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# METHODS OF USING MYTHOLOGICAL TEXTS IN TEACHING TO DEVELOP ECO-CONSCIOUSNESS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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**Abstract** One of the global issues troubling the world today is the ecological crisis. In recent years, the destructive processes occurring in nature have been the result of exploitative attitudes toward the environment. Saving nature has become one of the essential duties for everyone. One of the fundamental principles underlying the attitude toward nature is the issue of upbringing. In general, a person's perception of nature begins to form at an early age. From this period onward, the formation of environmental consciousness and ecological culture becomes a crucial matter. Solving this problem is primarily related to the process of education and upbringing. In this regard, from an early age, students must understand the importance of protecting nature during the process of learning about it. One of the most effective ways to instill this in young learners is by using mythological texts in Azerbaijani language lessons. This is because, in primitive societies, humans did not separate themselves from nature - they perceived it as equal in status. Therefore, mythological texts vividly reflect feelings of trust, reverence, and respect toward nature.

**Keywords**: Mythological texts; Eco-consciousness, Education process; Azerbaijani language; Teaching in primary school.

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## Introduction
Today, there are many approaches to preventing the ongoing ecological crisis in the world. Various scientific fields are working toward solving this issue, and one of these fields is pedagogy. It should be noted that the development of environmental consciousness in individuals must begin at an early age and proceed in the right direction. The most optimal way to realize this process is through the educational environment. This is

because, during a student's school years, the work of education and upbringing is mainly carried out by teachers. In this regard, one of the important tasks facing today's education system is the integration of eco-consciousness into the teaching and upbringing of young schoolchildren. One effective method for achieving this is by teaching mythological texts to young learners (Sintonen, 2020). Mythological texts emerged during a time when humans were in close harmony with nature. In this period - often referred to as the "childhood of humanity" - people perceived elements of nature as living beings equal to themselves (Adow et al., 2024). Therefore, the use of these texts in the teaching process has become one of the most relevant issues in contemporary pedagogy, as it helps foster a sense of kinship between young learners and the natural world.

In this scientific study, for the first time, the importance of including mythological texts in the teaching materials for young schoolchildren as a means of developing eco-consciousness is emphasized, and a systematic approach to this integration is proposed. The main objective of the research is related to the issue of incorporating ecological thinking - as a component of the pedagogical process - into the educational curriculum. In order to implement this process effectively, we have developed a system for using mythological texts in teaching, aimed at helping young students comprehend and internalize the concept of nature.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Regarding the role of the pedagogical process in the formation of eco-consciousness, it should be noted that in today's world, ecological problems are becoming increasingly prominent. Climate change, environmental pollution, and the depletion of natural resources require a reassessment of educational approaches. One of the key tasks is the development of ecological thinking in the younger generation. In this process, the school system plays a central role. For ecological responsibility to become an integral part of a person's worldview, this way of thinking must be cultivated from an early age.

Ecologists and educators, who recognize the necessity of fostering environmental initiative in children from a young age, have begun to view ecological experiences as a necessary part of the curriculum — with the hope of instilling a desire for active personal involvement (Ikonen et al., 2025). In this context, environmental protection should not be perceived by students merely as an intellectual abstraction. To establish a healthy relationship between humans and nature, ecological experiences must serve the purpose of encouraging students to personally care for the environment and act as stewards of its long-term sustainability (Choudhury & Choudhury, 2023).

However, simply directing students toward nature should not always be interpreted as fostering a genuine, environmentally responsible attitude (Mandal, 2022; Sharma & Biswas, 2024). At the same time, encouraging students to spend their free time in nature helps them distance themselves from harmful habits — including excessive time spent playing games on mobile phones. By exploring the role that nature-focused activities can play in shaping students' outlook, we can not only support their intellectual development but also foster moral and ethical awareness of the natural world (Matthew & Farrelly, 2019).

