moral messages that motivate positive transformation in readers, particularly in terms of resilience when confronting life's challenges and the development of self-regard (Inayyah & Simanjuntak, 2022). This finding reinforces the position of literature as an effective medium for reflection in the formation of individual character and personality (Al-Ma'ruf & Nugrahani, 2019).

The novel, as a genre of prose fiction, holds a comparative advantage in depicting the complexities and depths of human life more fully than other literary forms. Through the construction of intrinsic elements including character, characterization, plot, setting, and conflict novels are capable of presenting a wide range of life issues that intersect directly with social reality. Moral values are represented contextually through the decisions characters make amidst moral dilemmas, such as tensions between personal interest and duty, between conscience and social pressure, or between responsibility and self-interest (Putri & Simanjuntak, 2022). In this sense, the moral dimensions of a novel are inseparable from its narrative architecture: they emerge through character choices, relational dynamics, and the conflicts that drive the story forward (Tambunan & Pardede, 2022).

Despite the growing body of scholarship on moral values in Indonesian literature, several gaps remain. Most existing studies focus on canonical or widely recognized novels, while works of fantasy and adventure literature especially those written for young readers receive comparatively limited analytical attention (Putri et al., 2022). Prior studies have also tended to examine moral values in broad thematic terms without sufficiently accounting for how narrative structure, characterization, and plot complexity function together to produce morally layered texts (Rahmayanti et al., 2020). Furthermore, there is a relative scarcity of studies that trace moral value representation across all three of its primary dimensions responsibility, conscience, and obligation within a single, integrated analytical framework (Karundeng & Sukenti, 2023). These gaps represent an important scholarly opportunity, particularly given the growing readership of Indonesian children's and young adult fiction and its potential role in character formation (Prayitno et al., 2022).

One novel that is particularly relevant to examine from this perspective is *Negeri Bawah Air* (The Underwater Realm) by Ary Nilandari. The novel narrates the adventures and friendship of three protagonists Ridwan, Chang, and Rambe each confronting distinct existential challenges: Ridwan faces the harsh reality of losing his father; Chang must adapt to the physical limitations imposed by his asthma condition; while Rambe experiences alienation within his own family. The inner conflicts of these characters serve as a medium for conveying ethical values encompassing humility, empathy, social harmony, and responsibility (Pramusuari & Rahayu, 2023). The narrative complexity deepens when Rambe encounters Princess Meutia, a crown princess from the Underwater Realm whose kingdom faces a crisis, propelling the protagonists into an adventure that tests not only their physical endurance but also their moral integrity (Sabrina & Shomary, 2024).

Moral value representation in literary works can be traced through three primary dimensions: responsibility, reflected in characters' attitudes toward the consequences of their actions; conscience, evident in characters' processes of moral deliberation; and obligation, manifested in characters' adherence to prevailing norms and social expectations (Karundeng & Sukenti, 2023). All three dimensions are consistently present throughout the

narrative of *Negeri Bawah Air*, rendering it a productive and underexplored object of moral analysis within Indonesian literary scholarship (Al-Ma'ruf & Nugrahani, 2019).

