

THE SOCRATIC METHOD: A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH ENHANCING COMPETENCIES IN RESEARCH TRAINING

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Abstract

Research training focuses on developing students' methodological, technical, communicative, critical, and ethical competencies necessary for generating new knowledge applicable to research in various disciplines. This process aims to foster the ability to inquire, question, and solve problems systematically and rigorously. This article describes a significant experience using the reading of short literary works such as fables, and the analysis of films, music videos, TV commercials, songs, and video games for a hermeneutic view of research training mediated by the Socratic philosophical method. Through qualitative correlational analysis, the effectiveness of using questions, dialogue, and learning communities—characteristics of the Socratic method—was confirmed to awaken the investigative spirit in students and enhance their discourse.

Keywords - enhance, commercials, methodological, describes, process

INTRODUCTION

The Socratic method (*maieutics*) is a philosophical technique attributed to Socrates, the Greek philosopher of the 5th century BC. The term " *maieutics* " comes from the Greek "μαϊευτική" (*maieutiké*), meaning "the art of midwifery." This technique is a metaphor based on the profession of Socrates' mother, who was a midwife. Socrates compared his teaching method to the work of a midwife: instead of directly imparting knowledge, he helped his interlocutors "give birth" to the ideas that were already latent in their minds. The Socratic method was based on a dialogue in which Socrates asked strategic questions that led the interlocutor to discover truths for themselves, stimulating reflection and critical thinking.

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The primary intention of the Socratic method was to reach the truth through self-knowledge and introspection. Socrates believed that through constant questioning and self-examination, people could achieve a deeper understanding of complex concepts and of themselves. This method contrasted with the dogmatic teachings of the sophists, who focused on imparting knowledge and rhetorical skills. The Socratic method had a lasting influence on Western philosophy, laying the foundations of the dialectical method and the critical approach in the pursuit of knowledge.

On the other hand, Education as an activity encompasses three questions: the how, the what, and the why. The *how* is the fundamental question of pedagogy, accounting for the means; the *what* is the theory of education itself, and the *why* responds to the philosophy of education. Fullat (1987) and the philosophy of education lead us to reflect from the anthropological, axiological, and theological dimensions on the purpose of education. Valdés and López (2011) comment that the first dimension alludes to the type of human being we wish to form, from Socratic teachings to the present day, whose purpose is the transformation of the individual through knowledge. The second refers to values and content, meaning that with certain values, strategies, and techniques, the desired person is achieved; and the third points to the ends. It questions the purpose, serving as a guide for the educational act.

The UNESCO Report (2021), *A Turning Point: Why We Must Transform Education Now* is crucial in addressing the need to reimagine education to face current global challenges. It highlights the urgency of transforming education to ensure lifelong learning and to form just and sustainable societies. Also, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] (2019) analyzes how key competencies in education can be better prepared for the future, emphasizing the adaptability and critical capacity of students. In Spain, an article in *Magisterio* titled *The Key Question Is: Why Do We Educate?* suggests that the main objective should be to form individuals capable of living dignified lives and adapting to constant environmental changes.

In this sense, the anthropological dimension that seeks the transformation of the human being through knowledge is noteworthy. So, in this globalized society we are immersed in, what individual do we want to form? The current trend is the integral formation of being, knowing, doing, and living together as an individual capable of transforming the surrounding reality. For students receiving research training, they are provided with tools to develop, besides investigative competencies, technical skills to communicate effectively with critical thinking and ethical commitment. But how is this made possible? The Socratic method encourages the desire to inquire about the unknown, which is why a study was conducted on its correlation with research training through activities such as reading comprehension of continuous and discontinuous texts, such as fables, movies, music videos, TV commercials, songs, and video games.



Studies like this, which articulate the Socratic method and research training, focus on students and the methodologies employed by their teachers. Fundamentally, as Villalba-Villadiego et al. (2023) state:

Students are the central axis of the entire teaching-learning process since the whole school machinery revolves primarily around them and their formation. They are the *raison d'être* of educational institutions, which prepare a whole system of interactions among many other elements, actors, strategies, and resources to seek and, in the best cases, achieve true transformation, enabling society to have individuals capable of coexisting with themselves, their environment, and their peers, and at the same time, responding to and proposing solutions to emerging needs. (p. 1156).