To support the development of eco-consciousness during the educational process, it is essential for the education system to integrate ecological issues into traditional subjects and engage students in project-based learning. For example, participation in eco-campaigns, tree planting, creating eco-projects, and discussing contemporary environmental issues (such as climate change or ocean pollution) not only teach students about ecology in schools but also help foster a sense of personal ecological responsibility.

Schools should not merely provide knowledge about ecology; they must also cultivate a system of values and encourage active efforts to protect nature. Therefore, courses on ecology, sustainable development, and environmental protection in education, the integration of ecological issues into traditional subjects, analysis of ecosystems in biology, studying pollution problems in mathematics, examining environmental issues in literary works, and similar school activities all play a crucial role in shaping students' environmental culture.

Warnick and Bonnett (2007) suggest that our experiences in nature do not merely awaken us to the beauty of the natural world, but also have the potential to inspire us and teach us something about ourselves: "*Encounters with nature do not simply awaken us to its beauty, they can also inspire us and deepen our understanding of ourselves*" (Warnick & Bonnett, 2007, p. 261).

Other educational philosophers also support this idea, emphasizing that such personal, engaging, and dynamic relationships with nature are essential for achieving educational goals (Bonnett, 2004; Kravets et al., 2024). Kudryavtsev et al. (2012), referring to the theories of "place attachment" and "sense of place," conclude that in order to cultivate students' care and responsibility for the environment, there is a need to

develop a "sense of place" grounded in both education and personal experience: "*A sense of place developed through personal experience and education provides a foundation for shaping environmental behaviors and values among youth*" (Kudryavtsev et al., 2012, p. 233).

However, to foster such a sense of place, students must truly possess the ability to "be" in a place. Many researchers argue that in order for individual learners to have immersive experiences, they must undergo "lived body" experiences: "*When students have immersive experiences and aim to present themselves in relation to nature and their role within it, they need to engage with pedagogies of the 'lived body' and reflective thinking in the classroom*" (Matthew & Farrelly, 2019, p. 19).

Stables, a supporter of pluralism in environmental education, cautions against tying environmental learning to specific theoretical frameworks: "*To conduct environmental education without ethical and ontological frameworks would be foolish*" (Stables, 2020, p. 890). Stables approaches the issue of eco-consciousness in education through the dichotomy of humanism and posthumanism, arguing that humanist ontology does not necessarily lead to the exploitation of non-human nature, just as posthumanism does not automatically ensure respect for nature. "*While emphasizing human responsibility as stewards of nature can provide a framework for a sustainable lifestyle, the posthumanist focus on human-machine communities may render nature either magical or insignificant*" (Stables, 2020, p. 891).

Although transferring ecological thinking into the education system is among today's most pressing priorities, numerous challenges hinder this process. For instance, insufficient instructional time allocated to environmental topics, the lack of adequately trained teachers in the field of ecology, the acquisition of theoretical knowledge without real-world application, and the absence of comprehensive programs and teaching materials aimed at developing ecological awareness collectively pose significant obstacles to progress in this area. These issues demand systematic solutions at the state level and greater emphasis on ecological literacy within schools.

To ensure the effective development of ecological thinking, it is essential to integrate environmental topics across all subjects, develop specialized educational programs, train teachers accordingly, incorporate environmental literacy courses into the education system, and encourage students to participate in project- and research-based activities related to ecology.

Speaking about the purpose of using mythological texts in literature classes, one should mention that he founders of the philosophy shaped by the deep ecology movement argue that in order for environmental education to be successful, students must establish a connection with nature. Some claim that immersive experiences in nature are sufficient to foster such bonds. However, this may not always be adequate, and other methods may be required to motivate toward environmental stewardship (Farrelly, 2019, p. 117).