This study is guided by three research questions: (1) What moral values are represented in *Negeri Bawah Air* by Ary Nilandari? (2) How are these moral values narratively constructed through the novel's characterization, plot, and conflict? (3) To what extent do the moral dimensions of responsibility, conscience, and obligation operate as an integrated value system within the novel? Accordingly, the study aims to identify and describe the moral values contained in the novel, to analyze how those values are represented through narrative construction, and to understand the interrelationship among the three moral dimensions as they manifest across the text. This study is expected to contribute to Indonesian literary scholarship particularly in the analysis of moral values in children's and young adult fiction while offering readers a deeper understanding of the ethical messages embedded in the work (Prayitno et al., 2022).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The qualitative approach was adopted because the study aims to understand and describe the moral values embedded in a literary work in depth, rather than in numerical or statistical form. The descriptive method was used to systematically depict the facts and data derived from the research object, enabling a thorough and contextually grounded representation of the moral dimensions present in the text (Duha, 2023). The research object is the novel *Negeri Bawah Air* by Ary Nilandari. The research focus is directed toward moral values encompassing three primary aspects: responsibility, conscience, and obligation as manifested through the characters and narrative arc. Data collection was conducted through a reading and note-taking method. The researcher read the novel in its entirety, carefully and repeatedly, in order to develop a thorough understanding of the narrative, consistent with prior qualitative studies of moral values in Indonesian fiction (Inayyah & Simanjuntak, 2022). Based on the data collection process, a total of 285 excerpts were identified, analyzed, and classified. The data analysis technique was carried out in the following steps: (1) identifying excerpts containing moral values; (2) grouping data into the categories of responsibility, conscience, and obligation; (3) describing the moral significance of each excerpt; and (4) drawing conclusions based on the analysis (Putri & Simanjuntak, 2022). To ensure data validity, this study employed a sustained observation technique reading and re-examining the data repeatedly to achieve a thorough understanding and produce accurate analytical results (Karundeng & Sukenti, 2023).

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

The examination of moral values in literary works in this study draws upon the ethical theory advanced by Bertens (2013), who posits that moral values possess four defining characteristics: they are connected to personal responsibility, linked to conscience, obligatory for all individuals, and present across the various domains of human life. Of these four characteristics, this study focuses on the three most relevant to the moral representation of characters in the novel namely, responsibility, conscience, and obligation (Tambunan & Pardede, 2022).

Responsibility refers to the individual's consciousness of being accountable for one's actions and their consequences, both to oneself and to others. Conscience constitutes the internal moral awareness that functions both as a guide and a regulator of behavior, enabling individuals to determine right from wrong. Obligation, meanwhile, pertains to the moral imperative that requires individuals to act in accordance with prevailing norms and values not merely due to external pressure, but arising from an internally cultivated moral consciousness (Bertens, 2013). These three aspects of moral value are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are interrelated and manifest in an integrative manner through characters' actions, speech, and thought in literary works (Al-Ma'ruf, Arifin, & Nugrahani, 2024).

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Research Findings

The research data consist of excerpts from the novel that contain moral values, collected through a reading and note-taking technique. All data were classified into three moral value categories: responsibility, conscience, and obligation. Based on the analysis, a total of 285 morally significant excerpts were identified. Of these, the value

of conscience was the most dominant category with 214 data points, followed by responsibility with 174 data points, and obligation with 123 data points.

The dominance of conscience indicates that characters' internal conflicts and moral deliberations constitute the most prominent dimension of the novel. The discrepancy in figures across categories signifies that a single excerpt may simultaneously contain more than one moral value, demonstrating that moral values in the novel are overlapping and mutually interconnected (Duha, 2023). All classified excerpts are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Classification of Moral Values in the Novel**

