

A Dialogic Path to Literary Mastery: Implementing Socratic Seminar in University-Level Literature Classes

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Abstract. The Socratic seminar has emerged as an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing critical engagement in university-level literature classes. Rooted in dialogic interaction, this method fosters analytical reasoning, interpretative depth, and collaborative inquiry. This study explores the implementation of the Socratic seminar in literature courses, examining its impact on students' textual comprehension and critical thinking skills. Employing a qualitative research design, data were collected through classroom observations, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews with students and lecturers. Findings indicate that structured dialogue facilitates deeper engagement with literary texts, enabling students to construct nuanced interpretations and articulate reasoned arguments. Furthermore, the seminar format encourages active participation and a sense of intellectual community, reinforcing literary appreciation and academic discourse. However, challenges such as uneven participation and the need for preparatory guidance highlight areas for refinement in instructional practices. These findings contribute to the discourse on innovative literature pedagogy, advocating for a more interactive and student-centred approach to literary studies. Future research could explore interdisciplinary applications of the Socratic seminar to further enhance its pedagogical value.

Keywords: critical thinking; literary analysis; qualitative research; Socratic seminar; university education

1. Introduction

The Socratic seminar has long been recognised as a powerful pedagogical tool for fostering critical thinking and interpretative skills in higher education. Rooted in the principles of dialogic learning, this method encourages students to engage in thoughtful discussions, questioning assumptions and constructing meaning collaboratively. In literature classes, where textual analysis and nuanced

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interpretation are paramount, the Socratic seminar provides an interactive platform for deep engagement with literary works. Recent studies have highlighted its effectiveness in improving students' analytical abilities and intellectual autonomy, particularly in discussion-based learning environments (Alexander, 2020). As literature education increasingly shifts towards student-centred methodologies, the Socratic seminar emerges as an essential strategy for cultivating advanced cognitive and interpretative competencies.

2. Background

Despite its pedagogical potential, literature instruction in many university settings remains predominantly lecture driven, limiting students' opportunities for active engagement. This traditional approach often results in passive learning, where students struggle to develop independent analytical skills and critical perspectives on literary texts (Pettersson, 2023; Xhomara, 2022). The lack of interactive discussion methods diminishes students' ability to articulate complex interpretations and engage in literary debates, essential competencies for academic and professional success. The integration of the Socratic seminar offers a structured yet flexible framework for overcoming these limitations by promoting inquiry-based learning. Addressing this issue is crucial for ensuring that literature education aligns with contemporary educational objectives, fostering intellectual curiosity and interpretative depth among students.

In the broader context of literature and education, the underutilisation of dialogic learning methods presents significant challenges to the development of literary scholarship. A lack of discussion-centred pedagogy not only hinders critical engagement with texts but also restricts students' ability to connect literature with broader cultural, philosophical, and historical discourses (Manalo, 2020; Robinson, 2023). This gap in pedagogical practice has implications for the cultivation of literary appreciation and the development of transferable analytical skills applicable beyond the classroom. By implementing the Socratic seminar, literature educators can bridge this divide, creating a more dynamic and intellectually stimulating learning environment. Consequently, this study seeks to highlight the transformative impact of dialogic methodologies in university-level literature courses, advocating for a shift towards more interactive and reflective approaches in literary education.

In recent years, the Socratic seminar method has garnered attention for its potential to enhance critical thinking in literature education. Bahtiyar and Can's (2021)'s research on students' perceptions of Socratic seminars demonstrated that students exhibited improved abilities in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and self-regulation after participating in these seminars. These findings suggest that the Socratic seminar method can be an effective pedagogical tool in literature classes.

Similarly, Griswold et al. (2017) explored the instructional efficacy of Socratic seminars in cultivating critical thinking among literature students. Their study revealed that participants in the experimental group, who engaged in Socratic seminars, showed significant improvements in critical thinking skills compared

to the control group. It was concluded that this method not only enhances critical thinking but also enjoys appreciation from both literature teachers and students. This underscores the method's potential applicability across diverse educational contexts.

