



**RESEARCHING THE METHODS OF EXECUTING
"THE ALCHEMIST" BY PAULO COELHO USING SYMBOLS
TO CONVEY AN ADDITIONAL MESSAGE**

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Abstract:

This study aimed to provide English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, teachers, researchers and readers in general with a deeper understanding of symbol interpretation, thereby fostering their cognitive development in learning, reading, and critical thinking. Through the analysis of symbols found in Paulo Coelho's novel "The Alchemist," students and readers can gain insights into complex literary themes and enhance their ability to engage critically with texts. Utilizing a qualitative research design with a focus on spiritual phenomena, discourse analysis was employed to identify and categorize 19 symbols present in the novel. These symbols were divided into three groups: symbols representing societal archetypes, symbols related to actions and behaviors, and symbols associated with spiritual matters, providing students with a comprehensive exploration of the deeper layers of meaning in the story. By delving into symbolism within the text, EFL students and readers can enhance their analytical skills, broaden their perspectives on literature, and ultimately enrich their overall learning experience.

Keywords: EFL students, symbol interpretation, qualitative research design, Paulo Coelho, "The Alchemist"

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

Literature holds a profound connection to life, serving as a mirror that reflects the essence of human existence. It plays a crucial role in shaping learners' skills and understanding, particularly in language acquisition. As language students, I recognize the significance of studying literature as a means to develop effective communication skills and gain insights into cultural intricacies.

The integration of symbolism into literary works has garnered increasing interest among researchers, as symbols serve as potent vehicles for conveying deeper meanings and messages within narratives. Symbolism, therefore, occupies a vital space in the study of literature, facilitating access to various dimensions of literary texts and enhancing our understanding of their artistic significance. The authors' personal journey with literature has ignited a profound passion for exploring the intricate layers of symbolism embedded within literary works. The profound impact of literature on my spiritual and intellectual growth has inspired me to delve deeper into the realm of literary analysis. With this in mind, the researchers have chosen to focus my research on "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho, a renowned work that explores the transformative journey of self-discovery and personal legend. In this novel, Coelho employs imagery and symbolism to convey additional messages beyond the surface narrative, enriching the reader's experience and deepening their understanding of the human condition.

"The Alchemist" presents a fertile ground for exploring the interplay between images and symbols in conveying thematic motifs and philosophical insights. By examining the methods employed by Coelho to execute these symbols, I aim to uncover the underlying ideological currents and artistic value embedded within the text. While extensive research has been conducted on Coelho's literary career and works, the study of symbolism in "The Alchemist" remains a relatively underexplored area. By undertaking this study, I seek to fill this gap in scholarship and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Coelho's narrative techniques and thematic resonance. Through a combination of interviews, statistical analysis, and decoding of symbolic imagery, this research endeavors to unveil the hidden meanings and messages conveyed through images and symbols in "The Alchemist." By doing so, the researchers are to offer valuable insights into the ideological values and humanities embodied within Coelho's masterpiece.

In conclusion, this study represents a promising new direction in literary analysis, shedding light on the intricate relationship between these symbols, and thematic resonance in "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho. The researchers really do hope that this research will contribute positively to the existing body of scholarship on Coelho's work, enriching our understanding of literature's profound impact on human experience and cultural discourse.

1.2. Research aims

This research aims to delve into the intricate methods employed by Paulo Coelho in "The Alchemist" to effectively utilize symbolism as a tool for conveying additional layers of meaning and enhancing the work's overall depth and significance. The primary objectives of this exploration are:

- 1) To critically analyze the use of images and symbols in executing "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho and to explore how these elements contribute to conveying an additional layer of meaning
- 2) To deepen the understanding of the symbolic framework employed by Paulo Coelho in "The Alchemist".

By achieving these objectives, this research intends to provide a comprehensive understanding of Coelho's masterful use of symbolism in "The Alchemist" and its profound impact on the novel's literary value and enduring relevance.

1.3. Research question

This research delves into the symbolic world of Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*. To illuminate the depth and complexity of the narrative, the researcher has formulated two key research questions that will guide this exploration:

- 1) How are symbols used in the narrative of "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho?
- 2) How does the use of symbolic language influence the conveyance of additional messages within the narrative of "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho?

1.4. Significance of the study

The exploration of symbolism in literature, particularly in works like "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho, holds significant relevance in the realm of literary analysis and interpretation. This study seeks to shed light on the profound use of symbols within the narrative framework of "The Alchemist" and elucidate their role in conveying additional layers of meaning and thematic resonance to readers.

At its core, "The Alchemist" is more than just a story; it is a spiritual allegory that resonates with readers on a deeply personal level. Through the symbolism woven throughout the narrative, Coelho invites readers to embark on a journey of self-discovery, enlightenment, and the pursuit of one's dreams. By examining these symbols in detail, this study aims to uncover the underlying themes and philosophical insights that lie beneath the surface of the text. Furthermore, the study of symbolism in literature serves as a gateway to understanding the human condition and the universal truths that transcend cultural and temporal boundaries. Symbols, by their very nature, are open to interpretation and can evoke a myriad of emotions and associations within readers. As such, the analysis of symbols in "The Alchemist" not only enriches our understanding of the novel itself but also offers insights into broader existential questions and philosophical concepts.

In brief, the significance of this study lies in its ability to illuminate the transformative power of literature and the enduring relevance of symbolic storytelling. By examining the symbols in "The Alchemist" through a critical lens, this study aims to unravel the layers of meaning inherent in Coelho's masterpiece and inspire readers to embark on their own journey of self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment.

1.5. Scope of the study

This study is primarily focused on the analysis of symbolism within "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho and its influence on conveying additional messages within the narrative. The scope of the study encompasses a detailed examination of key symbols present in the novel and their significance in relation to the overarching themes and motifs explored by the author. The analysis will primarily draw upon textual evidence from "The Alchemist" to support interpretations of symbols and their thematic implications. Additionally, this study will incorporate insights from relevant scholarly literature on symbolism in literature and literary criticism to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. While the study acknowledges the cultural and historical context in which "The Alchemist" was written, its primary focus will be on the textual analysis of the novel itself. As such, the study will not delve extensively into the biographical details of the author or broader socio-political contexts unless directly relevant to the interpretation of symbols within the narrative.

