

Factors Influencing Chinese University English Majors' Ability to Analyze 19th Century Romantic Poetry

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Abstract

This thesis explores the factors influencing the ability of Chinese university English majors to analyze 19th-century Romantic poetry. As Romantic poetry is characterized by its complex language, rich symbolism, and deep emotional content, it presents unique challenges for students. This study aims to identify and understand the key factors—motivation, interest, exposure to Romantic poetry, cultural knowledge, and Teaching Methods—that impact students' analytical abilities. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to gather comprehensive data from students and educators across several Chinese universities. The study also examines the moderating role of critical thinking skills in enhancing students' ability to engage with and interpret Romantic poetry. Findings from this research reveal that motivation and interest are strongly impacted with improved analytical skills, with students who are more engaged showing a higher proficiency in literary analysis. Exposure to Romantic poetry, both in and out of the classroom, was found to significantly impact students' familiarity with the genre, which in turn enhanced their analytical abilities. Cultural knowledge, particularly an understanding of the historical and philosophical context of the Romantic period, was also identified as a crucial factor in the depth and accuracy of students' analyses. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of innovative Teaching Methods, such as interactive and multimedia approaches, in facilitating a deeper engagement with Romantic poetry. Traditional lecture-based methods, while useful, were found to be less effective in addressing the unique challenges posed by this literary genre. The research concludes with recommendations for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers to develop strategies that can better support the development of analytical skills in students studying Romantic poetry. The study also suggests areas for

future research, particularly in exploring the applicability of these findings across other literary genres and educational contexts.

Keywords: Chinese University, English Majors, 19th Century, Romantic Poetry.

Introduction

The study of 19th-century Romantic poetry among English majors in Chinese universities has gained prominence, not only as an academic subject but as a way to enrich students' analytical, linguistic, and cross-cultural understanding. Romantic poetry, with its focus on themes of individual emotion, the sublime, and nature's impact on humanity, presents complex ideas that challenge students to move beyond surface-level comprehension. The importance of this subject lies in its ability to cultivate critical thinking and interpretive skills, offering Chinese students a valuable perspective on Western literary history and its lasting impact on modern thought. This study addresses an essential academic need: equipping students with tools to interpret historically rich texts and to navigate cultural and temporal divides.

Several studies underscore the challenges Chinese students face in analyzing Romantic poetry due to linguistic and contextual barriers. Zachová (2021), found that students frequently struggle with the historical context and temporal orientation of literary works, which are crucial for understanding Romantic poetry's depth and nuance. This finding suggests the need for educators to build foundational knowledge that helps students connect the poems to their socio-political and cultural backgrounds, facilitating a deeper comprehension of the texts. Turner (2020), also highlighted that while exposure to complex literary works can improve analytical skills, it may simultaneously lead to mixed attitudes if students feel overwhelmed. This paradox points to a critical pedagogical challenge: educators must strike a balance between exposing students to complex poetry and ensuring it remains accessible and engaging.

Understanding the factors influencing students' literary comprehension is valuable for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers who aim to create supportive, inclusive learning environments. Gajić et al (2023), emphasized that socio-demographic factors, such as educational background, language of instruction, and socio-economic status, shape students' literary analysis abilities. This insight highlights the importance of differentiated instructional strategies that cater to diverse student needs, allowing all students to engage meaningfully with Romantic poetry. By tailoring curricula to accommodate these factors, educators can help students overcome potential barriers, making Romantic poetry more accessible and enriching their overall learning experience.

For students, studying Romantic poetry not only enhances comprehension of this genre but also strengthens broader interpretive skills applicable across various disciplines. Culler (2023), argued that traditional interpretive exercises, such as memorization and recitation, can play a significant role in building students' analytical abilities by encouraging them to internalize and reflect on poetic language and themes. Engaging in such exercises fosters a profound connection to the material, essential for effective literary analysis. Through this practice, students develop transferable skills, allowing them to engage more confidently with other challenging literary genres and disciplines.