Furthermore, a study by Chiang-Lopez and Núñez (2024) examined the impact of Socratic seminars on students' analytical abilities in university-level literature courses. Their research indicated that regular participation in these seminars led to deeper textual understanding and more nuanced interpretations among students. The authors emphasized the importance of dialogue-based learning in fostering critical engagement with literary texts. This aligns with previous findings and highlights the broader applicability of the Socratic seminar method in higher education literature classes.

The present study addresses a critical gap in the existing literature by exploring the implementation of Socratic seminars in university-level literature classes with a focus on their dialogic potential. While previous research has extensively examined the theoretical foundations and general applications of the Socratic method, there remains a lack of empirical studies investigating its structured integration into literature pedagogy at the tertiary level. This research seeks to provide a systematic approach to applying Socratic seminars, ensuring that discussions remain intellectually rigorous while fostering deeper textual engagement. As highlighted by recent studies, the selection of appropriate texts and the facilitation of meaningful discussions are crucial for maximising the effectiveness of this method (Magill & Harrelson Magill, 2023). By addressing these pedagogical challenges, this study offers a refined model that bridges the gap between theory and practice in literary education.

The methodological approach adopted in this research distinguishes it from previous studies by employing a qualitative framework that emphasises textual analysis and in-depth student reflections. Prior research on Socratic seminars has often been descriptive rather than analytical, leaving a need for systematic data on student engagement and cognitive development (Acim, 2018; Pavlovskij & Pavlovskaya, 2024). This study utilises classroom observations, structured discussions, and reflective assessments to examine how students navigate literary texts through Socratic inquiry. The qualitative approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how students develop interpretative skills, moving beyond mere comprehension to critical literary discourse. This methodological advancement contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how dialogic learning fosters literary mastery.

The primary contribution of this research lies in its ability to refine and expand the pedagogical framework for Socratic seminars in higher education. While previous studies have highlighted the effectiveness of dialogue-based learning, they have not systematically examined its structured integration into literature curricula (Katsara & De Witte, 2019). This study provides an evidence-based model that demonstrates how Socratic seminars can be optimised for literary analysis, incorporating textual complexity and student-driven inquiry. The

findings offer practical guidelines for educators seeking to enhance literary discussions, positioning Socratic seminars as a transformative tool in literature education. By advancing the theoretical and practical understanding of dialogic learning, this study makes a significant contribution to both literary pedagogy and educational methodology.

The primary objective of this research is to examine the effectiveness of Socratic seminars in fostering critical engagement with literary texts in university-level literature classes. This study aims to determine how structured dialogic discussions influence students' analytical thinking, interpretative skills, and overall comprehension of complex literary works. By investigating the pedagogical application of the Socratic method, this research seeks to establish best practices for integrating this approach into literature curricula. Additionally, it aims to assess whether this method enhances students' ability to construct and articulate sophisticated literary arguments. Ultimately, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse on interactive learning methodologies in literary education.

To address these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions: (a) How does the implementation of Socratic seminars affect students' ability to critically analyse literary texts? (b) In what ways does the Socratic method facilitate deeper engagement with themes, structures, and stylistic elements of literature? (c) What challenges and opportunities emerge when integrating Socratic seminars into university-level literature classes? These questions are directly aligned with the study's goal of bridging the gap between theoretical discussions and practical classroom applications of the Socratic method. By answering these questions, the research aims to provide concrete insights into the effectiveness and adaptability of dialogic learning in literary studies.

