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DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL THINKING AND ANALYTICAL SKILLS IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS OF ECONOMIC AND LEGAL DISCIPLINES

DESARROLLO DEL PENSAMIENTO CRÍTICO Y HABILIDADES ANALÍTICAS EN ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS DE DISCIPLINAS ECONÓMICAS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the effectiveness of integrating a mythocritical methodology into university curricula to enhance critical thinking and analytical skills among students of economics and legal disciplines. The purpose was to assess whether an interdisciplinary, inquiry-based module could improve students' research competencies. A quasi-experimental design was implemented with control and experimental groups (N=56) over one semester. The experimental group received targeted instruction using mythocritical analysis and problem-based learning. Pre- and post-intervention assessments measured changes in both theoretical knowledge and applied analytical skills. Results demonstrated statistically significant improvements in the experimental group compared to the control group ($\chi^2 > 22$, $p < 0.05$), particularly in the practical application of research methods. The findings support the inclusion of humanities-based methodologies in non-humanities fields. The study concludes that mythocritical approaches can effectively foster deeper intellectual engagement and skill development among economics and law students.

Keywords:

Education, Inquiry-based learning, Interdisciplinary methodology, Problem-based learning (PBL), Cognitive development.

RESUMEN

Este estudio explora la eficacia de integrar una metodología mitocrítica en los currículos universitarios para potenciar el pensamiento crítico y las habilidades analíticas en estudiantes de economía y derecho. El objetivo fue evaluar si un módulo interdisciplinario basado en la indagación podría mejorar las competencias de investigación de los estudiantes. Se implementó un diseño cuasiexperimental con grupos de control y experimental (N=56) durante un semestre. El grupo experimental recibió instrucción específica mediante análisis mitocrítico y aprendizaje basado en problemas. Las evaluaciones pre y postintervención midieron los cambios tanto en el conocimiento teórico como en las habilidades analíticas aplicadas. Los resultados demostraron mejoras estadísticamente significativas en el grupo experimental en comparación con el grupo de control ($\chi^2 > 22$, $p < 0,05$), especialmente en la aplicación práctica de los métodos de investigación.

Los hallazgos respaldan la inclusión de metodologías basadas en humanidades en campos no humanísticos. El estudio concluye que los enfoques mitocríticos pueden fomentar eficazmente una mayor implicación intelectual y el desarrollo de habilidades en estudiantes de economía y derecho.

Palabras clave:

Educación, Aprendizaje basado en la investigación, Metodología interdisciplinaria, Aprendizaje basado en problemas (ABP), Desarrollo cognitivo.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions have multifaceted objectives. They aim to increase students' knowledge and contribute to their personal and social development and economic and cultural progress. These institutions are key in shaping the future by educating the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and innovators. One of the most important functions of a modern university is to develop research skills. Studies show these skills facilitate academic and professional success.

The differences between natural science/technical and humanities education from the point of effectiveness in the development of research skills in students are substantial. Research suggests that natural science programs are better at developing the skills of quantitative analysis and experimental methods whereas humanities programs foster the skills of qualitative analysis and critical thinking.

Mythocritique as a humanities discipline is a method that has the potential to enrich educational theory and practice, especially in the framework of interdisciplinary and narrative-based approaches. Mythocritical analysis develops a broad range of abilities, spanning from critical thinking and problem-solving to communication and ethical awareness, essential for navigating the complexities of the modern world.

Modern research underscores the desire to comprehend the primary elements of mythological consciousness in a new way to create a contemporary model of life and revise mythological concepts. Scholars focus on the role and functions of myth in an artistic work, its relationship to religion and culture, and its significance for understanding the renewed picture of the world. Myth becomes a strong foundation for finding answers to the main questions of humanity about the origins of the world, its organization, fate, life, and death.

The authors (Eliade, 1996; Lévi-Strauss, 2005) stress the importance of myths as fundamental structures of human consciousness and culture that influence modern thinking. Jung (2014) investigates archetypes and the collective unconscious, demonstrating their lasting influence on people's psyche and behavior. Campbell & Moyers (2012) analyzes universal mythological stories, pointing out their role in shaping cultural narratives and educational models. Kristeva (2019) investigates the intersection of myth and modernity, showing how mythological elements are integrated into contemporary culture and education. These ideas provide a valuable framework for utilizing mythocritical methodology in educational research, aiding in a deeper understanding of the cultural and psychological aspects of learning.

