

MYTHOLOGY AS PEDAGOGY: A PRISMA-BASED SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF ITS ROLE IN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLISH EDUCATION

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Abstract

Mythology has historically functioned as a powerful medium for transmitting cultural knowledge, ethical values, and philosophical insights across generations. In educational contexts, mythological narratives offer significant pedagogical potential due to their complex linguistic structures, symbolic meanings, and rich moral dilemmas. This systematic review investigates the role of mythology in enhancing language proficiency and ethical development in English education. Using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, the study analyzes scholarly literature published between 1990 and 2024 examining mythology-based pedagogy and narrative learning in educational contexts.

A systematic search of Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, JSTOR, and Google Scholar identified 210 studies. After screening and eligibility assessment, 32 studies were included in the final synthesis. The review identifies four major pedagogical dimensions: mythology as cultural pedagogy, mythology as a resource for language development, mythology as a tool for ethical education, and mythology as a catalyst for student engagement.

Findings indicate that mythological narratives significantly support vocabulary development, reading comprehension, narrative interpretation, and creative writing skills. Furthermore, mythological stories encourage students to engage with complex ethical dilemmas that foster moral reasoning and critical thinking. In the Indian context, narratives from epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* provide culturally meaningful contexts that connect language learning with ethical reflection.

Despite increasing interest in narrative-based learning approaches, systematic research examining mythology within English language education remains limited. This review highlights research gaps and proposes future directions including interdisciplinary studies integrating mythology, language pedagogy, and

digital storytelling technologies. The study concludes that mythology-based pedagogy offers significant potential for holistic education by integrating linguistic competence, ethical awareness, and cultural understanding.

Keywords: mythology, narrative pedagogy, language learning, ethical education, storytelling, PRISMA systematic review

1. Introduction

Mythology has played a central role in shaping the cultural, philosophical, and ethical traditions of societies throughout history. Mythological narratives function as symbolic stories that communicate collective beliefs, moral principles, and historical experiences. Scholars of myth and culture argue that myths serve as foundational narratives through which societies interpret human existence and social values (Eliade, 1963; Campbell, 2008). These narratives frequently address universal human concerns such as justice, duty, sacrifice, loyalty, and the struggle between good and evil. As cultural narratives, myths provide societies with frameworks for interpreting human experiences and transmitting shared values across generations (Gottschall, 2012; Turner, 1996).

Within educational traditions, storytelling has historically been a powerful pedagogical tool. Long before formal schooling systems emerged, knowledge was transmitted through oral narratives, including myths, folktales, and epics. Anthropological and educational research indicates that storytelling has long functioned as an effective method for communicating ethical principles, social norms, and cultural knowledge (Bettelheim, 1976; Polkinghorne, 1988). Such stories served not only as entertainment but also as educational instruments that facilitated cultural transmission and moral development.

In the Indian cultural context, mythological epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* represent foundational narratives that have shaped philosophical and ethical discourse for centuries. These texts present complex characters, moral dilemmas, and philosophical reflections concerning concepts such as *dharma* (duty), justice, and moral responsibility. Scholars of Indian education argue that traditional pedagogical practices frequently relied on epic narratives and mythological stories to transmit moral and philosophical knowledge (Kumar, 2000; Scharfe, 2002). These narratives remain culturally significant and continue to influence contemporary discussions of ethics, leadership, and social responsibility (Desai, 2020).

Despite the historical importance of storytelling in education, modern educational systems often prioritize standardized assessment, technical literacy, and examination-oriented learning. Language education in many classrooms emphasizes grammatical accuracy and test performance rather than interpretive engagement with texts. Educational researchers have criticized this approach for neglecting the broader cognitive and cultural dimensions of language learning (Bruner, 1990; Egan, 1989). As a result, opportunities for narrative-based learning and ethical reflection are frequently limited in contemporary educational contexts.

Recent educational research increasingly emphasizes the need for holistic learning approaches that integrate cognitive development with cultural awareness and moral reasoning. Narrative pedagogy has emerged as a promising approach in this regard. According to Bruner (1990), narrative structures play a crucial role in organizing human knowledge and facilitating meaning-making. Stories provide meaningful linguistic contexts that support language

acquisition while simultaneously encouraging reflection on ethical and cultural themes (Green & Brock, 2000; Nikolajeva, 2014).