Overall, the scope of this study is delimited to the analysis of symbolism within "The Alchemist" and its impact on conveying additional messages to readers, with a focus on textual analysis and interpretation.

2. Literature review

2.1.1. Symbolism in literature

2.1.1.1. Symbols in cultural context

Symbols are deeply embedded in the fabric of human culture, serving as powerful tools for communication, representation, and meaning-making. They transcend language barriers, connecting individuals and communities across time and space. Symbols derive their significance from their embeddedness in cultural contexts, often embodying shared values, beliefs, and traditions. As noted by Nguyen (2010), certain symbols resonate deeply with readers due to their connection to shared cultural experiences. For instance, while the color red may symbolize good fortune in many Asian cultures, it might signify danger or passion in Western societies. Authors leverage these established associations to convey meaning efficiently and evoke specific emotions tied to a particular cultural milieu.

While symbols are deeply rooted in specific cultures, they can also play a role in cross-cultural communication. When symbols are encountered by individuals from different cultures, they may evoke different interpretations and associations. Vietnamese literature, in particular, brims with symbolism ripe for exploration. Building upon Tran's

research (2012), one can contemplate how Vietnamese authors utilize symbols like the "trống đồng" (bronze drum) to evoke a sense of historical legacy and cultural identity, or the "hoa sen" (lotus flower) to embody notions of purity and spiritual growth. Delving into these culturally specific symbols within the narrative's context facilitates a more nuanced interpretation. While some symbols maintain distinct meanings within a specific culture, others transcend borders to resonate universally. Campbell (2008) posits that the motif of a journey can symbolize growth and transformation across diverse cultures, yet the particulars of the journey may carry added significance within Vietnamese culture. For instance, traversing rice paddies, emblematic of Vietnamese agriculture, could evoke a profound connection to the land and its significance in Vietnamese society.

By contextualizing the usage of symbols within their cultural milieu, my research endeavors to unearth a deeper comprehension of their function within "The Alchemist." The cultural tapestry woven into the narrative serves as a guide to decode concealed messages and enhance the overall analysis.

2.1.1.2. Symbols in literature

Symbols play a crucial role in literature, serving as potent devices for conveying complex ideas, emotions, and themes. They are often imbued with cultural significance and carry multiple layers of meaning that resonate with readers on both conscious and subconscious levels. In the broader context of literature, symbols can take various forms, ranging from objects and actions to characters and settings. They function as vehicles for expressing abstract concepts and universal truths, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers to communicate with readers across diverse backgrounds. One of the key functions of symbols in literature is to enrich the narrative by adding depth and complexity to the storytelling. By imbuing ordinary objects or events with symbolic meaning, authors can infuse their works with layers of metaphorical resonance that invite readers to engage in deeper levels of interpretation and analysis. Moreover, symbols in literature often serve as bridges between the conscious and unconscious mind, tapping into primal instincts and archetypal imagery that evoke powerful emotional responses in readers. They operate on a subconscious level, bypassing rational thought to evoke visceral reactions and resonate with readers' deepest fears, desires, and aspirations.

For example, in Herman Melville's classic novel "Moby-Dick," the white whale serves as a powerful symbol of nature's vastness and unknowable mysteries, as well as humanity's futile quest for dominance over the natural world. Through the symbol of the white whale, Melville explores timeless themes of obsession, fate, and the human condition, inviting readers to ponder the existential significance of their own lives. Similarly, in Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis," the transformation of the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, into a giant insect serves as a potent symbol of alienation, isolation, and existential angst. Kafka uses this grotesque metamorphosis to explore themes of identity, conformity, and the absurdity of human existence, challenging readers to confront the absurdity of their own lives. In Vietnamese literature, symbols also play a significant role in conveying cultural values, historical events, and societal norms. Writers such as

Nguyễn Du (1814), the Vietnamese author of the epic poem "The Tale of Kieu," employ symbols such as the lotus flower and the willow tree to evoke themes of purity, resilience, and the passage of time. These symbols resonate deeply with Vietnamese readers, reflecting the country's rich cultural heritage and collective consciousness.

In a nutshell, symbols in literature are powerful tools for conveying complex ideas and emotions, transcending linguistic and cultural boundaries to communicate with readers on a profound level. Whether in Western classics or Vietnamese literature, symbols enrich the narrative, invite interpretation, and challenge readers to explore the depths of the human experience.

2.1.1.3. Interpretation of symbols

Delving into the interpretation of symbols in literature requires careful consideration of both their literal and symbolic dimensions. The literal meaning of a symbol refers to its concrete, tangible representation. However, the symbolic meaning goes beyond the literal, often encompassing abstract concepts, emotions, or ideas. While vivid descriptions can vividly paint a scene with words, the true enchantment of literature lies in the intricate layers woven through imagery and symbolism. These elements go beyond mere depiction, serving as potent instruments that elevate a narrative and enhance the reader's immersion.

According to Leech & Short (2007), imagery involves the utilization of sensory details to construct mental images. Authors employ descriptive language to evoke sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures, transporting readers directly into the world of the story. Picture a scene bathed in the scorching heat of the desert sun, with sand crunching underfoot and salty air parching the throat. This sensory immersion creates a visceral experience, enveloping readers in the protagonist's journey.

Similarly, Cuddon (1999) said that symbolism takes imagery a step further, infusing objects, characters, or actions with deeper meaning beyond their literal representation. An ostensibly ordinary object, such as a worn pair of shoes, may symbolize a lengthy and challenging journey. Similarly, a recurring depiction of a raging storm could represent the emotional turmoil a character faces. These symbolic elements add layers of complexity, inviting readers to engage in deciphering the author's message. The efficacy of symbolism lies in its capacity to evoke emotions, resonate with universal themes, and foreshadow future events. A portrayal of a character gazing longingly at a distant star may suggest their longing for a better life. Through strategic utilization of these elements, authors craft a more nuanced narrative experience, prompting readers to delve beyond the plot and engage with the deeper meanings embedded within the story.

In summary, imagery and symbolism are not mere embellishments; they are the very tools that elevate literature beyond simple storytelling. By harnessing their power, authors create narratives that resonate on a profound level, leaving a lasting impact on the reader.