In modern science, mythological analysis is among the most popular methods of literary analysis. Mythological analysis is a variant of comparative analysis, in which traditional myths and archetypes are identified in a work of literature. In comparativist studies by N.S. Maslova, mythological motifs, plots, and images are considered traditional if the significance of their content is perceived and transformed in the artistic and literary heritage of different historical periods. Modern people learn about ancient heritage through texts adapted through cultural and literary processing. The archetypal nature and typological similarity of these texts are revealed through a comparative structural and semantic analysis of different systems of world mythology.

Mythocritical methodology allows studying the reception, transformation, and development of mythological elements in literary works and their functions in creating a coherent picture of the world. The mythocritical method expands the possibilities of substantial interpretation by identifying mythological motifs, plots, and images, allowing the interpreter to discover the richer content of the work and uncover hidden symbolic meaning.

Throughout the 20th century, mythocritique became one of the most promising trends in literary studies. The works of Jung (2014) laid the foundations for the psychoanalytic school of mythocriticism, exploring archetypes and the collective unconscious. Jung asserts that myths represent psychologically necessary reactions to typical situations, which makes them relevant for literary analysis. Representatives of the Cambridge School of Anthropology, such as James Frazer (2018), explore myths as a projection of rituals, emphasizing their explanatory function in the structure of primitive societies.

The American comparative mythology school, represented by (Eliade, 1996; Frye, 1990), views myth as a universal constant of human thinking that transforms under the influence of cultural and historical factors. Frye (1990) introduces the concept of displaced myth, which refers to the writer adapting mythological plots, motifs, and images, thus adding their vision to them, which underlies the notion of myth displacement (Frye, 1990). Eliade (1996) emphasizes the fundamental resilience of archaic structures, which is important for mythocritical studies.

The schools of semantic symbolism and structuralism (Lévi-Strauss, 2005) have also significantly contributed to the study of mythology. In Russian mythocritique studies, (Losev, 2001) view myth as the ultimate reality, the source of conceptualization of the world, and the basis for the creation of parallel invariants of one's fate or the fate of the hero.

Mythocritical methodology provides researchers with powerful tools for analyzing literary texts, allowing them to uncover deep cultural and symbolic meanings. This makes it promising for integration into educational programs, especially in the humanities, where critical thinking and analytical abilities are important. However, the problem of integrating mythocritical methodology into curricula for humanities students remains under-researched. The main challenge lies in adapting this methodology for effective use in the classroom to deepen students' understanding of cultural and literary texts and develop their critical thinking and analytical skills.

The study aims to identify and evaluate the effectiveness of mythocritical methodology in teaching humanities students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To achieve our goal, we divided the study into two parts. In the first part, the most relevant mythological concepts were studied. Based on this, a plan for the training module "Mythocritical Methodology for the Study of Artistic Works" was developed.

In the second stage, we conducted a pedagogical experiment (PE) to evaluate the impact of the mythocritical approach on critical thinking and analytical skills and identify the most effective teaching methods and learning materials for integrating this methodology. The PE was conducted over the second semester of the 2022-2023 academic year.

The study covered 56 3rd-year students studying the discipline "Fundamentals of Mythopoetics". The control (CG) and experimental (EG) groups were formed based on existing academic groups with 28 people in each group.

The PE was conducted following a pre-planned program and focused on developing the research skills of philology students by incorporating the additional module "Mythocritical Methodology for the Study of Artistic Works" into the discipline "Fundamentals of Mythopoetics". The module included problem-based lectures and inquiry tasks.

Before introducing the module, the research skills in the discipline among the CG and EG students were assessed.

The structural composition of the module included three topics and, following the curriculum, had the following distribution of academic hours: lectures (6 hours) and seminars (12 hours) (Table 1).

Table 1: Structure of the Module «Mythocritical Methodology for the Study of Artistic Works».