Mythological narratives are particularly suitable for such pedagogical purposes. Their dramatic structures, symbolic language, and ethical conflicts create rich opportunities for linguistic engagement and interpretive discussion. Students interacting with mythological texts encounter varied vocabulary, narrative structures, figurative language, and philosophical themes that contribute to deeper language learning and interpretive competence (Ryan, 2001; Herman, 2009).

Given these potential benefits, there is growing scholarly interest in mythology-based pedagogy within language education. Studies examining narrative pedagogy suggest that storytelling can enhance student engagement, cultural understanding, and ethical awareness (Allender, 2009; Yakar, 2018). However, research examining the specific role of mythology in English language education remains scattered across different disciplines, including literature, education, cultural studies, and narrative psychology. A systematic synthesis of existing research is therefore necessary to better understand how mythological narratives can contribute to language learning and ethical development.

This study aims to provide a PRISMA-based systematic review of research examining mythology as a pedagogical resource in English language education. The review explores how mythological narratives contribute to language proficiency, ethical development, cultural awareness, and student engagement within contemporary educational contexts.

2. Theoretical Framework

Three major theoretical perspectives support the integration of mythology into language education: constructivist learning theory, sociocultural theory, and narrative ethics.

Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivist theory proposes that learners actively construct knowledge through meaningful engagement with learning materials rather than passively receiving information. Jerome Bruner's theory of narrative cognition emphasizes the importance of narrative structures in organizing knowledge and interpreting experiences (Bruner, 1990). According to Bruner, stories provide cognitive frameworks that allow individuals to understand complex events and relationships through sequential and causal structures.

Within educational contexts, narrative-based learning enables students to construct meaning through interpretive engagement with texts. Mythological narratives provide culturally meaningful stories through which students can explore language, symbolism, and ethical dilemmas in ways that promote active learning. By analyzing mythological texts, learners develop interpretive skills that support both linguistic competence and cultural understanding (Egan, 1989; Herman, 2009).

Constructivist pedagogy emphasizes inquiry-based learning, collaborative discussion, and interpretive analysis. Mythology-based instruction aligns with these principles because mythological narratives invite multiple interpretations and encourage students to explore symbolic meanings and moral questions. Through this process, learners actively construct knowledge about language, culture, and ethical values.

Sociocultural Theory

Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural context in cognitive development. According to this perspective, learning occurs through engagement with cultural artifacts such as language, symbols, narratives, and shared traditions (Vygotsky, 1978).

Myths represent powerful cultural artifacts that shape collective understanding and social identity. Cultural narratives transmit knowledge about social values, historical experiences, and ethical principles. Through classroom discussions and collaborative interpretation of mythological narratives, students participate in socially mediated learning processes that support linguistic and cognitive development.

Sociocultural learning environments encourage dialogue, interpretation, and collaborative meaning-making. When students analyze mythological stories together, they engage in interpretive discussions that deepen their understanding of language and culture. Such collaborative learning processes promote both linguistic competence and intercultural awareness (Gay, 2010).

Narrative Ethics

Narrative ethics highlights the role of storytelling in moral development and ethical reflection. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues that literary narratives allow individuals to understand complex moral situations by experiencing them through the perspectives of fictional characters (Nussbaum, 1997). Through narrative engagement, readers develop empathy, ethical imagination, and moral reasoning.

Mythological narratives frequently present dramatic conflicts between competing values such as loyalty, justice, duty, and personal desire. These narratives portray characters confronting ethical dilemmas that require difficult decisions. When students analyze such narratives in educational contexts, they engage in ethical reflection and philosophical inquiry.

Research in narrative psychology also suggests that stories play a crucial role in shaping moral identity and ethical understanding (Oatley, 2011; Polkinghorne, 1988). By examining mythological characters and their moral choices, students develop the ability to evaluate ethical situations and consider multiple perspectives.

Thus, mythology-based pedagogy integrates linguistic learning with ethical development. Through narrative analysis, students not only improve language skills but also engage in meaningful reflection on moral values and human experiences.

3. Methodology

PRISMA Systematic Review Approach

This study follows the PRISMA framework to conduct a systematic review of literature examining mythology-based pedagogy in language education.

Databases

The following academic databases were used:

- Scopus
- Web of Science
- ERIC
- JSTOR
- Google Scholar

Search keywords included: Mythology in education, Mythological narratives, Storytelling pedagogy, Narrative learning, Language learning through stories, Ethics in education.