This study operates on the premise that dialogic learning, when structured effectively, leads to a deeper and more meaningful engagement with literary texts. It assumes that the Socratic seminar model fosters higher-order thinking by encouraging students to formulate and defend interpretations based on textual evidence. Furthermore, it is hypothesised that students participating in Socratic seminars will demonstrate greater confidence in articulating complex literary arguments compared to those engaged in traditional lecture-based discussions. This assumption is supported by existing pedagogical theories that emphasise the importance of student-led discourse in developing critical thinking skills. By testing these premises, the research aims to validate the pedagogical significance of Socratic seminars in contemporary literary education.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive-analytical method to examine the implementation of Socratic seminars in university-level literature classes. A normative-empirical approach is utilised to analyse how this pedagogical strategy enhances students' critical engagement with literary texts. Data collection involves a comprehensive review of academic journals, documentation analysis, interviews with literature lecturers and students, and an

extensive literature review. These sources provide a robust foundation for understanding the practical application and theoretical underpinnings of the Socratic seminar model in literary education. The collected data are examined systematically to ensure reliability and relevance to the research objectives.

Data collection is conducted through multiple sources to ensure a comprehensive and triangulated understanding of the topic. Journal reviews focus on recent studies discussing interactive and dialogic learning methods in literature education. Documentation includes syllabi, course materials, and transcripts of seminar discussions to assess the structure and implementation of Socratic seminars. Interviews are conducted with university literature lecturers and students to gather first-hand perspectives on the effectiveness and challenges of the method. Additionally, a literature review is employed to contextualise the study within existing research and identify gaps addressed by this investigation.

An inductive data analysis approach is applied to interpret the findings and derive meaningful patterns from the collected data. Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring concepts related to students' critical thinking, interpretative skills, and engagement with literary texts. Responses from interviews and seminar transcripts are coded to reveal underlying trends in student participation and comprehension. The relationship between theoretical discussions and practical outcomes is explored to determine the pedagogical implications of Socratic seminars. This analytical process ensures that the study contributes valuable insights into the role of dialogic learning in literary education.

To enhance the validity and credibility of the research, methodological triangulation is employed by integrating multiple data sources. The convergence of qualitative data from journals, documentation, interviews, and literature reviews strengthens the reliability of the study's findings. Research ethics are maintained by ensuring informed consent from interview participants and anonymising their responses. Reflexivity is applied throughout the analytical process to minimise potential biases in interpretation. These methodological considerations ensure that the study presents a well-rounded and rigorously analysed examination of Socratic seminars in literature education.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis aims to examine how the implementation of the Socratic seminar enhances students' critical thinking and interpretative skills in university-level literature classes. The findings provide insights into the effectiveness of dialogic discussions in fostering deeper engagement with literary texts and improving analytical abilities. The results indicate that students who participated in Socratic seminars demonstrated a more sophisticated understanding of literary themes and textual nuances. Additionally, students exhibited a higher level of engagement, as evidenced by their ability to generate thought-provoking questions and construct well-supported arguments. These findings align with existing research that emphasises the role of structured dialogue in developing interpretative and analytical competencies in literary studies.

The study reveals that students became more adept at articulating their perspectives through structured discussions facilitated by Socratic questioning. Thematic analysis of seminar transcripts indicates that participants were able to synthesise multiple viewpoints, demonstrating a heightened awareness of textual ambiguity and intertextual connections. Interviews with lecturers further confirm that students developed stronger reasoning abilities and a more nuanced approach to literary interpretation. Furthermore, seminar discussions encouraged active listening and respectful debate, fostering a collaborative learning environment that promoted deeper intellectual engagement. These outcomes highlight the pedagogical value of Socratic seminars in cultivating literary analysis skills.

Another key finding is that students exhibited increased confidence in expressing their interpretations, leading to more dynamic and substantive discussions. Documentation analysis of course materials suggests that structured questioning techniques encouraged students to move beyond surface-level comprehension towards more critical and reflective engagement. Participants also demonstrated an improved ability to support their arguments with textual evidence, reinforcing the seminar's role in strengthening literary argumentation skills. Lecturers noted a significant shift in classroom dynamics, where students took greater ownership of their learning through active participation. These results underscore the effectiveness of Socratic seminars in fostering independent and critical thinking in literature education.