This study's findings also have implications beyond Chinese universities, highlighting the broader need for adaptable, inclusive teaching methods in international literary education. By examining the specific challenges faced by Chinese students in analyzing Romantic poetry, this research contributes to global understanding of how Western literature can be taught to non-native English speakers. Samchuk (2019), emphasized that historically contextual and interactive teaching methods can deepen students' appreciation and comprehension of literature. Inspired by such approaches, this study advocates for teaching strategies that make Romantic poetry accessible to a more diverse audience, promoting cross-cultural appreciation of literary heritage.

Ultimately, examining the factors influencing Chinese students' ability to analyze Romantic poetry addresses both academic and cultural goals. It underscores literature's role as a bridge between cultures and as a tool for intellectual growth, fostering informed, culturally sensitive individuals. Through better understanding of the obstacles students face and the instructional methods that can help, educators can enhance the effectiveness of literature courses, preparing students to navigate the complexities of Romantic poetry and, by extension, other demanding literary genres.

Problem Statement

The analysis of 19th-century Romantic poetry presents numerous challenges for university students, stemming from both the inherent complexities of the genre and the limitations of current educational practices. While the richness and educational potential of Romantic poetry are undeniable, several obstacles significantly hinder students' effective learning and comprehension of these texts.

Firstly, the intricate language and symbolic imagery characteristic of Romantic poetry pose significant challenges for students. Romantic poetry is known for its use of highly symbolic and metaphorical language, which can be difficult for students to decode and interpret. Stauffer (2019), points out that the layered meanings and dense allusions typical of this period's literature require a level of interpretative skill that many students have not yet developed. This complexity is further compounded by the need for a robust understanding of the historical and cultural contexts in which these poems were written. Romantic poetry often reflects the socio-political climate and philosophical currents of the 19th century, which are not always familiar to modern students. As Potashova (2023), argues, this lack of contextual knowledge can lead to a superficial reading of the texts, where students may miss deeper meanings and critical nuances embedded within the poetry.

Moreover, the pedagogical approaches commonly employed in teaching Romantic poetry frequently fail to engage students effectively. Traditional lecture-based methods, which are often static and didactic, do not adequately address the unique challenges posed by this complex genre. Ene (2019), highlights that one of the major difficulties faced by undergraduates is the correct decoding of themes and messages within the texts. The conventional methods of teaching, which often prioritize rote learning over interactive and critical engagement, may not provide students with the tools they need to navigate the symbolic and thematic intricacies of Romantic poetry. As a result, students may struggle to move beyond surface-level interpretations, limiting their ability to fully appreciate the depth of these works.

In addition to the challenges posed by the content and Teaching Methods, the cognitive demands of interpreting Romantic poetry require students to develop advanced analytical and critical thinking skills. However, current educational settings do not always foster these skills to the extent necessary for a deep engagement with Romantic texts. Mulholland (2020), discusses how the historical poetics of Romanticism demand a nuanced understanding that goes beyond a cursory reading. Engaging with Romantic poetry requires students to delve into the philosophical, symbolic, and often abstract ideas that are woven into the fabric of the poems. This level of analysis is challenging and requires a strong foundation in critical thinking and literary analysis, which may not be sufficiently developed in all students.

Furthermore, the challenges of analyzing Romantic poetry are exacerbated by the disconnect between students' general reading experiences and their ability to comprehend literary texts. Bauer et al (2022), demonstrated that students who have limited exposure to diverse reading materials often perform poorly in literary comprehension tests. This finding underscores the importance of incorporating a wider range of reading practices within the curriculum, which can help to build the necessary interpretative skills for analyzing complex literary works like Romantic poetry. Without this broad exposure, students may find themselves ill-prepared to tackle the dense and often abstract nature of Romantic literature.