Search string used: (Mythology OR Mythological Narratives) AND (Language Learning OR English Education) AND (Ethics OR Moral Development)

Inclusion Criteria: Studies were included if they:

- Were peer-reviewed research publications
- Published between 1990 and 2024
- Examined mythology or storytelling in educational contexts
- Were written in English

Exclusion Criteria: Studies were excluded if they:

- Were non-academic sources
- Focused solely on religious theology without educational relevance
- Were duplicate records

Study Selection

The search identified **210 records**. After removing **42 duplicates**, **168 studies** remained. Screening of titles and abstracts excluded **96 records**. Full texts of **72 articles** were assessed for eligibility. **40 studies were excluded**, resulting in **32 studies included** in the final review.

To ensure methodological rigor, the included studies were evaluated using a structured quality appraisal framework adapted from systematic review guidelines in educational research. The evaluation considered four criteria: clarity of research objectives, methodological design, relevance to mythology-based pedagogy, and validity of findings.

Each study was assessed according to these criteria and categorized as high, moderate, or exploratory quality. Studies lacking clear educational relevance or methodological transparency were excluded during the eligibility stage. This appraisal process ensured that the final dataset consisted of studies that provided meaningful insights into the pedagogical role of mythology in language education.

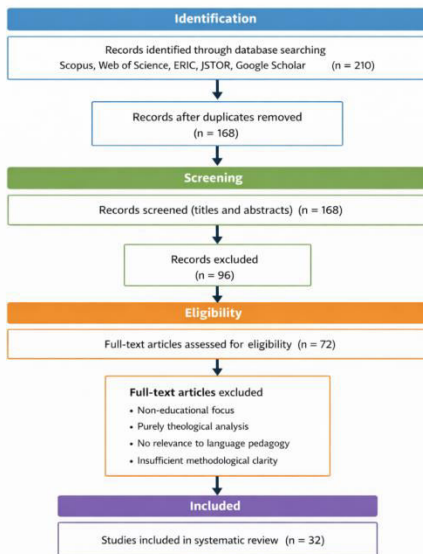


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram illustrating the selection process of studies included in the systematic review.

4. Results

Analysis of the selected studies revealed four major themes:

1. Mythology as cultural pedagogy
2. Mythology and language acquisition
3. Mythology and ethical development
4. Mythology and student engagement

5. Literature Synthesis and Thematic Analysis

The PRISMA-based review of 32 selected studies revealed several recurring themes regarding the role of mythology in educational contexts. Through thematic analysis, four primary dimensions emerged: mythology as cultural pedagogy, mythology as a resource for language development, mythology as a tool for ethical education, and mythology as a catalyst for student engagement. These themes demonstrate that mythological narratives operate as multidimensional educational tools capable of fostering linguistic, cognitive, cultural, and moral development.

Table 1: Summary of Selected Studies

Author	Year	Context	Focus	Key Findings
Quinn	1993	English classrooms	Mythology teaching	Improves literary comprehension
Kumar	2000	Indian education	Mythological pedagogy	Cultural narratives support learning
Scharfe	2002	Ancient Indian education	Mythology and knowledge	Storytelling central to traditional education
Allender	2009	Curriculum design	Narrative pedagogy	Encourages critical thinking
Galarraga	2010	Folklore pedagogy	Story-based learning	Promotes cultural identity
Green & Brock	2000	Narrative psychology	Story engagement	Narratives increase persuasion and memory
Campbell	2008	Comparative mythology	Hero narrative	Universal narrative patterns
Eliade	1963	Cultural studies	Myth and culture	Myths transmit cultural values
Egan	1989	Education theory	Storytelling pedagogy	Enhances engagement
Bruner	1990	Cognitive psychology	Narrative learning	Stories organize knowledge
Vygotsky	1978	Sociocultural theory	Cultural learning	Culture shapes cognition
Nussbaum	1997	Narrative ethics	Moral development	Literature develops empathy
Reis	2015	African mythology	Education	Improves engagement
Silva	2018	Indigenous narratives	Intercultural education	Promotes cultural awareness
Yakar	2018	Child education	Mythology	Supports moral reasoning
Desai	2020	Indian classrooms	Mythology teaching	Enhances ethical reflection
Priya	2023	Children's education	Mythological stories	Improves values education
Oatley	2011	Literary	Fiction & empathy	Stories enhance empathy