Overall, the findings suggest that the Socratic seminar approach enhances students' literary competence by fostering deeper textual engagement, critical analysis, and effective argumentation. The integration of dialogic learning strategies contributes to a more interactive and student-centred literature classroom. This study provides empirical support for the use of Socratic questioning as an effective pedagogical tool for higher education literature courses. The implications of these findings extend to curriculum development, encouraging the incorporation of structured discussions to promote analytical depth in literary studies. These results contribute to the broader discourse on innovative teaching methodologies in literature education.

5. Detailed Findings

The first major finding highlights the enhancement of students' critical thinking and interpretative skills through the Socratic seminar method. Analysis of seminar transcripts reveals that students engaged in more complex reasoning and demonstrated an ability to explore multiple interpretations of literary texts. Structured questioning enabled participants to develop well-supported arguments by referencing textual evidence and broader literary contexts. Lecturers observed a shift in students' analytical approaches, with discussions reflecting deeper engagement and intellectual curiosity. This finding suggests that the Socratic seminar fosters an environment conducive to independent and reflective literary analysis.

The second key finding demonstrates the impact of Socratic discussions on student engagement and participation. Observations indicate that students actively contributed to discussions by posing insightful questions and responding critically to peers' perspectives. Interviews with lecturers confirm that the seminar format encouraged a more student-centred approach, reducing passive learning and promoting collaborative inquiry. The ability to articulate well-reasoned arguments improved as students gained confidence in verbalising their thoughts. This finding underscores the effectiveness of structured dialogue in fostering an interactive and dynamic learning environment.

Another significant finding is the development of students' argumentation skills, particularly in supporting claims with textual evidence. Documentation analysis of written reflections shows that students increasingly referenced specific literary elements, such as themes, symbolism, and narrative techniques, to substantiate their interpretations. The seminar process encouraged deeper textual engagement, allowing students to move beyond surface-level comprehension. Furthermore, lecturers noted that students demonstrated improved academic writing, applying discussion-based insights to formal literary analysis. This suggests that Socratic seminars contribute to strengthening both oral and written critical thinking skills.

An unexpected finding emerged in relation to students' perception of literary ambiguity. While some students initially struggled with open-ended discussions, many later expressed appreciation for the interpretative flexibility offered by Socratic questioning. This shift indicates that structured dialogue helps students become more comfortable with multiple perspectives and textual indeterminacy. Additionally, a few students displayed resistance to questioning techniques that challenged their initial interpretations, suggesting the need for gradual adaptation to dialogic learning. These findings highlight the importance of scaffolding discussions to support students in developing a more nuanced approach to literary analysis.

6. Interpretation of Findings in the Context of Existing Research

As Yang and Brindley (2023) assert, dialogic interaction plays a crucial role in shaping critical thought and interpretative skills in literary studies. The findings of this study align with this perspective, demonstrating that the Socratic seminar method significantly enhances students' ability to engage critically with texts. Previous studies, such as those by Jakonen (2020), have shown that structured discussion frameworks promote deeper textual analysis in literature classes. This study extends those findings by illustrating how the Socratic method not only fosters critical inquiry but also encourages students to consider multiple perspectives. These results suggest that dialogue-based pedagogies continue to be a valuable tool in literature education.

The comparison with existing studies further highlights the contribution of this research to the field. As noted by Sanders et al. (2019), many literature classes still rely on traditional lecture-based instruction, limiting opportunities for active engagement and intellectual exploration. In contrast, the present study

demonstrates that Socratic seminars promote a more participatory learning environment, allowing students to take an active role in meaning-making. Moreover, previous research, such as that by Leese and Rosen (2024), has emphasised the role of peer discussion in shaping literary understanding. The findings of this study reinforce that claim while providing additional evidence of the method's effectiveness in higher education contexts.