The primary challenges hindering the effective analysis of 19th-century Romantic poetry among university students include the inherent complexity of the texts, a lack of sufficient contextual knowledge, inadequate pedagogical approaches, and underdeveloped critical analytical skills. Addressing these issues is crucial for enhancing students' literary analysis capabilities and fostering a deeper appreciation of Romantic poetry. By adopting more interactive and contextually rich Teaching Methods, and by emphasizing the development of critical thinking skills, educators can better equip students to engage with and appreciate the profound and nuanced works of the Romantic period.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to investigate and enhance the ability of Chinese university English majors to analyze 19th-century Romantic poetry. This involves a multifaceted approach focusing on various educational and cognitive factors. Specifically, the study aims to:

RO1: To examine the impact of various factors—motivation, interest, exposure to Romantic poetry, cultural knowledge, and Teaching Methods—on the ability of Chinese university English majors to analyze 19th-century Romantic poetry.

RO2: To investigate the moderating role of critical thinking skills on the relationships between the independent variables (motivation, interest, exposure, cultural knowledge, Teaching Methods) and the dependent variable (ability to analyze 19th-century Romantic poetry) of Chinese university English majors.

Literature Review

Critical thinking skills have a profound impact on students' analytical abilities, particularly in the context of literary analysis. These skills enable students to engage deeply with texts, evaluate complex poetic elements, and develop well-reasoned interpretations.

Enhanced Analytical Abilities: Developing critical thinking skills is closely linked to the enhancement of students' analytical abilities, particularly in the context of literary analysis. Sarwanto et al (2021), conducted a study that demonstrated a direct correlation between critical thinking skills and students' performance in analyzing literary texts. The research highlighted that students who possessed higher levels of critical thinking were more adept at interpreting, evaluating, and drawing inferences from complex texts. This finding is crucial as it underscores the role of critical thinking in enabling students to go beyond surface-level interpretations and engage with deeper, more nuanced readings of literary works.

Sarwanto et al (2021), emphasize that critical thinking fosters the ability to approach texts with a questioning mindset, allowing students to challenge their assumptions and consider multiple perspectives. This skill is particularly valuable in literary analysis, where the interpretation of themes, characters, and symbols requires a careful examination of the text's language and structure. As students develop their critical thinking abilities, they become more proficient in identifying the subtleties of poetic language and the intricate interplay of literary elements, which in turn enhances their overall analytical performance.

Additionally, Mayarni and Nopiyanti (2021), explored the relationship between critical and analytical thinking skills, finding that these cognitive processes are deeply interconnected. Their study revealed that students with stronger critical thinking abilities also exhibited superior analytical skills, particularly in tasks that required them to break down complex information and synthesize new insights. The findings suggest that critical thinking serves as a foundation for the development of analytical skills, enabling students to approach literary texts with greater depth and precision.

Improvement in Academic Performance: Critical thinking skills have a significant impact on academic performance across various disciplines. D'Alessio et al (2019), conducted a study on MBA students, revealing a strong association between critical thinking abilities and higher academic performance. The study utilized the Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA) test to measure critical thinking and found that students who scored higher on this assessment also achieved better grades in their coursework. This suggests that critical thinking is not only essential for success in literary analysis but also plays a crucial role in overall academic achievement.

D'Alessio et al (2019), further argue that critical thinking skills are particularly important in fields that require complex decision-making and problem-solving, such as business and management. The ability to analyze information, evaluate arguments, and make reasoned judgments is critical in these fields, where students are often required to navigate ambiguous situations and develop innovative solutions. The study's findings highlight the broader applicability of critical thinking skills, suggesting that students who excel in critical thinking are better equipped to succeed in a wide range of academic and professional contexts.

Moreover, Shahzadi et al (2020), explored the correlation between critical thinking skills and academic achievement among intermediate students in Pakistan. The study found that students who performed well on critical thinking assessments also tended to achieve higher academic grades. This correlation was particularly strong in subjects that required logical reasoning and analytical skills, such as mathematics and science. The study's findings

underscore the importance of integrating critical thinking into the curriculum, as it not only enhances students' performance in specific subjects but also contributes to their overall academic success.

Similarly, Ren et al (2020), demonstrated that critical thinking predicts academic performance beyond general cognitive ability. Their study involving both university students and primary school children revealed that critical thinking dispositions, such as open-mindedness and reflective thinking, contributed uniquely to academic success, even when controlling for general cognitive abilities like fluid intelligence and working memory. This indicates that critical thinking is a distinct and valuable skill that plays a crucial role in academic achievement across different educational levels.