Author	Year	Context	Focus	Key Findings
		psychology		
Nikolajeva	2014	Children's literature	Narrative comprehension	Improves interpretation
Zipes	2006	Fairy tales	Story pedagogy	Promotes critical literacy
Gerrig	1993	Narrative cognition	Story processing	Improves understanding
Ryan	2001	Narrative theory	Story structure	Enhances narrative engagement
Fisher	2018	Digital storytelling	Narrative learning	Improves participation
Gay	2010	Cultural pedagogy	Culturally responsive teaching	Improves student engagement
O'Flaherty & Phillips	2015	Pedagogy research	Narrative learning	Enhances classroom interaction
Polkinghorne	1988	Narrative psychology	Story and meaning	Supports learning through narrative
Bettelheim	1976	Folklore studies	Story psychology	Stories aid emotional development
Turner	1996	Cognitive theory	Narrative mind	Humans think in stories
Herman	2009	Narrative theory	Narrative cognition	Supports comprehension
Brockmeier	2002	Cultural narrative	Identity formation	Stories shape identity
Gottschall	2012	Evolutionary storytelling	Story psychology	Humans are storytelling animals
Abbott	2008	Narrative studies	Story analysis	Improves literary interpretation

5.1 Mythology as Cultural Pedagogy

Mythology has historically functioned as a cultural repository through which societies preserve and transmit collective knowledge, traditions, and ethical values. Scholars in cultural studies argue that myths represent symbolic narratives that communicate sacred knowledge and social structures within communities (Eliade, 1963). In educational contexts, mythology therefore serves as an important medium for transmitting cultural memory and identity.

Previous research suggests that integrating culturally meaningful narratives into classroom instruction enhances students' cultural awareness and engagement with learning materials (Allender, 2009; Yakar, 2018). When learners encounter mythological narratives within the classroom, they engage not only with linguistic structures but also with the cultural traditions embedded within these narratives. Such engagement supports culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasizes connecting curriculum content with students' cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2010).

In the Indian context, mythological epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* provide culturally rich texts that enable learners to explore ethical and philosophical concepts such as duty (*dharma*), justice, and moral responsibility (Kumar, 2000; Desai, 2020). These

narratives contain complex character relationships and philosophical dialogues that stimulate interpretive thinking and cultural reflection.

Comparative mythology research further highlights that myths from diverse cultures often share universal narrative structures, such as the heroic journey and moral transformation (Campbell, 2008). By examining myths from different cultural traditions—including Greek, African, and Indigenous mythologies—students develop intercultural awareness and global cultural literacy (Silva, 2018; Reis, 2015). Consequently, mythology-based pedagogy not only strengthens linguistic competence but also promotes intercultural understanding.

5.2 Narrative Learning and Language Acquisition

Narrative learning represents one of the most effective pedagogical approaches for language education. Linguistic research indicates that language acquisition occurs more effectively when learners encounter language within meaningful contexts rather than isolated grammatical exercises (Bruner, 1990). Stories provide coherent narrative structures that facilitate comprehension, interpretation, and retention.

Mythological narratives are particularly effective in language learning because they combine narrative complexity with symbolic meaning. Such narratives frequently contain figurative language, descriptive imagery, and varied vocabulary that enrich linguistic exposure. Studies examining storytelling pedagogy demonstrate that narrative-based instruction improves reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and narrative competence (Egan, 1989; Quinn, 1993).

Narrative competence refers to the ability to understand and interpret narrative structures such as plot development, character motivation, and thematic meaning. According to Bruner (1990), stories organize human knowledge by linking events through causal relationships and symbolic interpretation. Through engagement with mythological texts, students develop interpretive skills that support both literary analysis and language proficiency.

In addition to reading comprehension, mythology-based pedagogy encourages creative language production. Classroom activities such as dramatization, storytelling, role-playing, and creative rewriting enable students to actively use language in expressive contexts. Research on storytelling in language classrooms suggests that such activities enhance speaking fluency and writing creativity (Priya, 2023; Galarraga, 2010).

Psychological studies also indicate that information presented in narrative form is easier to remember than isolated factual information because stories create meaningful cognitive frameworks (Green & Brock, 2000). Mythological narratives therefore function as powerful mnemonic tools that support long-term language retention.

5.3 Mythological Narratives and Ethical Development

One of the most distinctive features of mythological narratives is their exploration of ethical dilemmas and moral conflicts. Mythological stories frequently portray characters confronted with difficult decisions involving competing values such as loyalty, justice, sacrifice, and personal desire.

Philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues that literary narratives play a crucial role in developing ethical imagination by allowing readers to experience moral situations through the perspectives of fictional characters (Nussbaum, 1997). Through narrative engagement, learners develop empathy and moral reasoning.