From a psychological perspective, it can be argued that if mythological texts are capable of developing the human-environment imagination in students, they may serve to create conditions that prompt students to take action in defense of the environment. It is almost universally acknowledged that we stand at a turning point in our ecological history. We are the "inheritors of a post-industrial world that has fundamentally altered both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems across nearly every continent" (Habibova, 2023, p. 174). The ongoing negative impacts of these industrial moments on our natural resources, habitats, and communities are undeniable. On a global scale, we recognize the necessity of protecting the purity of our soil, water, and air from the abuses associated with fossil fuel consumption and the chemical practices of industry and agriculture. For this reason, environmental education is more vital now than ever before (Farrelly, 2019, p. 118). One of the core principles in fostering ecological thinking among students lies in the pedagogical application of mythological texts in literature classes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The concept of eco-consciousness in mythological thinking is of particular importance. Myth represents a partial study of the primary psychology of primitive society — its instinctive and conscious views of nature and society. As defined by the French anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, primitive thinking corresponds to the "childhood of humanity." According to Lévy-Bruhl, the diffuseness of logical elements, the indivisibility of primitive thought, and its inseparability from the emotional and affective-motor sphere formed the basis of mythological logic. As a result, myths emerged with a naive anthropomorphization of nature and an extensive metaphorical comparison of cultural (social) objects (Lévy-Bruhl, 1930, p. 9).

In other words, people in primitive societies, with their animistic and totemistic worldviews, did not distinguish strictly between the real and the unreal. This led to a belief that all existing things were alive. In the course of human development, the era of primitive society represents a period in which humanity perceived itself to be of the same origin and status as nature. Similarly, childhood is a stage in human life during which nature is perceived with the same cognitive structure as in primitive thinking. People of the early ages with animistic beliefs believed that spiritual beings governed their lives and influenced them both in this world and the afterlife. All of this contributed to a view of nature as a living entity.

Myth is not merely an expression of magical thinking. Every nation's mythology reflects its history, ethnoculture, belief systems, climate, and geography — all of which are expressed in its mythological worldview. In this context, myths are generally classified into three types: myths about the creation of the world, the formation of society, and the origin of time. In creation myths, the geography and climate of a people are clearly represented.

For instance, in Slavic mythology, the model of the world is imagined as follows: "*The earth stands on water, the water rests on a stone, the stone lies on four whales, the whales swim in a fiery river, the river flows from a pine tree, and this pine tree was the first to be created. At its roots lies the power of the god*" (Slavic Mythology, 1995, p. 262).

In the Altai creation myth, it is said that in the beginning there was only water. There was no earth, sky, moon, or sun - only the god Kara-Khan and a human. Both flew over the water in the form of ducks. The human began to agitate the waters and splash them at the god, considering himself superior. He attempted to fly higher but instead fell into the water and began to drown. Begging for help, he said, "My God, save me." The god rescued him and commanded him to retrieve earth from the depths. The first human did so, and with the god's order, the earth was created (Uraz, 1967, p. 24).

The Finns' view of creation is reflected in the epic *Kalevala*: "*The Daughter of the Air descends to the sea. She becomes pregnant by the wind. She helps a duck find a place to lay its egg. She raises her knee out of the water, and the duck builds a nest on it. Eventually, her knee grows tired, and the eggs fall into the sea. From the parts of the broken eggs, the earth, sky, sun, moon, and clouds are formed. From the steps of the Water Mother, valleys, straits, hills, shores, and glaciers are formed — and finally, from the Water Mother, the first human, Väinämöinen, is born*" (Kalevala, 1977, p. 35).

According to *The Prose Edda*, Scandinavian beliefs hold that before anything existed, the universe was a void resembling an abyss. In the north of this void emerged Niflheim -  the land of mists and darkness. At the center of Niflheim, there was a body of water called Hvergelmir, from which twelve icy rivers flowed. On the southern side of the abyss lay Muspelheim, where fiery rivers streamed, releasing toxic vapors. These vapors eventually condensed and were covered by ice coming from the north. At the same time, warm winds from the south blew in, melting the ice into water droplets. From these droplets, the first living being, the humanoid Ymir, was born. Ymir became the ancestor of all giants. From his sweat, a man and a woman were formed. As the ice continued to melt, the giants' nurse Adumla appeared - a divine cow who licked the ice, thus bringing forth Buri. Buri gave rise to Bor, who in turn fathered three gods: Odin, Ve, and Vili. These gods fought and killed the giants. Ymir's blood flooded the abyss, sparing only the giant Bergelmir and his wife. Bor's sons then pulled Ymir's corpse from the waters and used his body to create Midgard, the world of humans: the earth was made from his flesh, the sea from his blood, the mountains from his bones, and the sky from his skull. Sparks from Muspelheim became the sun, moon, and stars (*The Prose Edda*, 1970, p. 34).