No.	Novel Excerpt	Responsibility	Conscience	Obligation
1	"My father and mother perished saving me." (p. VIII)	✓	✓	✓
2	"Meanwhile, my courage keeps rising and sinking. Like a small lifeboat in a raging ocean." (p. VIII)		✓	
3	"While I am still afloat, I must gather strength." (p. VIII)	✓		
4	"We Three Knights, pledge our loyalty..." (p. IX)			✓
5	"Liberating the Underwater Realm — until victory is in our hands." (p. IX)	✓		✓
6	"He had built hundreds of constructions, not one of them based on an instruction manual." (p. 1)	✓		
7	"He was determined never again to be an easy target for enemy fire." (p. 2)	✓		
8	"His mother was right — playing games is addictive." (p. 2)		✓	
9	"But Chang was different. He had grown thin from playing PlayStation too much." (p. 2)	✓	✓	
10	"Chang gradually cut down his gaming hours... Chang truly broke free from the PlayStation." (p. 3)	✓	✓	
11	"Even when Papi wanted to give him a new game CD, Chang refused outright." (p. 3)	✓	✓	
12	"They were by no means disloyal. They simply chose to stay and accompany Chang." (p. 4)			✓
13	"If they wanted to leave, then let them go. Nothing could stop them." (p. 4)		✓	
14	"And Chang had to let them go." (p. 5)		✓	
15	"My mother always said: do not run away from problems, but do not go looking for them either." (p. 6)	✓	✓	
16	"If we could have fun somewhere else, why bother getting into a fight with them?" (p. 6)	✓	✓	
17	"But if he let his friends leave now, who knew when they would come back." (p. 7)		✓	
18	"Don't let your gastric acid flare up again." (p. 7)	✓		✓
19	"...slid from the top toward the river. He let go of his hands while shouting." (p. 8)		✓	
20	"Chang knew that rismi, or rice threshing, meant rolling around in the rice barn." (p. 8)		✓	
21	"I still have a whole roll of durian left. Enough for all three of us." (p. 9)	✓	✓	
22	"He ate only the seeds, slowly, so his friends could enjoy more without feeling awkward." (p. 10)	✓	✓	
23	"The water in the durian shell can remove the smell... effective for preventing durian sickness." (p. 11)	✓	✓	
24	"Because my mother does not like durian, I ate a whole one by myself." (p. 12)	✓		
25	"Fortunately, Amang had already counted the durian sections and divided them up." (p. 12)	✓		✓
26	"Fortunately, Amang had already counted the durian sections and divided them up." (p. 13)	✓		✓
27	"Perhaps that was why he was so often forgotten." (p. 14)		✓	
28	"Rambe was just an ordinary boy — with no nickname, not much drama." (p. 14)		✓	
29	"I am not allowed to eat carelessly." (p. 15)	✓	✓	✓
30	"Let's grill them in the kitchen. I want to try." (p. 16)	✓	✓	

31	"Relax, Bi Imas is on leave today. Only Bi Ara is here. Let's go!" (p. 17)		✓	
32	"Ridwan had quickly stopped him from washing the seeds." (p. 17)	✓	✓	
33	"The outside of the seeds can get very cold, but heat is retained inside for a long time." (p. 18)	✓	✓	
34	"With a knife, Ridwan split the seeds to cool them faster." (p. 19)	✓		
35	"Ridwan peeled the skin off the seeds and handed the contents to Chang." (p. 20)		✓	
36	"He said he wanted to call briefly to ask permission from his parents." (p. 21)	✓	✓	✓
37	"Still, he drank the water." (p. 21)		✓	
38	"Ridwan and Rambe were overcome by doubt." (p. 22)		✓	
39	"Race to the top!" shouted Ridwan, jumping off his bicycle. (p. 22)	✓		
40	"Chang, remember what Mami told you? Push, but don't let go of the handlebars!" (p. 23)	✓	✓	✓
41	"Don't worry, I will be fine." (p. 23)		✓	
42	"They braked swiftly." (p. 24)	✓		
43	"Ridwan dropped his bicycle and rushed into the river." (p. 25)	✓	✓	
44	"What hurts? Is anything wounded, broken, crushed?" (p. 26)		✓	
45	"Ridwan nodded and went to retrieve his jacket." (p. 27)	✓		✓
46	"They braked swiftly." (p. 24)	✓		
47	"Ridwan dropped his bicycle and rushed into the river." (p. 25)	✓	✓	
48	"He moved Chang's bicycle aside and helped Chang to his feet." (p. 25)	✓	✓	
49	"What hurts? Is anything wounded, broken, crushed?" (p. 26)		✓	
50	"They huddled by Chang's side, waiting for him to be able to speak." (p. 26)		✓	

Source: Primary data analysis (2026)

### 3.2 Data Analysis

#### a. Responsibility

The moral value of responsibility manifests in the novel through a variety of characters' actions reflecting moral awareness toward themselves and others.

Datum 1.

*"My father and mother perished saving me."* (Nilandari, 2010: p. VIII)

This excerpt reflects the moral value of responsibility. The parental figures demonstrate an immense sense of responsibility toward their child, as evidenced by the ultimate sacrifice made for the child's safety. The phrase "perished saving me" illustrates that parental responsibility is fulfilled with profound sacrifice and sincerity.

Datum 3.