Mythological narratives provide particularly rich contexts for ethical education because they present dramatic moral conflicts that encourage reflection on ethical decision-making. For instance, many mythological narratives explore tensions between personal emotions and social responsibilities. When students analyze such narratives in classroom discussions, they engage in ethical reflection and philosophical inquiry.

Research on narrative ethics suggests that discussing moral dilemmas in literature enhances students' critical thinking and ethical awareness (Oatley, 2011). Classroom discussions focusing on characters' motivations, ethical choices, and consequences of actions enable students to evaluate moral frameworks and develop independent ethical reasoning.

Furthermore, mythological narratives often illustrate the consequences of moral and immoral actions. These narrative patterns reinforce ethical learning by demonstrating how individual decisions influence social outcomes. Scholars examining character education in literature classrooms emphasize that stories are particularly effective in teaching moral values because they provide concrete examples of ethical behavior (Desai, 2020; Yakar, 2018). Thus, mythology-based pedagogy supports ethical development by encouraging students to reflect on moral dilemmas within narrative contexts.

5.4 Storytelling Pedagogy and Student Engagement

Storytelling has been recognized as one of the oldest and most effective teaching methods in human history. Educational theorist Kieran Egan argues that storytelling engages learners emotionally and cognitively, making learning experiences more meaningful and memorable (Egan, 1989).

In language education, storytelling helps learners understand linguistic structures through narrative contexts rather than abstract grammatical rules. Students encountering language through stories develop stronger interpretive and communicative abilities.

Mythological storytelling offers unique advantages for language education due to its dramatic plots, symbolic imagery, and imaginative settings. Stories involving heroic quests, supernatural events, and moral conflicts capture students' imagination and stimulate curiosity.

Research examining storytelling pedagogy in classrooms indicates that narrative-based activities increase student motivation and participation (Allender, 2009). Interactive classroom strategies such as debates about ethical dilemmas, role-playing mythological characters, and creative reinterpretations of myths encourage collaborative learning.

Creative writing activities inspired by mythological themes also promote student engagement. Students may reinterpret myths from alternative perspectives or adapt traditional narratives to contemporary contexts. Such activities transform mythological narratives from passive reading material into active learning experiences.

Furthermore, recent studies highlight the potential of digital storytelling tools in mythology-based pedagogy. Digital platforms allow students to create multimedia narratives combining text, images, and audio, thereby enhancing both language proficiency and digital literacy (Silva, 2018).

6. Discussion

The findings of this systematic review indicate that mythology-based pedagogy offers significant potential for enhancing English language education. Consistent with previous research on narrative learning, mythological narratives provide meaningful linguistic contexts that facilitate language acquisition (Bruner, 1990; Egan, 1989).

First, mythology supports language development by exposing students to rich narrative structures and diverse vocabulary. Story-based learning environments allow students to encounter language in authentic communicative contexts rather than through isolated grammatical exercises.

Second, mythological narratives promote ethical reflection and critical thinking. As emphasized by Nussbaum (1997), literary narratives encourage readers to engage with complex moral situations that stimulate ethical reasoning.

Third, mythology-based pedagogy enhances student engagement. Studies examining storytelling in educational contexts demonstrate that narratives increase motivation and participation because they stimulate imagination and curiosity (Allender, 2009).

However, this review also identifies several limitations within existing research. Many studies focus on theoretical analysis or cultural interpretation rather than empirical classroom experimentation. As a result, the measurable impact of mythology-based pedagogy on language proficiency remains underexplored.

Future research should therefore focus on experimental studies examining how mythology-based instructional strategies influence specific language skills such as reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and writing proficiency.

7. Research Gap

Despite increasing scholarly interest in narrative pedagogy, empirical research examining mythology specifically within English language classrooms remains limited. Much of the existing literature focuses on cultural analysis rather than measurable learning outcomes.

Future studies should adopt interdisciplinary research approaches that integrate educational psychology, language pedagogy, and digital storytelling technologies. Such research could provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of mythology-based pedagogy in contemporary educational environments.

8. Conclusion

Mythology offers significant pedagogical potential for enriching English language education by combining narrative learning with ethical reflection and cultural understanding. Mythological narratives provide linguistically rich and culturally meaningful contexts that support vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and creative writing skills. Mythological stories encourage students to engage with complex ethical dilemmas that foster moral reasoning and critical thinking. Integrating mythology into language education aligns with contemporary educational goals emphasizing holistic learning and cultural literacy. Future empirical research examining mythology-based pedagogy will further clarify its potential for enhancing language learning and ethical education in modern classrooms.

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