In the context of higher education, Cabrales et al. (2023) state that “In the pursuit of academic excellence, higher education seeks to ensure that undergraduate students increase the focus of intellectual growth, allowing students to achieve personal development and innovation to increase students' academic performance, as this is a crucial point for student success and the institutional campus. However, the vast academic journey of students in training is unique and challenging” (p. 777). It becomes essential for institutions to provide robust support systems that cater to individual student needs. This includes implementing personalized tutoring, offering mental health resources, and creating an inclusive learning environment. By addressing the diverse challenges students face, universities can foster a more supportive and effective educational experience, ultimately leading to higher levels of achievement and satisfaction among students. Through these efforts, higher education not only promotes academic success but also contributes to the holistic development of future leaders and innovators. In this stage appears the Socratic Method proposed in this study to improve teaching strategies.

METHOD

This article focuses on qualitative correlational analysis. The main objective is to understand and describe the ways and reasons why the categories of the Socratic method and competencies in research training relate. Techniques such as workshops and document analysis allow researchers to examine perceptions, experiences, and contexts affecting this relationship. Rather than quantifying the strength of this relationship using numerical coefficients, a deep understanding of the nature of these relationships is sought from the historical-hermeneutic paradigm (Habermas 1985).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A finding in this study on the effectiveness of the Socratic method for developing research competencies showed collaborative learning based on Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. This theory, grounded in sociocultural theory, posits that human beings are situated within a given society and culture and that their learning depends on social interaction and support among learners. As Collante (2006) states, "Its main emphasis lies consecutively in how we help each



other to learn" (p.34). The foundations of this theory are collaboration and dialogue, which would provide the bases for meaningful learning for students.

In this study, the participating students expressed positive implications of peer collaboration during reading workshops for greater understanding and goal achievement through co-construction. These observed results confirm what Vargas and collaborators (2020) state regarding the collaborative learning strategy, which impacts performance and learning in cognitive, procedural, and attitudinal dimensions. Individualism, which strips students of their human sensitivity, tends to create stratified groups that elitize and dehumanize education. Through the common effort to socialize workshops via the Socratic method, students implemented communication strategies involving understanding, explanation, constant questioning and answering, as well as discussion and debate.

Thus, it is concluded that the Socratic method applied in workshops favored the development of research competencies such as: capacity for analysis and synthesis, logical reasoning, evaluation skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving, in addition to communicative competencies, highlighting students' ability to interpret, argue, and propose.

In this context, Freire (1970) emphasizes the value of social interaction when critiquing the banking model of education, which disregards what the student constructs both individually and collectively. In this conception, dialogue as a form of social interaction fosters constructivist learning. The Socratic dialogue enables learners to begin philosophizing.

The Socratic method as a method is characterized by seeking in learners a construction through questioning. "Any question corresponds to a problem that needs to be solved and therefore requires one or several answers, whether simple or complex." (Chacón 2000 p.2). In this sense, philosophizing through the Socratic method represents a "search for universal definitions [...] mediated by dialogue and especially questioning" (Collante 2010 p.23). The philosophical Socratic method has become a pedagogical method based on Socrates' original idea, employing his ability to persuade and dissuade for the discovery of problems rather than solutions, as he believed the truth lies latent in every human being's mind due to innate reason, but it must be 'given birth' by responding to proposed questions or problems intelligently. Essentially, this philosophical method fosters an interaction commitment between students, the discussed topic, and the teacher.

Returning to the questions, what kind of individual do we want to form? and how can we make this possible? some pedagogical tools can be suggested to promote dialogue, analysis, and communication. To teach how to philosophize and develop the characteristic questioning in young people being trained as researchers, the analysis of narratives was used as a valuable mediation. Stories whose contents provoke reflection, considering that the literary world has a plural significative character, leading to various interpretations and providing different endings to the reader.



The fable was determined as the appropriate textual typology of the narrative literary genre to introduce young people to philosophy. In fact, authors of this genre are philosophers. One of the most recognized was Aesop, who expressed his moral philosophy in his extensive work. Fables are more attractive for all ages if questioned about personification—the relationship between human and animal characteristics. For instance, they will initially have much to share since many analogies of the animal world allow reflection on human behavior and its consequences.