Development of Higher-Order Thinking Skills: Higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) are essential for engaging in deep analytical work, particularly in the context of literary analysis. Ramadhana (2022), emphasized that literary analysis plays a pivotal role in fostering these skills. Through critical thinking exercises, students are able to progress beyond basic comprehension to more advanced stages of analysis, such as creating and synthesizing information. These higher-order skills are vital for interpreting complex literary works, where students must not only understand the text but also evaluate its themes, construct new interpretations, and apply insights to broader contexts.

Ramadhana's (2022), findings are supported by additional research that highlights the importance of fostering HOTS in educational settings. Gantuya (2023), conducted a study on the development of HOTS among university students, focusing on how these skills are applied in academic contexts such as vocabulary, grammar, discourse, and engaging with texts. The study found that students who regularly engaged in activities that required higher-order thinking demonstrated significant improvements in their ability to analyze and externalize from texts, indicating that HOTS are integral to academic success in literary studies.

Practical Applications and Teaching Strategies: To effectively develop critical thinking through literary analysis, educators must employ practical teaching strategies that encourage deep engagement with texts. Kovpik (2020), discussed the use of active methods such as event analysis and fishbone structures to enhance critical thinking. These strategies promote a structured approach to literary analysis, guiding students through the process of breaking down complex texts and identifying key elements such as themes, character motivations, and narrative structure. By organizing their thoughts in a systematic way, students can achieve a deeper understanding of the material and develop more nuanced interpretations.

Further supporting the importance of practical strategies in teaching critical thinking, Majumder et al (2019), explored various teaching models designed to foster critical reasoning and higher-order thinking skills. Their research in medical education emphasizes that critical thinking should be systematically integrated into the curriculum through methods such as concept mapping, cognitive de-biasing, and the use of case studies. These techniques, though applied in a medical context, are equally relevant in literary studies, where they can be adapted to help students critically engage with texts and develop sophisticated analytical abilities.

Enhanced Cognitive Skills: Critical thinking is not only crucial for analytical work but also enhances overall cognitive abilities. Mayarni and Nopiyanti (2021), found a significant correlation between students' critical thinking and analytical thinking skills, suggesting that training in critical thinking can improve students' cognitive performance across various tasks. This relationship underscores the importance of incorporating critical thinking exercises into educational practices, as they help students develop the cognitive flexibility necessary to tackle complex problems in both academic and real-world settings.

The development of critical thinking and its impact on cognitive skills is further explored by Nesterenko and Drahinda (2022), who investigated how reading literary texts can be used as a technique to build critical thinking skills. Their research emphasizes the role of literary analysis in enhancing both personal and professional development, demonstrating that students who engage with texts critically are better equipped to process information, form independent opinions, and apply their knowledge in diverse contexts.

In conclusion, critical thinking skills are essential for enhancing students' analytical abilities in the study of 19th-century Romantic poetry. By fostering these skills through innovative Teaching Methods and practical applications, educators can significantly improve students' engagement, understanding, and interpretation of complex literary texts.

Theoretical Framework

Based on Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), developed by Albert Bandura, this study explores the relationships between various educational and cognitive factors—motivation (IV1), interest (IV2), exposure to Romantic poetry (IV3), cultural knowledge (IV4), and Teaching Methods (IV5)—and the ability to analyze 19th-century Romantic poetry (DV). SCT posits that learning occurs in a social context and is influenced by the dynamic interaction between personal factors, behavioral patterns, and environmental influences.