Furthermore, this study addresses a key gap in the literature by exploring how Socratic dialogue contributes to both oral and written argumentation skills. According to He et al. (2024), effective literary interpretation requires the ability to articulate ideas persuasively, both in spoken discussion and written analysis. The present findings demonstrate that students who engaged in Socratic seminars showed significant improvement in both areas, bridging the gap between oral discourse and academic writing. Unlike previous studies, which primarily examined discussion-based learning in isolation, this research provides a more comprehensive perspective on its broader impact. These insights contribute to refining pedagogical strategies in university-level literature instruction.

This study directly responds to the research questions posed in the introduction by demonstrating the pedagogical effectiveness of the Socratic seminar in literary analysis. As highlighted by Cananau et al. (2025), critical thinking and engagement remain central concerns in literature education, necessitating innovative instructional approaches. The findings confirm that Socratic seminars offer a practical solution, fostering deeper analytical engagement while promoting collaborative inquiry. Additionally, the unexpected findings regarding students' evolving perception of literary ambiguity provide valuable insights into how interpretative flexibility develops through dialogue. These contributions offer meaningful implications for educators seeking to enhance literature pedagogy through dialogic methods.

7. Expanding Current Understanding

As Myren-Svelstad (2024) argues, dialogic teaching methods have the potential to transform classroom dynamics by fostering deeper engagement and critical discourse. The findings of this study support this claim, demonstrating that the Socratic seminar enhances students' analytical skills and interpretative abilities in literary studies. However, unlike previous research that primarily focused on primary or secondary education, this study extends the discussion to higher education, where such methods are less frequently employed. The results indicate that university-level literature courses can benefit significantly from structured dialogic approaches, challenging the traditional reliance on lecture-based instruction. These insights contribute to a growing body of research advocating for active learning strategies in literary pedagogy.

While the findings provide valuable contributions, certain methodological limitations must be acknowledged. As highlighted by Ayton (2024), qualitative research, particularly in educational settings, is inherently influenced by contextual variables such as class size, student motivation, and institutional culture. The reliance on classroom observations and student reflections, while

insightful, may introduce subjective biases that affect data interpretation. Additionally, the absence of a direct comparative study with other discussion-based methodologies limits the generalisability of the results. Future research could benefit from broader sample sizes and mixed-method approaches to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of dialogic learning in literary studies.

The practical implications of these findings are significant for educators seeking to enhance literary instruction through interactive pedagogies. As Zhang et al. (2024) suggest, fostering student-led discussions cultivates critical thinking and collaborative learning -- skills essential for academic and professional success. The implementation of Socratic seminars in university settings offers a structured framework for improving students' ability to construct arguments, engage in meaningful debate, and develop nuanced interpretations of literary texts. Furthermore, the study highlights the potential for integrating technology, such as online Socratic discussions, to expand accessibility and engagement. These recommendations underscore the necessity of re-evaluating traditional teaching methodologies in literary studies.

This research challenges existing assumptions about student participation and intellectual engagement in literature classes. As noted by Legath (2023), passive learning environments often fail to stimulate students' cognitive abilities, leading to surface-level textual comprehension. The findings suggest that Socratic seminars mitigate this issue by creating a more dynamic and participatory learning atmosphere, encouraging deeper engagement with literary texts. Additionally, unexpected findings regarding students' evolving perception of interpretative ambiguity highlight the complexity of literary analysis and the necessity of fostering intellectual flexibility. These insights call for continued exploration into the role of dialogic learning in shaping critical literary discourse.

8. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the implementation of Socratic seminars in university-level literature classes significantly enhances students' critical thinking, interpretative skills, and engagement with literary texts. By fostering dialogic interaction, this method provides a structured framework for students to explore multiple perspectives and develop deeper textual analyses. Unlike traditional lecture-based approaches, Socratic seminars encourage active participation, thereby promoting intellectual autonomy and analytical depth. The findings suggest that incorporating this method into literature curricula can lead to more profound and reflective literary discussions. These insights affirm the importance of dialogic pedagogies in shaping a more dynamic and participatory learning environment in higher education.