Topic	Inquiry tasks
Mythocritique, its distinctive features	1. Read «The Golden Bough» by Frazer. Provide examples of the combination of archaic myths, rituals, and ceremonial actions in the culture of ancient peoples. 2. In «Archetype and Symbols» by Jung, find interpretations of the major archetypes and symbols. What role does archetype theory play in the search for ritualistic and mythological models in literature? 3. Read «Anatomy of Criticism» by Frye (1990). Whose theories did Frye use to build his concept? What new methodological foundations did Frye try to offer to literary studies? What is the myth for Frye? What basic elements of myth does Frye distinguish? What is the function of myth in literature?
Development of mythocritique	1. In the works by Eliade (1996), find an interpretation of the temporal paradigm in the consciousness of archaic societies and modern man. Comment on the concepts of sacred time and ideal time and space. 2. Read «Mythologies» by R. Barthes and characterize the features of mythological discourse as defined by Barthes. 3. Read «The Hero with a Thousand Faces» by Campbell & Moyers (2012) and prepare an answer to the question: What skill from those possessed by our ancestors have modern people lost? What approach does Campbell & Moyers (2012) take? What similarities does Campbell & Moyers (2012) find between the world's numerous mythologies and religions? What ways of finding human understanding and unifying today's world does Campbell & Moyers (2012) suggest?
Specificity of mythocritical analysis of artistic works	1. Choose an example of a work of fiction from contemporary world literature with a mythopoetic component. Analyze how the mythological component is realized at the thematic, motive, figurative, spatial-temporal, narrative, and linguistic levels of the artistic work. 2. Select examples of the embodiment of the elements of stories from ancient mythology in prose, drama, or lyrical works of world literature (the myth of Orpheus, Prometheus, Cassandra, Narcissus, Medea, Odyssey). 3. Select examples of: a. the development of the protoplot for Dr. Faustus in European literature, b. the medieval legend of Don Juan in the literature of subsequent eras, c. traditional plots and images in other arts (music, painting, theater, cinema, etc.).

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The development of research skills was assessed based on the identified and diagnosed knowledge and practice components (Table 2). Assessment of the knowledge component of research skills included testing theoretical knowledge in the discipline and the degree of its understanding. The practical component of research skills was assessed by evaluating the ability and skills of applying knowledge to solve a research objective and the knowledge of specific ways of its accomplishment

Table 2: Diagnostics of Students' Research Skills

Component	Component diagnostics	
	Type of diagnostics	Diagnostic methods
Knowledge	Expert assessment	Assessment of students' knowledge in class
Practice	Expert assessment	Assessment of completed inquiry tasks (planning and realization of research activities within the framework of specific objectives)

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Subsequent processing of the PE results was carried out using mathematical statistics. The task was to identify differences in the distribution of a certain attribute (learning success) when comparing two empirical distributions. For this purpose, we deployed Pearson's $\chi 2$ test. The measurement scale used is a scale of three categories (high, level, and low levels), hence the number of degrees of freedom is $v = 2$.

Null hypothesis H0: There are no significant differences in the development of research skills between the CG and EG. The introduction of the training module "Mythocritical Methodology for the Study of Artistic Works" does not positively impact the development of critical thinking in EG students. EG students do not demonstrate a higher level of analytical skills compared to CG students. The problem-based lectures and inquiry tasks included in the module do not contribute to a more effective assimilation of the material and the practical application of knowledge.

Alternative hypothesis H1: There are significant differences in the development of research skills between the CG and EG. The introduction of the training module "Mythocritical Methodology for the Study of Artistic Works" positively impacts the development of critical thinking in EG students. EG students demonstrate a higher level of analytical skills compared to CG students. The problem-based lectures and inquiry tasks included in the module contribute to a more effective assimilation of the material and the practical application of knowledge.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before introducing the module, we analyzed the development of research skills among the EG and CG students. The results showed almost identical indicators of research skills in the two groups (Table 3).

Table 3: Results of the Diagnostics of Students' Research Skills before the PE, %.

Level	Knowledge component		Practice component	
	EG	CG	EG	CG
Low	30.8%	34.8%	29.8%	30.5%
Average	46.7%	45.5%	50.2%	49.8%
High	22.5%	19.7%	20.0%	19.7%
$\chi 2$	2.467		3.947	

Source: Authors' own elaboration

From the table of $\chi 2$ values for the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ and the number of degrees of freedom $v = 2$, we find the critical value of the test $\chi 2crit = 5.991$. Since $\chi 2emp \approx 2.467 < \chi 20.05 \approx 5.991$ and $\chi 2emp \approx 3.947 < \chi 20.05 \approx 5.991$, the H0 hypothesis that there is no difference between the empirical distributions is accepted at the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

After the completion of the PE, the EG and CG students showed significant changes in their research skills (Table 4).

Table 4. Results of the Diagnostics of Students' Research Skills after the PE, %.