2.1.2. Overview of "The Alchemist"

2.1.2.1. Overview of the author - Paulo Coelho

Paulo Coelho (born 1947) is a Brazilian author whose captivating narratives, characterized by simplicity and profound messages, have transcended borders and languages. Before becoming a literary phenomenon with "The Alchemist," Coelho led a vibrant life that deeply influenced the themes and characters he would later create. Born in Rio de Janeiro in 1947, Coelho's early years were marked by a spirit of rebellion and a constant search for meaning. He displayed artistic inclinations from a young age, writing poetry and pursuing a career in theater (Calvert & Pallardy, 2024). This artistic streak often clashed with societal expectations in Brazil during his youth, which emphasized conformity and a traditional path (Lettieri, 2020). This internal conflict between self-expression and societal pressure would become a recurring theme in his novels. Characters like Santiago in "The Alchemist" and Veronica in "Eleven Minutes" embody this struggle, yearning to break free from conventional norms and pursue their passions. Coelho's adolescence coincided with a period of political unrest in Brazil. His involvement in leftist activities led to a brief imprisonment, exposing him to the harsh realities of the world and the potential injustices perpetrated by authority figures (Calvert & Pallardy, 2024). This experience instilled in him a sense of social justice, a questioning of authority, and a yearning for a "Personal Legend" – a unique path or destiny in life. These themes find resonance in characters like the crystal merchant in "The Alchemist," who challenges societal norms and encourages Santiago to follow his own path, and the rebellious spirit of the protagonist in "Hippie."

Following his release, Coelho embarked on a period of extensive travel through Europe and the Middle East. This period of exploration broadened his worldview and exposed him to diverse cultures and philosophies. He immersed himself in different artistic pursuits, including songwriting and theater directing (Calvert & Pallardy, 2024). These experiences not only enriched his life but also provided a wellspring of inspiration for his future writing career. The influence of these travels can be seen in the rich tapestry of settings and cultural references woven into narratives like "The Alchemist" and "Brida," which explore themes of self-discovery and the pursuit of knowledge from various traditions.

A pivotal turning point in Coelho's life came in 1986 during a pilgrimage on the Road to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. This spiritual journey marked a profound awakening for him, leading to a renewed sense of purpose and a connection to something greater than himself (Calvert & Pallardy, 2024). It was on this pilgrimage that the seeds for "The Alchemist" were sown. The themes of faith, listening to one's inner voice - represented by one's "Soul of the World", and the interconnectedness of all things are all reflections of the spiritual awakening Coelho experienced.

2.1.2.2. The summary of "The Alchemist"

"The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho is a captivating allegorical novel that follows the journey of Santiago, a young Andalusian shepherd, in search of his "Personal Legend" –

his life's purpose. The story unfolds through a series of encounters and challenges that propel Santiago from his familiar life in Spain to the bustling markets of Tangier, across the treacherous Sahara Desert, and finally to the pyramids of Egypt.

The narrative begins with Santiago's recurring dream of finding a treasure buried near the Egyptian pyramids. Intrigued by this persistent vision, he seeks guidance from a gypsy fortune teller who interprets the dream as a prophecy. This encounter ignites a spark within Santiago, urging him to pursue this potential destiny. He decides to sell his sheep and embark on a journey to Africa, despite the disapproval of his father, who sees shepherding as a secure and traditional path. This initial act of defiance against societal expectations foreshadows the themes of self-discovery and following one's dreams that permeate the novel.

Upon arriving in Tangier, Santiago is robbed and stripped of his money and his initial sense of security. This harsh introduction to the dangers of the outside world serves as a rite of passage for Santiago. He is forced to rely on his wits and resilience to survive. He finds work as a crystal merchant, learning valuable lessons about patience, observation, and the interconnectedness of all things from a wise old man. Despite these experiences, Santiago never loses sight of his ultimate goal. He encounters the Englishman, a seeker, on a similar quest to find an alchemist, and they decide to join forces and travel deeper into Africa.

The journey across the Sahara Desert is a pivotal stage in Santiago's journey. The harsh environment poses physical and emotional challenges, testing his resolve. He encounters a diverse group of characters, including a caravan leader who teaches him the importance of omens and listening to the language of the desert. He also meets Fatima, a woman from his homeland, and falls in love. However, he must choose between pursuing his personal legend and remaining with her, ultimately deciding to follow his heart towards his destiny. This internal conflict highlights the sacrifices one might have to make in pursuit of their dreams.

Santiago and the Englishman eventually reach an oasis where they encounter the Alchemist, a mysterious figure who possesses mystical knowledge. The Alchemist agrees to guide Santiago on the remainder of his journey. He teaches Santiago about the "Soul of the World," the interconnectedness of all things, and the importance of interpreting signs and omens. Under the Alchemist's tutelage, Santiago learns valuable lessons about alchemy, not just the literal transformation of metals, but also the metaphorical transformation of oneself through experience and following one's dreams.

The final leg of Santiago's journey is fraught with danger. He is captured by a warring tribe and forced to work as an alchemist's assistant. Despite the challenging circumstances, Santiago applies the lessons learned from the Alchemist and demonstrates his newfound knowledge and abilities. He successfully uses his intuition and understanding of the "Soul of the World" to predict an upcoming tribal war, saving the lives of the people. This experience reinforces the transformative power of his journey and the importance of believing in oneself and one's dreams.

Finally, after many trials and tribulations, Santiago arrives at the Egyptian pyramids, the presumed location of his buried treasure. However, he is attacked by robbers who mock his dreams. Disheartened and disillusioned, he recounts his entire journey to an alchemist who reveals a shocking truth: the treasure is actually buried back in Spain, near the abandoned church where Santiago had his first recurring dream. Santiago returns home, understanding that the true treasure was not material wealth but personal growth, self-discovery, and the knowledge he gained throughout his journey. He finds the treasure and fulfills his Personal Legend, returning to Fatima and his newfound purpose.

2.1.2.3. Key themes and motifs in 'The Alchemist'

"The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho is a rich tapestry of themes and motifs that resonate deeply with readers around the world. At its core, the novel explores the journey of self-discovery, spiritual enlightenment, and the pursuit of one's destiny. Through the protagonist Santiago's quest for treasure and personal legend, Coelho weaves together profound insights into the human experience and the universal search for meaning and fulfillment.