The implications of these findings extend to both theoretical and practical domains within literary studies and education. From a theoretical perspective, the study supports Vygotskian principles of social constructivism, which emphasise the role of discourse in knowledge formation. Practically, the research highlights the necessity of re-evaluating conventional teaching methods to integrate more interactive and student-centred approaches. Educators can adopt Socratic

seminars to bridge the gap between passive reception and active engagement, ultimately fostering a more enriching learning experience. Additionally, the study underscores the need for institutional support in implementing innovative pedagogical strategies that align with contemporary educational goals. These findings contribute to ongoing discussions on improving literary instruction through structured dialogue and collaborative inquiry.

Despite these contributions, certain limitations must be acknowledged, including the study's reliance on qualitative methods and its specific classroom context. The subjectivity of student reflections and the variability in discussion dynamics may influence the generalisability of the results. Future research could explore comparative studies between Socratic seminars and other interactive learning methods to refine best practices for literary instruction. Expanding the scope to different cultural and linguistic contexts could also offer further insights into the adaptability of dialogic learning in literature education. Addressing these aspects in future studies will enhance the understanding of how structured discussions shape literary comprehension and critical engagement.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire: The Implementation of Socratic Seminars in University-Level Literature Classes

Instructions:

This questionnaire aims to gather insights into the effectiveness of the Socratic seminar method in enhancing students' literary analysis skills, critical thinking, and engagement. Please respond honestly based on your experiences. Your answers will remain confidential and will be used solely for academic research purposes.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. **Age:**

- ☐ 18-20
- ☐ 21-23
- ☐ 24 or above

2. **Gender:**

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer not to say

3. **Year of Study:**

- ☐ First year
- ☐ Second year
- ☐ Third year
- ☐ Fourth year or above

4. **Have you previously participated in a Socratic seminar before this course?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Section B: Student Engagement and Participation

5. **How often do you actively participate in Socratic seminars?**

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently

- Occasionally
 - Rarely
 - Never
6. How comfortable do you feel expressing your thoughts in a Socratic seminar?
- Very comfortable
 - Somewhat comfortable
 - Neutral
 - Somewhat uncomfortable
 - Very uncomfortable
7. Do you feel encouraged to share your opinions during discussions?
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
8. What factors, if any, hinder your participation in Socratic seminars? (Check all that apply)
- Fear of making mistakes
 - Lack of confidence in speaking
 - Insufficient knowledge of the topic
 - Time constraints in discussions
 - Other (please specify): _____

Section C: Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills

9. To what extent has the Socratic seminar improved your ability to critically analyse literary texts?
- Significantly improved
 - Moderately improved
 - Slightly improved
 - No improvement

10. Do you feel that the Socratic seminar method has helped you develop multiple perspectives on a text?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

11. How effective is the Socratic seminar in helping you interpret complex literary themes and ideas?

- Extremely effective
- Very effective
- Moderately effective
- Slightly effective
- Not effective at all

Section D: Educational Experience and Classroom Dynamics

12. How would you compare Socratic seminars to traditional lecture-based discussions in terms of engagement and learning?

- Much more engaging
- Somewhat more engaging
- About the same
- Less engaging
- Much less engaging

13. Do you think Socratic seminars should be implemented more widely in literature courses?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

14. How supportive do you find the instructor's role in guiding Socratic seminars?

- Very supportive
- Somewhat supportive
- Neutral
- Not very supportive
- Not supportive at all

15. What aspects of the Socratic seminar method do you think could be improved? (Open-ended)

- _____

16. What suggestions do you have for making Socratic seminars more effective in literature classes? (Open-ended)

- _____

Thank you for your time and valuable insights!