*"While I am still afloat, I must gather strength. Seek the full assistance of the knights of this realm."* (Nilandari, 2010: p. VIII)

This excerpt reflects the moral value of responsibility as active engagement. The phrase "I must gather strength" reveals that responsibility is not passive, but drives strategic action.

Datum 10.

*"Chang gradually cut down his gaming hours... Eventually, he almost never played. Chang truly broke free from the PlayStation."* (Nilandari, 2010: p. 3)

This excerpt reflects responsibility as behavioral transformation. The character demonstrates a gradual shift toward positive change, confirming that responsibility can be realized through consistent and deliberate changes in behavior.

#### b. Conscience

The moral value of conscience represents the most dominant aspect in the novel, reflecting that the author positions internal moral consciousness as the foundational basis of character construction.

Datum 2.

*"Meanwhile, my courage keeps rising and sinking. Like a small lifeboat in a raging ocean."* (Nilandari, 2010: p. VIII)

This excerpt reflects the moral value of conscience through the depiction of intense inner conflict. The character's struggle between fear and courage represents an authentic process of moral deliberation, where conscience functions as an internal control mechanism compelling the character to persist despite doubt.

Datum 15.

*"My mother always said: do not run away from problems, but do not go looking for them either."* (Nilandari, 2010: p. 6)

This excerpt reflects conscience as balanced wisdom. The principle of facing challenges without excess represents a moral philosophy that can only be genuinely internalized by individuals with a cultivated and reflective conscience.

c. Obligation

The moral value of obligation in the novel manifests across multiple dimensions of social relations, ranging from familial ties and friendship to commitment toward collectively assumed duties.

Datum 4.

*"We Three Knights, pledge our loyalty to escort and defend, to rescue the Twin Princes, to fight Rangaswazir."* (Nilandari, 2010: p. IX)

This excerpt reflects obligation as collective commitment. The characters' solemn pledge represents an act of binding themselves morally to a mission that transcends personal interest, as evidenced by the phrase "pledge our loyalty."

Datum 36.

*"He said he wanted to call briefly to ask permission from his parents."* (Nilandari, 2010: p. 21)

This excerpt reflects obligation as filial respect. The act of seeking parental permission reflects the internalization of norms of deference and accountability within family relationships, demonstrating that obligation must be carried out with moral consciousness.

### 3.3 Discussion

The results and discussion section presents the research findings clearly, systematically, and supported by both primary textual evidence and relevant theoretical frameworks.

#### **The Value of Responsibility**

The moral value of responsibility in *Negeri Bawah Air* manifests through a wide range of characters' actions and attitudes that reflect moral awareness both toward themselves and others. Moral values associated with responsibility are not merely abstract ideals but are empirically observable through the behavioral choices individuals make in both private and social contexts (Van den Berg, Kroesen, & Chorus, 2022). Bertens (2013) affirms that moral values pertaining to responsibility require individuals to be accountable for their actions on a personal basis, not merely under external pressure. This internal dimension of responsibility is further supported by the understanding that literary characters who embody such values provide readers with concrete moral exemplars that transcend the fictional world (Mchussain, 2023).

Self-reliance as a form of responsibility is evident in the novel through the portrayal of a character who "had built hundreds of constructions, not one of them based on an instruction manual," which marks responsibility as an internal capacity that fosters initiative and creativity. This representation aligns with findings in literary analysis demonstrating how ethical values in fiction including self-discipline, personal accountability, and autonomous action function as instruments of character formation for readers (Andriyanto, Darni, Subandiyah, Hardika, & Sukarman, 2022). Conversely, failure to exercise responsibility is portrayed through Chang, who had grown thin from excessive gaming a representation of the inability to exercise self-control. A comparative literary study of moral values in novels confirms that self-discipline and the acceptance of personal responsibility rank among the most foundational dimensions of moral portrayal in fiction (Tambunan & Pardede, 2022). The novel subsequently depicts a process of transformation, underscoring that responsibility can be cultivated through consistent and intentional behavioral change (Duha, 2023). This observation is consistent with the broader literature on character development, which emphasizes that moral growth is an ongoing, cultivable process rather than a fixed trait (Fazlina & Saharudin, 2025).