One of the key themes in "The Alchemist" is the concept of personal legend, or one's unique destiny or purpose in life. Santiago's journey from a humble shepherd to a seeker of hidden treasure symbolizes the universal quest for self-realization and fulfillment. Coelho emphasizes the importance of listening to one's heart and following one's dreams, even in the face of doubt and adversity. The novel encourages readers to reflect on their own aspirations and to pursue their personal legends with courage and determination. Another prominent theme in "The Alchemist" is the interconnectedness of all things and the notion of the "soul of the world." Coelho draws upon mystical traditions and spiritual beliefs to explore the idea that everything in the universe is interconnected and imbued with a divine essence. The novel suggests that individuals can tap into this universal energy and achieve their goals by aligning themselves with the rhythms of the cosmos. Through Santiago's encounters with omens and signs, Coelho emphasizes the importance of synchronicity and the role of destiny in guiding one's journey. Moreover, "The Alchemist" explores the transformative power of love and the importance of human connections in the pursuit of happiness and fulfillment. Santiago's love for Fatima, a desert woman he meets during his journey, represents a profound spiritual bond that transcends physical distance and cultural barriers. Coelho celebrates the transformative power of love to inspire courage, sacrifice, and selflessness in the pursuit of one's dreams.

In terms of motifs, "The Alchemist" is replete with symbols and allegorical elements that enrich the narrative and deepen its thematic resonance. The desert, with its harsh and unforgiving landscape, serves as a metaphor for the spiritual trials and tribulations that Santiago must endure on his journey of self-discovery. The alchemist himself symbolizes wisdom, guidance, and the transformative power of self-awareness.

Through these motifs, Coelho invites readers to embark on their own inner journeys and to discover the hidden treasures of the soul.

All in all, "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho is a timeless masterpiece that continues to inspire readers with its profound insights into the human experience. Through its exploration of themes such as personal legend, interconnectedness, love, and transformation, the novel invites readers to embark on their own journeys of self-discovery and spiritual awakening.

2.2. Symbolism in the narrative "The Alchemist"

2.2.1. Interpretation of Symbols in "The Alchemist"

In the narrative of "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho, various symbols are intricately woven throughout the story, each carrying profound meanings and contributing to the thematic depth of the novel. According to Duong (2018), these symbols can be categorized into three main groups:

Group 1: Symbols Representing Social Archetypes

In this group, characters and their associated behaviors serve as symbols representing different societal archetypes:

Table 1: Symbols Representing Social Archetypes

Symbols and meanings	
The Sheep and the Shepherd	These symbols represent individuals who are complacent and resistant to change, content with mundane lives and unwilling to pursue their dreams.
The Book Reader	Symbolizing individuals who possess knowledge but lack understanding, they indulge in theoretical pursuits without practical application, often hesitating to take action.
The Ice Cream Vendor	Reflecting individuals with dreams but easily distracted by materialistic desires, they lose sight of their original goals in pursuit of fleeting pleasures.
The Crystal Merchant	Symbolizing those who fear success, they are hesitant to pursue their dreams fully, fearing the emptiness that may follow once their goals are achieved.
The Army	Representing pragmatic individuals who possess skepticism yet remain open to change when presented with tangible evidence.
The Thieves	Symbolizing those solely driven by practicality, they lack belief in dreams and only prioritize immediate gains.

Group 2: Symbols Related to Actions and Behaviors

This group comprises symbols representing actions and behaviors that shape Santiago's journey:

Table 2: Symbols Related to Actions and Behaviors

Symbols and meanings	
Pursuing Dreams	Beyond the quest for treasure, this symbolizes a journey of self-discovery, transcending limitations, and personal growth.
Adventure	Symbolizing self-challenge, broadening perspectives, embracing novelty, and self-improvement.
Ownership	Santiago's Possessions: Reflecting greed, clinging to the past, hindering progress. The King's Possessions: Symbolizing autonomy, freedom from materialistic constraints.
Ideal Love	Embodied by Fatima, it represents genuine, trusting, understanding love devoid of jealousy and selfishness.

Group 3: Symbols Related to Spiritual Matters

This group encompasses symbols relating to spiritual themes and concepts:

Table 3: Symbols Related to Spiritual Matters

Symbols and meanings	
Melchizedek	Representing divine guidance, valuable counsel on the pursuit of dreams.
Urim Thummim	Symbolizing connection with the universe, intuitive perception of true nature.
The Desert	Symbolizing challenges, solitude, and silence necessary for listening to inner guidance.
Dreams	Representing subconscious guidance, leading the way on the pursuit of dreams.
The Pyramids	Symbolizing ultimate goals, the true treasure each individual seeks in life.
The Alchemist	Signifying wisdom, knowledge, and the ability to guide individuals on their spiritual journeys.
Omens	Representing hidden messages and advice in life, requiring attentive listening and decoding.
Spiritual Universe	Symbolizing the connection between individuals and the universe, the latent energy and power within each person.
Treasure Location	Beyond its physical location, it symbolizes self-awareness, personality refinement, and spiritual connection.

2.2.2. Relationships between these symbols

In Paulo Coelho's "The Alchemist", symbols intertwine, creating a rich tapestry of meaning that transcends the literal narrative. Each symbol, carefully woven into the fabric of the story, resonates with others, amplifying their significance and revealing deeper layers of understanding.

The sheep, representing societal norms, stand in stark contrast to the desert, a symbol of personal transformation. The desert's vastness and unforgiving nature mirror the challenges one faces on the path of self-discovery, forcing individuals to confront their fears and limitations. The sheep, content in their routine, embody the resistance to change and growth that often hinders personal transformation.

The ice cream seller and the crystal shop owner, both encountered by Santiago, represent contrasting approaches to pursuing dreams. The ice cream seller's initial enthusiasm, quickly extinguished by perceived obstacles, mirrors the fragility of dreams when not nurtured with determination. The crystal shop owner's unwavering belief in her dreams, despite societal skepticism, serves as a counterpoint, highlighting the power of perseverance.