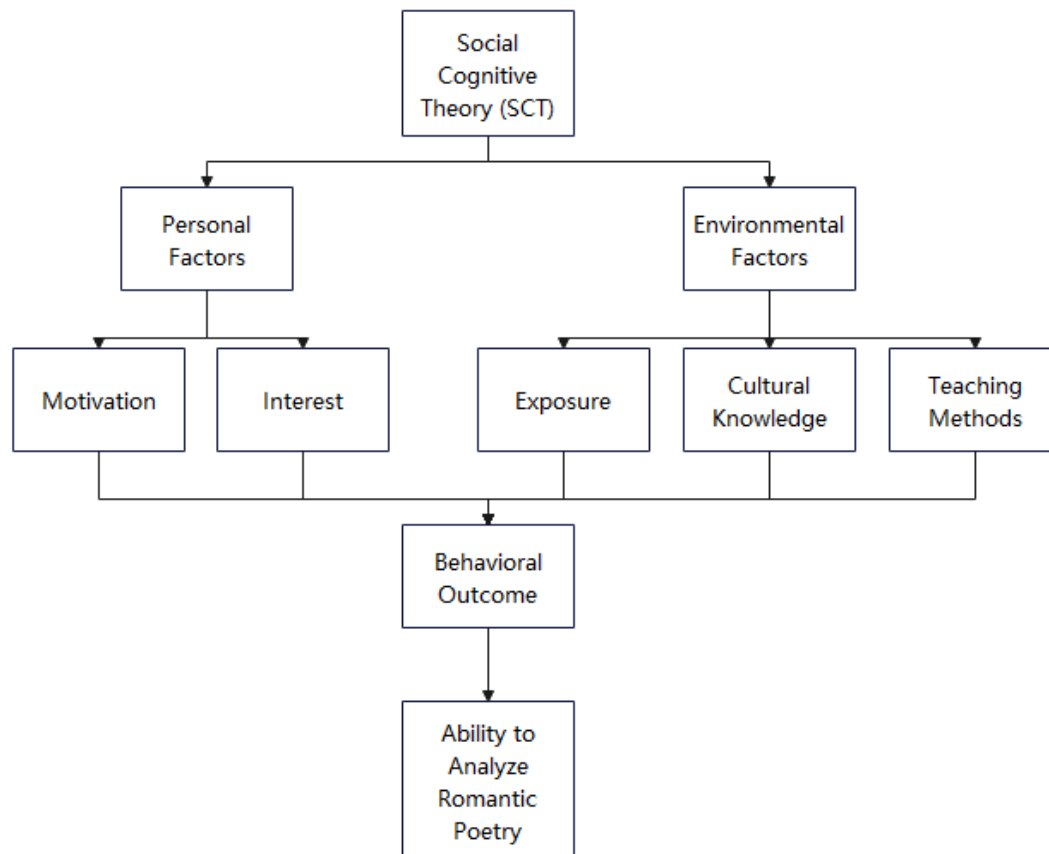


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

In this framework, motivation (IV1) is understood as a key personal factor that drives students' engagement and persistence in learning tasks. SCT highlights the role of self-efficacy in motivation, where students who believe in their ability to succeed are more likely to be motivated to analyze complex literary texts such as Romantic poetry (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

Interest (IV2) is another critical personal factor under SCT, closely related to intrinsic motivation. When students are interested in the subject matter, such as the themes and stylistic features of Romantic poetry, they are more likely to engage deeply with the content, leading to better analytical skills. SCT suggests that interest can be enhanced through positive experiences and reinforcement in the learning environment (Middleton et al., 2019).

Exposure to Romantic poetry (IV3) is conceptualized as an environmental influence within SCT. The theory emphasizes that students learn by observing and interacting with their environment. Increased exposure to relevant literary texts can provide students with the necessary context and content knowledge, enabling them to develop a deeper understanding and analytical ability (Trif, 2015).

Cultural knowledge (IV4) plays a significant role in SCT as it shapes the background schemas that students use to interpret and analyze literary works. SCT acknowledges the importance of sociocultural factors in cognitive development, suggesting that students' understanding of

Romantic poetry is deeply influenced by their cultural context and prior knowledge (Mercer, 2016).

Teaching Methods (IV5) are seen as both an environmental and behavioral factor in SCT. Effective teaching strategies, such as scaffolding and guided practice, can enhance students' cognitive processes, including critical thinking and analytical skills. SCT emphasizes the importance of structured learning environments where students can observe, model, and practice these skills under expert guidance (Kaplan, 2017).