Level	Knowledge component		Practice component	
	EG	CG	EG	CG
Low	14.2%	27.2%	15.2%	28.6%
Average	46.4%	48.5%	47.2%	50.8%
High	39.4%	24.3%	37.6%	20.6%
$\chi 2$	22.336		21.712	

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Following the PE, the empirical value of $\chi 2_{emp} > \chi 2_{crit}$, which allows us to reject the null hypothesis H0 and accept the alternative hypothesis H1 about the presence of statistically significant differences between the CG and the EG in terms of the development of research skills.

Given that EG students were trained using the module, which focused, among other things, on resolving inquiry tasks, we can argue that this aspect contributed to their higher results. We can conclude that the proposed hypothesis was experimentally confirmed.

The study aimed to assess the influence of the module "Mythocritical Methodology for the Study of Artistic Works" on research skills in university students. The research involved the identification of significant differences in the level of critical thinking and analytical skills between the CG and EG. The main hypotheses included the prediction that implementing this module would positively impact students' research skills.

The CG and EG students' research skills were analyzed before introducing the module. The results indicate that the indicators in the two groups were almost equal, with insignificant differences not exceeding the critical values of $\chi 2$ (Table 3). This supports the initial hypothesis that baseline levels of research skills in the CG and EG are comparable.

Following the completion of the PE, our results indicate a significant improvement in EG students' research skills compared to that of CG students (Table 4). The post-experimental values of $\chi 2$ are above critical values, which indicates significant differences. This gives us reason to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that the implementation of the training module had a positive impact on students' research skills.

The results show that the knowledge component of research skills in EG students improved significantly. The percentage of students with a high level of knowledge rose from 22.5 to 39.4%. Problem-based learning (PBL) and inquiry tasks contributed to better assimilation of theoretical knowledge confirmed by the findings of similar studies (Aditomo & Klieme, 2020; Bae et al., 2021; Savery, 2019).

The practice component also shows significant improvement in the EG. The percentage of students with a high level of practical skills increased from 20.0 to 37.6%. This indicates that the mythocritical methodology tasks promoted the development of applied skills, which is also consistent with research results on similar topics (List et al. 2024; Zhou et al. 2024).

The overall level of research skills in EG students significantly surpassed that of CG students. This indicates that the module is an effective tool for enhancing research skills, corroborating the findings of other studies on the importance of integrating interdisciplinary approaches into the learning process (Klaassen et al., 2019).

Our data support the alternative hypothesis (H1) that the implementation of the training module positively affects the development of critical thinking and analytical skills. EG students showed a higher level of research skills compared to CG students, which can be considered an experimental confirmation of the hypothesis.

The use of mythocritical methodology in the analysis of specific writers addresses the problem of classifying the main forms of a combination of the semantic field of myth and narrative text. These classifications represent a generalization of the main approaches to myths and the operating principles of myth elements in the artistic text.

The totality of mythological elements embodied in a literary work constitutes its mythopoetic paradigm, through which the interaction of formal and substantive components comes to fruition. The mythopoetic paradigm is understood as a system of the author's worldview ideas about the laws of life's development and their relationship with society and nature. The mythopoetic paradigm is incarnated at the textual level within the mythopoetic system.

The mythocritical study of a literary work consists in discovering its mythopoetic structure at different levels of the artistic text (thematic, motive, figurative, spatial-temporal, narrative, and linguistic) and analyzing the author's myth, archetypal symbolism, and the interaction of different mythologemes within a text.

Myth as a universal constant of thinking unites the collective and individual and serves as a symbolic means of conceptualizing the world. It is constantly evolving and can transform and give rise to new and new meanings and integrate into new historical and cultural contexts, becoming close and understandable to many generations of recipients. Modern writers use myths in their works differently, retelling them, adapting, interpreting, transforming, or involving only certain structural elements of mythological thinking, creating a myth of their own.

Mythocritical methodology for the study of artistic works allows students to deepen their understanding of the text, uncover new symbolic meanings of images and motifs, and build their research skills. The mythocritical method in literary studies is justified and especially fruitful when its application is guided by theoretical and methodological frameworks, beyond which literary studies turn from a science of literature into one of its artistic or semi-artistic genres. Mythocriticism has done much in the study of the genesis and typological aspects of literature. The works of mythocritics have clarified much about the nature of universal eternal symbols, images, themes, conflicts, and the identification of mythopoetic invariants in the literature of different epochs.