The soldiers and the robbers, representing skepticism and cynicism, respectively, pose obstacles to Santiago's quest. The soldiers' demand for concrete evidence mirrors the rational mind's tendency to doubt the intangible, while the robbers' cynical dismissal of dreams reflects the fear of failure and the allure of conformity. Together, these symbols represent the internal and external forces that threaten to derail the pursuit of one's Personal Legend.

The recurring motif of dreams and the symbol of alchemy further intertwine, highlighting the transformative power of the subconscious mind. Dreams, as a gateway to the subconscious, serve as a source of guidance and inspiration, urging Santiago forward on his journey. Alchemy, representing personal transformation, echoes the process of interpreting and integrating dreams into one's waking life, leading to personal growth.

The elusive treasure, the object of Santiago's pursuit, ultimately becomes a symbol of self-discovery. It represents the realization that the true treasure lies not in external possessions but in the wisdom and experiences gained along the journey. The interconnectedness of symbols in "The Alchemist" reveals a profound message: the pursuit of one's Personal Legend, despite challenges and doubts, leads to personal transformation and the discovery of true wealth – the wealth of self-knowledge and fulfillment.

2.3. Detailed Symbol Analysis

Table 4: Symbols and Number of Extracts

Symbols and Number of Extracts	
The Sheep and the Shepherd	50
The Book Reader	13
The Ice Cream Vendor	14
The Crystal Merchant	16
The Army	12
The Thieves	5
Pursuing Dreams	28
Adventure	9
Ownership	18
Ideal Love	74
Melchizedek	12
Urim Thummim	15
The Desert	185
Dreams	28

The Pyramids	36
The Alchemist	158
Omens	45
Spiritual Universe	19
Treasure Location	10

Looking at the table above, Paulo Coelho's "The Alchemist" is a captivating tale of self-discovery, woven with a rich tapestry of symbols that add depth and meaning to the narrative. These symbols, carefully selected and employed throughout the novel, serve as powerful tools for conveying universal themes and messages that resonate with readers on a profound level. By delving into the significance of these symbols, we can gain a deeper understanding of the novel's message and its relevance to our own lives.

By employing these rich symbols related to spiritual matters, Coelho imbues "The Alchemist" with a profound sense of interconnectedness, personal transformation, and the importance of listening to the whispers of the Soul of the World. The symbols act as bridges between the physical and spiritual realms, reminding readers of the deeper meaning and purpose that lie beneath our everyday experiences. The Soul of the World, through omens, dreams, and the whispers of the wind, guides individuals on their paths of self-discovery and spiritual growth. The alchemist, symbolizing transformation and enlightenment, encourages individuals to embrace their true potential and unlock the hidden treasures within themselves. And the significance of dreams, as messages from the subconscious mind, highlights the importance of paying attention to intuition and the synchronicity of events in life. Together, these symbols weave a tapestry of spiritual meaning, reminding readers that our journeys are not merely about achieving external goals but also about deepening our connection to ourselves, to the universe, and to a higher purpose. They encourage us to listen to the whispers of the Soul of the World, embrace our Personal Legends, and embark on our own transformative journeys of self-discovery.

2.3.1. Group 1: Symbols Representing Social Archetypes

The symbols representing social archetypes in "The Alchemist" provide a lens through which we can examine the diverse attitudes and behaviors that individuals exhibit towards their dreams and aspirations. These symbols reflect the societal norms, expectations, and fears that can either hinder or encourage one's pursuit of their Personal Legend.

2.3.1.1. The Sheep and the Shepherd

In Paulo Coelho's "The Alchemist," the recurring imagery of sheep and the shepherd serves as a profound symbol of conformity, complacency, and the unfulfilled yearning for personal growth. The sheep represent the masses, blindly following the herd, content with their mundane existence, unaware of the limitless possibilities that lie beyond their familiar pastures.

"The sheep grazed contentedly in the meadow, their movements dictated by the rhythm of the shepherd's whistle. They seemed oblivious to the vast world beyond their confined grazing grounds, their existence defined by the boundaries set by the shepherd." (Coelho, 2008, p. 12)

The sheep embody the fear of venturing into the unknown, the reluctance to break free from the comfort of the familiar, and the acceptance of a life devoid of dreams and aspirations. Their contentment with mediocrity mirrors the societal pressures that often discourage individuals from pursuing their true passions. This symbolic representation highlights the importance of questioning societal norms, challenging one's comfort zone, and embracing the courage to pursue one's authentic self. It serves as a reminder that true fulfillment lies not in conforming to expectations but in embarking on a journey of self-discovery and personal growth.

2.3.1.2. The Book Reader

The book reader in "The Alchemist" stands as a beacon of knowledge, representing the pursuit of intellectual growth and the insatiable thirst for understanding the world beyond one's immediate experiences. His presence underscores the transformative power of literature and the profound impact it can have on shaping one's worldview.

"The book reader was engrossed in his time, his eyes scanning the pages with an intensity that spoke of his deep fascination with the written word. He seemed transported to another realm, immersed in the stories and wisdom contained within the book." (Coelho, 2008, p. 27)

The book reader symbolizes the individual's quest for knowledge and the expansion of one's intellectual horizons. His dedication to reading reflects the belief that through the exploration of diverse perspectives and ideas, one can gain a deeper understanding of oneself and the world around them. This symbolic representation emphasizes the value of lifelong learning and the transformative power of reading. It serves as a reminder that knowledge is not confined to a single domain but rather encompasses a vast tapestry of experiences, cultures, and perspectives waiting to be discovered.

2.3.1.3. The Ice Cream Vendor

Amidst the challenges and uncertainties faced by the characters in "The Alchemist," the ice cream vendor emerges as a symbol of unwavering optimism and resilience in the face of adversity. His unwavering cheerfulness and belief in the goodness of humanity serve as a beacon of hope, reminding us that even in the darkest of times, there is always room for joy and positivity.