Finally, critical thinking skills (MV) serve as a mediating factor in this study. SCT posits that cognitive processes are essential for interpreting and analyzing complex information. Students with stronger critical thinking skills are better equipped to apply their motivation, interest, and knowledge to the analysis of Romantic poetry, enhancing their overall ability to engage with and understand the text (Kaplan, 2017).

This theoretical framework, supported by SCT, provides a comprehensive understanding of how these factors interact to influence students' ability to analyze 19th-century Romantic poetry. The theory highlights the importance of both personal and environmental factors, as well as cognitive processes, in shaping learning outcomes in literary analysis.

Conceptual Framework

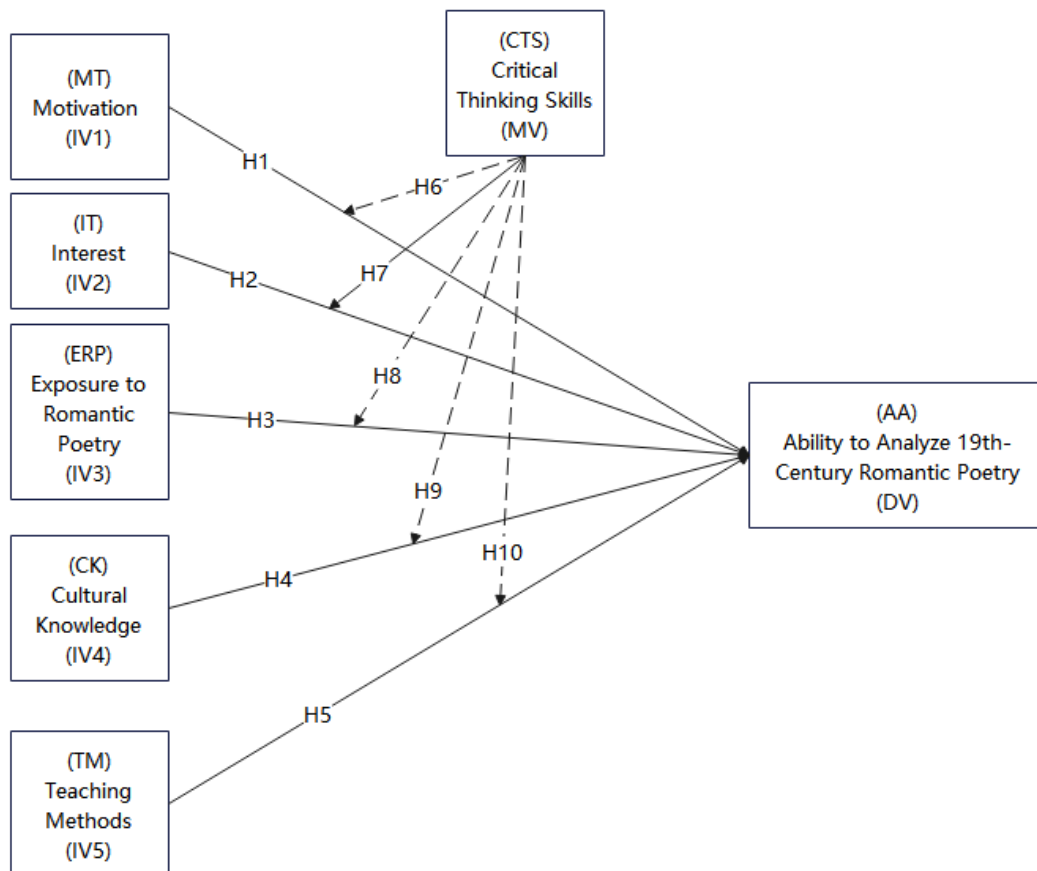


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework
Source: Self-developed

Methodology

The methodology for this study, which investigates the factors influencing Chinese university English majors' ability to analyze 19th-century Romantic poetry, employed a quantitative research design. This approach was selected for its ability to collect and analyze numerical data, allowing for a systematic examination of key variables such as motivation, exposure to Romantic poetry, cultural knowledge, and the effectiveness of teaching methods. A survey-based method was utilized to gather data from a sample of 400 university students, ensuring that the results were representative of the broader population of Chinese English majors. This research design provided an empirical foundation for testing the study's hypotheses and establishing relationships between the variables.