### **The Value of Conscience**

The moral value of conscience represents the most dominant aspect in the novel, as reflected by its highest frequency of occurrence. This dominance indicates that the author positions internal moral consciousness as the foundational basis of character construction. The centrality of conscience in literary narrative is not incidental; fiction has long served as a medium through which writers externalize and interrogate the internal moral life of individuals, making the novel an especially powerful vehicle for exploring ethical self-awareness (Devereux, 2022). Bertens (2013) explains that one of the defining characteristics of moral values is their capacity to arouse the "voice" of conscience a voice that accuses when moral values are violated and praises when they are upheld. This dynamic is supported by narrative ethics scholarship, which holds that characters' inner conflicts and moral deliberations in fiction constitute the primary medium through which ethical consciousness is activated in both characters and readers (LeBlanc & Stornaiuolo, 2023).

Characters' inner conflicts serve as the primary medium through which conscience is realized in the novel. The psychological dimension of reading literature particularly the engagement with characters' internal states has been shown to cultivate readers' own moral and emotional intelligence, reinforcing the link between narrative and the development of conscience (Davis, Corcoran, Billington, & Frank, 2023). Furthermore, conscience guides characters in navigating their social relationships, demonstrating that conscience in the novel is not merely reactive but also proactive in guiding characters toward wise and dignified action (Al-Ma'ruf, Arifin, & Nugrahani, 2024). An analysis of moral values across contemporary Indonesian novels consistently reveals that conscience manifested through inner conflict, self-reflection, and guilt constitutes the most frequently represented moral dimension, underlining its centrality to the Indonesian literary imagination (Rezeki, Susilawati, & Rosnija, 2023).

### **The Value of Obligation**

The moral value of obligation manifests across multiple dimensions of social relations, from familial ties and friendship to collectively assumed duties. Research on moral education emphasizes that institutions, individuals, and communities all share the obligation to contribute not only to social productivity but also to the cultivation of moral goodness, thereby positioning obligation as a fundamentally relational and prosocial concept (Chen, Liu, Dai, & Wang, 2023). Bertens (2013) affirms that moral obligation cannot be understood solely as duty to oneself but encompasses obligation across all dimensions of human social life. This multi-directional nature of obligation encompassing the self, family, peers, and community is particularly salient in literary texts, where narrative structure naturally exposes the competing demands that characters must negotiate (Kalkman, 2024).

Obligation in the familial domain is evident through the mother's decisive action for her child's wellbeing, representing a form of moral duty that is simultaneously instinctive and ethically grounded. The anthropological literature on solidarity and obligation reveals that individuals frequently develop a felt sense of moral duty toward those with whom they share close social bonds a dynamic that the novel renders with psychological authenticity (Hemer, 2023). Obligation within friendship is represented through loyalty in accompanying Chang a form of solidarity that positions social care as a moral obligation rather than a voluntary choice, reflecting the interpersonal dimensions of duty that the novel explores through its characters' relationships (Hemer, 2023). The dimension of self-directed obligation also receives attention through the character's awareness of dietary discipline (Duha, 2023), underscoring the novel's recognition that the moral self is constituted not only through social duties but also through the responsible stewardship of one's own well-being (Van den Berg, Kroesen, & Chorus, 2022).

### **The Interrelationship Among Moral Values**

Taken as a whole, the analysis demonstrates that responsibility, conscience, and obligation are not discrete entities but are interwoven within a cohesive and integrated moral system. Fiction-based research has established that literary narratives are uniquely capable of representing moral complexity in layered, contextually embedded ways that resist the reductive categorizations often imposed by abstract ethical theory (Kalkman, 2024). A single character action may simultaneously represent all three values: the parental sacrifice in Datum 1 encompasses the dimension of responsibility for the child's safety, the voice of conscience that refuses to permit harm, and the fulfillment of the innate obligation of parenthood.