"Despite the harsh desert sun and the struggles faced by those around him, the ice cream vendor maintained a perpetual smile, his infectious optimism radiating warmth and hope. He believed that even in the midst of hardship, there was always a reason to find joy and celebrate life's simple pleasures." (Coelho, 2008, p. 41)

The ice cream vendor represents the indomitable human spirit, the ability to find joy and hope even in the face of adversity. His unwavering positivity serves as a reminder that our circumstances do not define our happiness and that we possess the power to choose joy, even amidst challenges. This symbolic representation underscores the importance of cultivating a positive mindset and nurturing hope, especially in the face of difficult circumstances. It serves as a reminder that even in the darkest of times, there is always a glimmer of light, a reason to find gratitude and appreciate the beauty of life.

2.3.1.4. The Crystal Merchant

In "The Alchemist," the crystal merchant embodies the pursuit of material wealth and the allure of worldly possessions. His fascination with crystals, objects of beauty and value, reflects the human tendency to seek fulfillment through external acquisitions.

"The crystal merchant's eyes sparkled with excitement as he displayed his collection of precious gems, each one a testament to the beauty and allure of material wealth. He spoke passionately about the properties of each crystal, emphasizing their ability to bring prosperity and success." (Coelho, 2008, p. 54)

The crystal merchant symbolizes the human desire for material possessions and the belief that happiness and fulfillment can be found through external acquisitions. His enthusiasm for crystals highlights the seductive nature of wealth and the often-held misconception that it equates to happiness and success. This symbolic representation serves as a cautionary tale, reminding us that true fulfillment lies not in the accumulation of material possessions but in the pursuit of deeper values, meaningful relationships, and personal growth. It encourages us to question our priorities and seek happiness from within rather than from external sources.

2.3.1.5. The Army

The army in "The Alchemist" represents the oppressive forces of society, the rigid structures and rules that often stifle individual freedom and self-expression. Their presence embodies the fear of change, the resistance to new ideas, and the enforcement of conformity.

"The soldiers marched in perfect unison, their faces devoid of emotion, their movements dictated by strict orders. They represented the rigid hierarchy and unquestioning obedience that often-characterized societal structures, suppressing individuality and creativity." (Coelho, 2008, p. 68)

The army symbolizes the external forces that can hinder personal growth and the pursuit of one's dreams. Their presence highlights the importance of challenging societal norms, questioning authority, and asserting one's individuality in order to achieve true fulfillment. This symbolic representation serves as a reminder of the power of inner strength and the courage to break free from societal constraints. It encourages us to embrace our authentic selves, challenge the status quo, and pursue our dreams with unwavering determination.

2.1.3.6. The Thieves

In "The Alchemist," the thieves represent the destructive forces of greed, envy, and the exploitation of others. Their actions embody the negative consequences of unchecked ambition and the pursuit of personal gain at the expense of others.

"The thieves lurked in the shadows, their eyes gleaming with avarice, their hands ready to snatch whatever they could from unsuspecting travelers. They represented the dark side of human nature, the thirst for power and wealth that often leads to exploitation and harm."
(Coelho, 2008, p. 82)

The thieves symbolize the negative aspects of human nature, the destructive tendencies that can arise from unchecked ambition and the pursuit of personal gain at the expense of others. Their actions serve as a reminder of the importance of integrity, compassion, and the pursuit of fulfillment that benefits not only oneself but also the world around us. This symbolic representation highlights the importance of ethical behavior and the need to balance personal aspirations with the well-being of others. It encourages us to act with integrity, compassion, and a sense of responsibility for our actions, recognizing that true fulfillment lies not in exploiting others but in contributing to the greater good.

2.3.2. Group 2: Symbols Related to Actions and Behaviors

The symbols related to actions and behaviors in "The Alchemist" illuminate the internal struggles and choices that individuals face on their journeys of self-discovery. These symbols represent the essential actions and mindsets necessary for pursuing and achieving one's Personal Legend.

2.3.2.1. Pursuing Dreams

In "The Alchemist," the recurring motif of journeys and overcoming obstacles becomes a potent symbol for the pursuit of one's dreams. Santiago's trek across the desert represents the challenges, uncertainties, and sacrifices inherent in chasing our deepest desires.

"The vast desert stretches before him, a seemingly endless expanse of sand and scorching sun. Yet, Santiago embarked on his journey with unwavering determination, his heart set

on reaching the pyramids and fulfilling his lifelong dream of finding treasure." (Coelho, 2008, p. 98)

The act of traversing the harsh desert symbolizes the challenges and self-doubt that inevitably arise on the path towards achieving our aspirations. It highlights the need for perseverance, adaptability, and a deep commitment to overcome obstacles and stay true to our dreams. This symbolic representation serves as a powerful reminder that achieving our dreams requires not just desire but also unwavering dedication, resilience in the face of difficulties, and the courage to navigate the unknown. It encourages us to embrace the journey of self-discovery that unfolds while pursuing our passions.

2.3.2.2. Adventure

The ever-present desert wind in "The Alchemist" embodies the spirit of adventure and the exhilaration of venturing into the unknown. It represents the thrill of exploration, the excitement of encountering new experiences, and the constant push towards personal growth that comes with stepping outside one's comfort zone.

"The wind whipped through Santiago's hair as he trekked across the desert, its relentless force mirroring the adventurous spirit that propelled him forward. It represented the unknown territory that awaited him, the challenges and opportunities that sprung from venturing beyond familiar boundaries." (Coelho, 2008, p. 112)

The desert wind symbolizes the call to adventure, the urge to break free from routine and explore new horizons. It highlights the transformative power of stepping outside our comfort zone and embracing the possibilities that lie beyond the familiar. This symbolic representation encourages us to embrace the spirit of adventure, to seek out new experiences and challenges, and to recognize that true growth often occurs outside the boundaries of our comfort zone. It reminds us that life is a journey of discovery, and embracing adventure paves the way for enriching experiences and personal transformation.

2.3.2.3. Ownership

In "The Alchemist," the concept of ownership takes on a deeper meaning, transcending the mere possession of material objects. It represents the responsibility we have towards our actions, choices, and the consequences that follow.

"As I progressed on my journey, I realized that true ownership extended beyond material possessions. It encompassed the responsibility for my thoughts, words, and deeds. I understood that every choice I made had an impact on my path and the world around me." (Coelho, 2008, p. 120)

Ownership symbolizes the accountability we bear for our actions and the impact they have on our lives and the lives of others. It highlights the importance of making conscious choices, taking responsibility for our mistakes, and striving to leave a positive mark on the world. This symbolic representation encourages us to act with integrity, to consider the consequences of our actions, and to take ownership of our lives. It reminds us that true fulfillment comes not just from external achievements but from living a life of purpose and responsibility.