Due to the pervasiveness of myth, the interpretation of art with the help of mythocritical methodology is performed by searching for traces of primitive mythological consciousness, the elements of ancient mythological representations, plot motifs of ceremonial actions, and ethnogenetic roots in the artistic text. An important condition for successful interpretation is, without a doubt, familiarity with traditional ancient mythology, national mythology, folk worldview, the features of mentality, and the forms of its reproduction in an artistic work, since mythological representations are often conveyed in a work via transformed forms of poetic reinterpretation.

Recent studies of mythocritique methods in the educational process emphasize their potential for enriching teaching methodology and enhancing student engagement (Fuchs & Corni, 2024). According to Fuchs & Corni (2024), this approach encourages critical thinking and fosters a deeper understanding among students by connecting traditional myths with contemporary issues, making learning more relevant and engaging.

Recent advances in digital learning have incorporated mythocritique techniques that promote collaborative learning and critical analysis. Digital platforms for learning myths allow interactive multimedia experiences that improve comprehension and memorization (Popa Blanariu & Popa, 2018).

The results of our study on the impact of the module on the development of students' research skills are supported by other studies, such as the work by Simons & Klein (2007), who investigated the impact of scaffolding on student success in a PBL environment.

The study by Simons & Klein (2007) investigates how different levels of scaffolding affect students' research skills and success in a hypermedia learning environment. Their experiment involved 111 7th-grade school students who worked in groups on a project to create a hot air balloon and develop a travel plan. The results show that the groups that used mandatory scaffolding performed better in completing the project, and their entries in project notebooks were more organized and relevant. In our study, students participating in the mythocritique training module also significantly improved their research skills. After the module's completion, we observed an increase in the percentage of students with a high level of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. These results are consistent with the findings by Simons & Klein (2007), emphasizing the importance of scaffolding in improving academic performance.

The authors Kirschner et al. (2006) discovered the problem of wrongfully equating PBL and IL with discovery learning. The authors argue that PBL and inquiry learning (IL), like discovery learning, are ineffective due to the lack of leadership. Subsequent studies, including by Hmelo-Silver et al. (2007), refute this assertion. Specifically, the authors demonstrated that PBL and IL actively utilize scaffolding reducing cognitive load and allowing students to learn effectively in challenging domains.

Our data show that the mandatory inclusion of inquiry tasks and problem-based lectures in the module significantly improved students' research skills. In the same way mandatory scaffolding in Simons & Klein's (2007) study resulted in better organization and quality of task completion, our module provided students with a clear structure and direction promoting deeper understanding and assimilation of the material. This also agrees with the conclusions of a study by Hmelo-Silver et al. (2007), who showed that structured learning approaches, such as PBL and IL, are effective and necessary to achieve important educational goals, including the development of content knowledge, epistemic practices, and soft skills, such as collaboration and self-learning.

Similar to the results of Simons & Klein (2007), our data indicate that EG students demonstrated a higher level of organization and quality in completing tasks. This supports our hypothesis that structured pedagogical approaches and compulsory inquiry tasks contribute to more effective learning and research skills development. Our study also found that more successful students performed better on final tests than students with lower levels of mastery, emphasizing the importance of the initial level of training and the need to adapt pedagogical strategies for different levels.

Our findings are supported by the results of prior studies that demonstrate the importance of structured pedagogical approaches for improving academic performance. The module substantially improved students' research skills, confirming the importance of integrating interdisciplinary and problem-based approaches into the educational process.

CONCLUSIONS

The study confirms that the training module "Mythocritical Methodology for the Study of Artistic Works" significantly improves students' research skills. This makes the module a valuable addition to the curriculum of humanities disciplines that promotes the development of critical thinking and analytical skills, as further confirmed by other studies.

Our data show that the module can be useful for other educational programs and disciplines. This finding can be applied to develop new programs to improve students' research skills.

We should highlight some limitations of our study. The limitations include the small sample size, including only two student groups from a single university, and the short timeframe of the experiment, which limits the extrapolation of the findings to other contexts and educational institutions. These factors may have affected the overall validity and generalizability of the results. In future studies, we recommend increasing the sample size and extending the observation period to obtain more accurate data. The study did not consider the influence of other factors, such as motivation, the structure of the learning process, and teachers' qualifications, which can also influence research skills. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study and planning future research.

In our view, further research should focus on the influence of mythocritical methodology on other aspects of the educational process and students in other specialties. We recommend investigating the long-term effects of such educational modules on students' professional development.

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