The overlapping nature of the categories is not an analytical inconsistency; rather, it reflects the very nature of morality itself integrative and contextual. Narrative responsibility theory similarly argues that a character's moral stance cannot be disaggregated into discrete causal components, as the interpretation of any act of moral agency is conditioned by the full relational context in which it is embedded (Wilkinson, 2022). This integrative moral structure serves an important pedagogical function: by presenting characters whose actions are simultaneously responsible, conscientious, and duty-bound, the novel invites readers to develop a similarly holistic ethical orientation. Literary works grounded in local culture and lived experience have been shown to produce concrete representations of character values through narrative, tradition, and social interaction, making them particularly effective tools for moral formation (Fazlina & Saharudin, 2025). This is consistent with the view that contemporary Indonesian literature presents complex and layered moral dimensions as a means of enriching readers' ethical consciousness (Al-Ma'ruf, Arifin, & Nugrahani, 2024). Literature's capacity to transcend time, culture, and circumstance positions it as one of the most powerful instruments for transmitting moral values across generations shaping perspectives, molding intellects, and guiding the ethical development of both individual readers and the societies they inhabit (Mchussain, 2023). Ethical values in modern literary works including humility, respect, harmony, and social responsibility remain relevant across historical periods precisely because they are embedded within living narratives that resonate with readers' own social realities (Andriyanto et al., 2022).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the novel *Negeri Bawah Air* by Ary Nilandari, this study finds that moral values in the novel manifest through three primary aspects—responsibility, conscience, and obligation—with a total of 285 data points distributed throughout the narrative. The value of conscience occupies the most dominant position with 214 data points, followed by responsibility with 174 data points, and obligation with 123 data points. The dominance of conscience indicates that the author positions internal moral consciousness as the foundational basis of character construction, in which inner conflict and moral deliberation function as the primary driving force of the narrative.

Overall, *Negeri Bawah Air* does not function solely as a work of adventure fiction; it also serves as a medium for the transmission of contextual moral values directly relevant to readers' lives. These findings affirm that literature and novels in particular hold significant potential as a means of character formation and the cultivation of moral consciousness in readers (Al-Ma'ruf, Arifin, & Nugrahani, 2024). This study is therefore expected to constitute a meaningful academic contribution to the development of Indonesian literary scholarship, while opening space for further research that examines moral dimensions in literary works from more diverse perspectives.

#### 5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are directed at relevant stakeholders. For educators and educational institutions, the novel *Negeri Bawah Air* by Ary Nilandari can be integrated as a literary teaching material at the secondary and tertiary levels, particularly within Indonesian Language and Literature Education courses. The dominance of the value of conscience (214 data points) indicates that this novel is highly effective as a medium for moral reflection and character formation among students.

For curriculum developers and educational policymakers, the findings of this study provide an empirical basis for strengthening the position of contemporary Indonesian literary works within character-based curricula. The integration of moral value analysis into literary learning should be systematically promoted not merely as a supplementary component, but as a primary instrument for cultivating the ethical consciousness of the younger generation.

For authors and the literary community, this study affirms the importance of preserving authentic and contextually relevant moral dimensions in fictional works. The overlapping representation of responsibility, conscience, and obligation within a single character action as identified in this study demonstrates that the moral depth of a literary work lies precisely in its integrative quality, rather than in the rigid separation of moral categories.

## 6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations that warrant acknowledgment. First, the data source is confined to a single literary work, namely *Negeri Bawah Air* by Ary Nilandari, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other novels or literary genres. Second, the theoretical framework applied is limited to Bertens' (2013) three-dimensional model of moral values responsibility, conscience, and obligation without incorporating alternative ethical theories that might yield different analytical perspectives. Third, the study relies exclusively on textual analysis without triangulation through reader-response data or authorial intent, which may limit the depth of interpretive conclusions.

For future research, scholars are encouraged to expand the scope of analysis by examining moral values across multiple novels within the same genre or by the same author, enabling comparative insights into patterns of moral representation in Indonesian children's and young adult literature. Future studies may also consider applying alternative moral frameworks, such as virtue ethics or care ethics, to enrich the theoretical discussion. Additionally, incorporating reader-response approaches or empirical studies on the actual impact of the novel's moral content on student character development would constitute a meaningful and practically significant contribution to the field.

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