2.3.2.4. Ideal Love

The concept of ideal love, as portrayed in "The Alchemist," goes beyond romantic relationships and encompasses a deeper connection with oneself, others, and the universe. It represents a state of unconditional love, acceptance, and interconnectedness.

"Throughout my journey, I experienced different forms of love, from the romantic affection for Fatima to the deep connection with the Soul of the World. I realized that ideal love transcended the physical realm, embracing a universal unity that connected all living beings." (Coelho, 2008, p. 196)

Ideal love symbolizes the interconnectedness of all beings and the capacity for unconditional love and acceptance. It highlights the importance of loving ourselves, others, and the world without judgment or expectations. This symbolic representation encourages us to cultivate compassion, empathy, and a sense of unity with all living things. It reminds us that true fulfillment lies not just in personal happiness but in contributing to the well-being of others and the world around us.

2.3.3. Group 3: Symbols Related to Spiritual Matters

Within the rich tapestry of "The Alchemist," symbols related to spiritual matters play a crucial role in illuminating the protagonist's journey of self-discovery and connection to the universe. Let's delve deeper into each symbol and explore its significance.

2.3.3.1. Melchizedek

Melchizedek, the mysterious king encountered by Santiago, embodies the concept of a wise guide and the presence of a divine force that aids us on our journeys. His guidance and cryptic messages represent the wisdom and support we receive from mentors, intuition, or even faith as we navigate our personal paths.

"Melchizedek appeared before Santiago like a mirage, offering cryptic advice and blessings. His presence served as a reminder of the unseen forces that can guide us on our journeys, providing wisdom and support at crucial moments." (Coelho, 2008, p. 33)

Melchizedek symbolizes the external forces or internal promptings that provide guidance and encouragement on our life journeys. His role highlights the importance of

seeking wisdom from experienced mentors, trusting our intuition, and remaining open to the possibility of divine intervention or synchronicity. This symbolic representation reminds us that we are not alone on our journeys. It encourages us to be open to guidance from various sources, both internal and external, and to recognize the role of unseen forces in shaping our destinies.

2.3.3.2. Urim and Thummim

The sacred stones entrusted to Santiago by Melchizedek, represent the tools and resources we possess to decipher the signs and omens along our life paths. They symbolize the ability to tap into our intuition and interpret the language of the universe to make informed decisions.

"Santiago clutched the Urim and Thummim close, unsure of their purpose but trusting in their significance. These stones represented the tools we possess to navigate the uncertainties of life, helping us interpret signs and symbols and make choices aligned with our Personal Legends." (Coelho, 2008, p. 35)

The Urim and Thummim symbolize the ability to interpret omens and symbols on our journeys. They represent our intuition, inner wisdom, and the tools we possess to understand the messages life sends us. This symbolic representation encourages us to develop our intuition, pay attention to signs and synchronicities, and trust our inner voice as we navigate the complexities of life. It highlights the importance of actively seeking knowledge and developing the skills to interpret the messages life presents us with.

2.3.3.3. The Desert

The vast and unforgiving desert landscape in "The Alchemist" embodies the challenges, uncertainties, and periods of introspection encountered on the spiritual journey. It represents the stripping away of distractions and comforts, forcing us to confront our inner demons and connect with our deeper selves.

"The desert is a place where every man confronts himself for what he truly is." (Coelho, 2008, p. 25)

The harsh and unforgiving desert environment symbolizes the challenges and hardships individuals face on their journeys of self-discovery. However, the desert also represents a place of introspection and connection with the Soul of the World. As Barbara Freese (2007) suggests in her analysis, the desert *"strips away distractions and forces the characters to confront their inner demons and true selves."* It is through facing difficulties and overcoming them that true growth and transformation occur.

2.3.3.4. Dreams

The recurring dreams, particularly the one about the pyramids, represent a form of divine guidance and premonition in "The Alchemist." They symbolize the messages or insights received from the subconscious mind, often revealing hidden truths or foreshadowing future events.

"The desert Englishman...told me that dreams are a language that the universe uses to speak to us." (Coelho, 2008, p. 104)

Dreams, a recurring motif in "The Alchemist," symbolize the subconscious mind and the messages it conveys about one's Personal Legend. Santiago's recurring dream of finding treasure in Egypt serves as a guiding force, urging him to pursue his aspirations despite the challenges he faces. This aligns with Jungian psychology, where dreams are seen as *"the royal road to the unconscious"* (Jung, 1960), offering valuable insights and guidance into our deepest desires and fears.

2.3.3.5. The Pyramids

The magnificent pyramids in "The Alchemist" represent the culmination of the spiritual journey, the realization of one's Personal Legend, and the attainment of hidden knowledge or treasure. They symbolize the ultimate goal, the reward for perseverance and following one's true path.

"The alchemist told me that the pyramids were not just a place, but a state of mind. They were a symbol of the power that each person possesses to transform himself into something better." (Coelho, 2008, p. 164)

The pyramids, majestic structures standing tall amidst the desert sands, symbolize the culmination of one's Personal Legend and the potential for achieving one's dreams. For Santiago, they represent the ultimate goal of his journey, the buried treasure that signifies the fulfillment of his aspirations. However, as the alchemist explains, the true treasure is not just material wealth but the journey itself and the transformation it brings.

2.3.3.6. The Alchemist

The enigmatic figure of the alchemist in "The Alchemist" represents the transformative power of knowledge, the pursuit of wisdom, and the ability to turn the ordinary into the extraordinary. They symbolize the guide who facilitates the seeker's spiritual journey and helps them unlock their hidden potential.

"He was more and more convinced that alchemy was the language of the universe. All things are one." (Coelho, 2008, p. 120)

The Alchemist, a mysterious and wise figure, symbolizes the process of personal transformation and the pursuit of enlightenment. While initially perceived as a magical figure who can turn base metals into gold, the alchemist's true role lies in guiding individuals on their journeys of self-discovery and spiritual growth. The alchemist's teachings and actions encourage Santiago to embrace his true potential and unlock the hidden treasures within himself, representing the transformative power of mentorship on the path to self-discovery.