A stratified purposive sampling technique was used to select participants, focusing on students who had completed coursework in 19th-century Romantic poetry. The population was divided into subgroups based on year of study and gender, ensuring that the sample was diverse and representative. GPower software was used to calculate the minimum required sample size, ensuring adequate statistical power for detecting relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Ultimately, 400 participants were selected to enhance the robustness and generalizability of the findings. This sampling process ensured that the data collected would be reliable and applicable to the broader population of English majors.

Data collection was conducted online through multiple channels, including university networks and social media platforms like WeChat and QQ. Participants were provided with a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, and informed consent was obtained electronically. The survey included a five-point Likert scale questionnaire, which measured variables such as motivation, interest, exposure, cultural knowledge, and teaching methods. The online approach allowed for broad geographical coverage and convenience for participants, resulting in a high response rate. After data collection, a thorough data cleaning process was undertaken to address any missing data and outliers, ensuring the quality of the dataset.

Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis to examine the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was also employed to explore the moderating role of critical thinking skills. The reliability and validity of the research instruments were confirmed through pilot testing and reliability analysis, with Cronbach's alpha values indicating strong internal consistency across all constructs. Ethical assurances, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity, were upheld throughout the research process, ensuring the integrity of the study and the protection of participants' rights.

Results and Discussion

This study's main findings reveal that several key factors significantly influence the ability of Chinese university English majors to analyze 19th-century Romantic poetry. Motivation emerged as a critical determinant, with highly motivated students demonstrating greater analytical abilities. This aligns with self-determination theory, which posits that intrinsic motivation leads to deeper cognitive engagement and academic success, particularly in complex tasks like literary analysis. Interest also played a significant role, with students who

had a strong interest in Romantic poetry being more capable of engaging in sophisticated interpretations, as interest-driven learning fuels persistence and deeper understanding.

Exposure to Romantic poetry was found to be another essential factor in enhancing students' analytical skills. Students who had more extensive and varied exposure to the genre were better equipped to identify recurring themes, stylistic elements, and historical contexts, which are crucial for interpreting Romantic texts. The study emphasized that frequent engagement with diverse Romantic works helps students develop the cognitive frameworks necessary for in-depth literary analysis. Cultural knowledge also significantly impacted analytical ability, as students with a stronger understanding of the cultural and historical context of the Romantic era were better able to produce nuanced interpretations.

Teaching methods had the strongest direct effect on students' analytical abilities, with interactive and student-centered approaches, such as group discussions and critical thinking exercises, being particularly effective. These methods allowed students to engage deeply with the material, facilitating a more thorough exploration of complex literary themes. Traditional, lecture-based teaching methods, however, were found to be less conducive to fostering critical engagement with Romantic poetry, indicating that instructional strategies should prioritize active learning to enhance analytical skills.

Lastly, the study found that critical thinking skills acted as a significant moderator, amplifying the effects of motivation, interest, exposure, cultural knowledge, and teaching methods on students' analytical abilities. Students with strong critical thinking skills were better able to leverage these factors to engage deeply with Romantic poetry, leading to more sophisticated analyses. This underscores the importance of incorporating critical thinking training into literary education to maximize students' analytical potential.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the complex relationships between various educational factors—namely, motivation (MT), interest (IT), exposure to Romantic poetry (ERP), cultural knowledge (CK), Teaching Methods (TM), and critical thinking skills (CTS)—and their influence on the ability of Chinese university English majors to analyze 19th-century Romantic poetry (AA). Utilizing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the study aimed to uncover the direct effects of these variables on students' analytical abilities and to determine whether CTS acts as a significant moderator in these relationships. The findings provide critical insights into the dynamics of literature education, offering both theoretical contributions and practical implications for educators, curriculum designers, educational institutions, and policymakers.

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