In the case of the young participants in the study, belonging to the global generation, digital citizens, multimedia devices are their attraction; Therefore, the analysis of a film, a music video, a television commercial, a song, even a video game, can be the trigger for a flurry of questions that lead them to 'ruminate' (using Nietzsche's terms) these productions so that they are more critical of what they consume. Now, this leaves the conclusion that the challenge of today's teacher is greater, it is to teach young people to orient themselves in the tide of information they receive, especially in the era of telecommunications where cyberspace is the new public square. where they participate and daily face rapid information that must differentiate fake news from truthful information.

The above becomes important to maintain a well-informed society and avoid misinformation, to make informed decisions, protect democracy, and promote a discourse based on real and verifiable facts, which represents verification as an exercise of research. In this sense, the students, through the implementation of the Socratic method in carrying out the workshops, had the opportunity to carry out the bibliographic research activity inherent to all research and produce texts from the discussions, so that they evidenced their ethical commitment by attributing copyright and enhance their interpretation, argumentation, and proposition skills. The maieutics at this point was oriented so that the students were able to discern reliable sources given that the consultation occurred mainly on the Internet and it is known that it is a vast space that houses information of all kinds in which it is necessary to know how to identify key elements that ensure the reliability of the sources to select the information that will be used in the argued discourse and in the investigative proposals

In this same digital scenario where information and communication circulate based on what Pérez (2011) states about adolescents. This author states that young people are constantly exploring, enjoying, and expressing themselves on different platforms. Therefore, it is crucial that institutions not only adapt to these changes and critically evaluate new tools, but also reinforce their fundamental role of cultivating critical and autonomous thinking in all students, which is essential to guarantee a responsible use of new technologies.

It was observed that students can handle computers, chat efficiently, participate in social networks and search for information easily and quickly. They also use technologies to build knowledge. For this finding, it is concluded that the role of teachers is to add that additional value, specific to their work, by observing how students use the Internet to build their understanding and not demonize multimedia devices in training, even more so in the context of scientific research and the consolidation of Artificial Intelligence [AI] for the search for information. The role



of the teacher should be aimed at developing their capacity for discernment, since it is easy to find countless information, but it must be the researcher who selects, according to their study interests, the reference material through the evacuation of criteria of coherence and adequacy.

Despite the current technological revolution, there are human qualities, such as creativity, the generation of new ideas and the ability to improvise, that AI cannot yet replicate and is precisely one of the inferences that students declared should be enhanced in research training, as Padilla (2019) explains, that AI has great potential to accelerate the achievement and development of global objectives in education by reducing barriers to access to learning, automating management processes and optimizing methods that improve results. educational and for this reason teachers cannot allow themselves to be alienated by the appearance of artificial intelligence and its access in education.

Then, through the reading comprehension workshops of continuous and discontinuous texts using Socratic dialogue or maieutics, it can be stated that it is possible to lead young people to develop their thinking that, like any research proposal, starts from the question, which stimulates desire to investigate and invites the young person to maintain an alert attitude in the search for knowledge. Furthermore, philosophical dialogue is an activity that involves the exchange of ideas, which leads to developing the ability to listen carefully, evaluate what is heard, compare ideas, argue, refute, infer, make judgments, draw conclusions, among others.


The topic of philosophy for young people is a topic that has worried many. Balbona (2009) comments that Fernando Savater, the philosopher, essayist, novelist, and playwright, confessed to being “practically inventing” an entire system of rules and philosophical games with which to make his way into a territory with many unknowns and challenges to create philosophical stories. In his arduous task he has managed to demonstrate that philosophizing can be achieved from an early age. Works such as *Ethics for Amador*, *Politics for Amador*, *The Questions of Life*, *History of Philosophy without Fear or Trembling* and *On Thought and Knowledge in the Internet Age*, have been inspiring, as is the case with *Sofia’s World* by Jostein Gaarder.

CONCLUSION

The Socratic method represents a valuable pedagogical approach in research training, fostering critical thinking, dialogue, and the ability to question established norms. This study confirms its effectiveness in developing competencies necessary for research, demonstrating the benefits of collaborative learning and reflective inquiry. By integrating activities such as reading fables and analyzing multimedia content, educators can enhance students' investigative abilities, preparing them to contribute to knowledge generation in various fields.

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