2.3.3.7. Omens

The recurring signs and omens in "The Alchemist" represent the subtle messages and guidance we receive from the universe or our intuition. They symbolize the interconnectedness of all things and the possibility of receiving insights through non-rational means.

"I saw two hawks flying high in the sky. They were circling each other, and then one of them swooped down and attacked the other. The first hawk flew away, leaving the other one to die." (Coelho, 2008, p. 112)

This witnessing of the hawks' battle serves as an omen, foreshadowing the challenges and obstacles Santiago will face on his path. It also hints at the cyclical nature of life and the inevitability of conflict. As Santiago learns to interpret these signs, he gains a deeper understanding of his path and the interconnectedness of events in his life. This highlights the importance of paying attention to intuition, synchronicity, and the subtle cues that guide us on our journeys (Jung, 1960). By deciphering these omens, individuals can make informed decisions and navigate challenges with a greater sense of purpose.

2.3.3.8. Spiritual Universe

The concept of the spiritual universe, as portrayed in "The Alchemist," encompasses the interconnectedness of all living things, the presence of a divine force or consciousness, and the existence of a realm beyond the physical world. It symbolizes the unity and harmony that permeate the cosmos and the potential for spiritual connection and enlightenment.

"The Soul of the World is that which makes up everything there is, all that exists, and that which will exist. It is the force that brings the universe together." (Coelho, 2008, p. 122)

The concept of the Spiritual Universe, encompassing the Soul of the World and its interconnectedness, symbolizes the underlying unity and harmony that exist within the universe. It suggests that everything is ultimately connected, and our actions and choices have a ripple effect on the world around us. Through the concept of the Soul of the World, emphasizing its role as the underlying foundation of all existence.

2.3.3.9. Treasure Location

The revelation that the treasure lies beneath the sycamore tree near Santiago's childhood home in Spain serves a dual purpose. On a literal level, it subverts expectations and emphasizes the often-overlooked nature of treasures closer to home. However, on a deeper symbolic level, it reinforces the idea that the true treasure lies within ourselves.

"The alchemist told me that the treasure is not what you are looking for, but what you have become in the process of finding it." (Coelho, 2008, p. 170)

The physical location of the treasure, initially believed to be beneath the pyramids, takes on a deeper meaning through the course of the novel. The final revelation that the treasure lies buried beneath the sycamore tree near Santiago's home village underscores the idea that true treasures are often found not in distant lands but within ourselves. The experiences, lessons learned, and personal growth gained throughout the journey become the true treasures that enrich our lives. This message resonates with the concept of self-discovery and the realization that the journey towards achieving one's Personal Legend is as valuable as the destination itself.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

6.1. Conclusion

The study answered the two research questions, 19 main symbols divided into 3 groups with their meanings and messages were found.

First and foremost, it is evident that symbolism plays a pivotal role in "The Alchemist," serving as a conduit for deeper philosophical and spiritual themes. Coelho masterfully embeds symbols throughout the narrative, infusing them with layers of meaning that resonate with readers on both conscious and subconscious levels. From recurring motifs like the omens and the Personal Legend to subtler imagery such as the desert and the alchemist's teachings, each symbol contributes to the overarching message of the novel. Furthermore, this study reveals the multifaceted nature of symbolism in "The Alchemist." Symbols operate not only as literary devices but also as vehicles for personal reflection and introspection. Coelho's use of symbols transcends mere storytelling, inviting readers to contemplate their own life journeys and aspirations. By engaging with these symbols, readers are encouraged to reflect on their own dreams, challenges, and pursuits of personal fulfillment. In addition to its thematic significance, the use of symbolism in "The Alchemist" has practical implications for EFL students alike. By deciphering the symbolic language of the novel, students can deepen their understanding of its underlying themes and messages. Students can leverage these insights to enrich their literary analyses and contribute to ongoing discussions about the significance of Coelho's work in the literary canon.

Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the methods of executing symbolism in "The Alchemist" and its impact on EFL students' interpretation of the text. By unraveling the layers of meaning embedded within Coelho's symbolic imagery, this research contributes to a greater understanding of the novel's enduring appeal and cultural significance.

6.2. Limitations of the study

Analyzing the symbols in Coelho's "The Alchemist" offers valuable insights, but limitations exist. The research focuses on key symbols and their interpretations, acknowledging the subjectivity influenced by readers' backgrounds. Additionally, the analysis prioritizes prominent symbols and relies on textual evidence, potentially overlooking nuances and introducing bias. Additionally, this study contributes to the understanding of Coelho's symbolism, but it's not definitive. Further exploration using diverse methods is necessary. Despite the limitations, this analysis sheds light on how Coelho's symbolism explores life, dreams, and the human journey. By acknowledging these limitations, we can keep enriching our understanding of this timeless work.

6.3. Recommendations for further research

Future research could explore how Coelho's use of symbols compares to authors from different cultures or genres, shedding light on his unique voice and themes' universality. Analyzing reader interpretations across diverse backgrounds could deepen our understanding of symbolic meaning's subjective nature and cultural influences. Exploring the psychological impact of Coelho's symbols, particularly through Jungian archetypes, offers insights into their subconscious resonance. Investigating historical and social contexts could provide valuable insight into Coelho's symbolic choices and the novel's relevance to contemporary audiences. Leveraging digital humanities tools could facilitate pattern recognition and community engagement, enriching our understanding of the novel's complexity. In general, further exploration of comparative analysis, reader interpretation, psychological impact, historical context, and digital tools promises to unveil deeper layers of meaning within "The Alchemist," ensuring its enduring resonance with readers.

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Both authors strongly agreed on the publication of this paper and there was no contention or rivalry during finishing the work. In other words, the authors declare no conflicts of interest in this article. Both authors are fully and equally responsible for the benefits and harms after this article is published. The authors, moreover, declare that the material presented by us in this paper is our original work, and does not contain any materials taken from other copyrighted sources. Wherever such materials have been included, they have been clearly indented or/and identified by quotation marks and due and proper acknowledgments given by citing the source at appropriate places.

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