An analysis of such mythological texts reveals that each nation's cosmogonic myths reflect elements of climate, geography, fauna, and flora specific to their environment. This makes it possible for young learners to perceive nature in a way that aligns with their childlike imagination, thereby facilitating a closer understanding of their homeland's geographical conditions, climate, and natural world.

Similarly, in myths about the formation of society, one observes a unity between nature and humanity. In particular, ethnogenetic myths often depict humans linking their ancestry to an element of nature. Naturally, such associations reflect the environmental features - flora and fauna - of the culture's geographic setting. The first ancestral human is often portrayed as being assisted or guided by natural elements. In pantheistic belief systems, this is especially pronounced. The idea that humans and nature share a common origin shapes the belief that gods exist in human form. Many Sumerian and Hittite deities were depicted with beards. Likewise, in Turkic mythology, gods such as Erlik Khan and Ulgen Khan, along with their families, were imagined in human form. These gods took part in the creation of humans and taught them how to use natural resources. Divine beings - considered ancestral figures like the goddess Mangdashira in Turkic mythology - descended from the heavens to complete cultural acts of creation, teaching people how to make fire, hunt, and cook, before returning to the sky (Uraz, 1967, p. 19).

Propp also linked the miraculous birth of ancestral heroes to the involvement of sacred elements. He systematically analyzed the mysteries of such births, noting: "*The miraculously born child plays the role of a mythic hero. He brings fire or the first seed to humans, establishes the first totemic tradition and the structure of the first society. These myths bear a sacred character*" (Propp, 1976, p. 205). Propp classified these miraculous births into categories such as conception by a seed, conception through a magical word, drinking water, or being born from fire (Propp, 1976, p. 207).

For instance, in a legend recorded by Sebetçioğlu, it is said that when Oghuz Khan returned from battle, the wife of a fallen soldier gave birth to a boy inside the hollow of a tree. Oghuz Khan named him Kipchak, meaning "tree hollow," and the Kipchaks are said to descend from him. In one of the pre-Islamic versions of the *Oghuz Khagan Epic* also recorded by the same author, it is told: "The great ruler sees a very dense forest near a river. He cuts down the trees and lies on one of them to cross to the opposite bank. Oghuz Khagan rejoices and, laughing, says:

"*Ay, ay sen munda beg bolunq,
Kıpçak degen sen beg bolung*" (Sepetcioğlu, 1986, p. 52).

The translation of the text is as follows:

"Oh, oh, you be a nobleman here, Be the nobleman called Kipchak!"

In the *Book of Dede Gorgud*, specifically in the tale *"Basat Slays the Cyclops"*, Basat introduces himself to the Cyclops with the following words: "If you ask the name of my mother - it is Gaba Agaj (Old Tree)" (Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud, 1988, p. 102). These examples clearly demonstrate that trees occupied a significant position as totems in ancient Turkic beliefs. In such cases, the tree serves the function of an ancestral totem, which in turn reflects the deeply intrinsic bond between humans and nature.

Among the elements contributing to the formation of society, there are also cosmic phenomena. For instance, Mircea Eliade, in his work *Cosmos and History*, highlights the prominent role of the sun as one of the fundamental components shaping societal structures. He extensively discusses the cosmogonic characteristics attributed to the sun in various mythological systems. Eliade writes: "*If we look at the myths of the Apinayé people, we observe that both the Sun and the Moon once lived on Earth in human form and were the leaders of two opposing clans*" (Eliade, 1987).

As a result of animistic thinking, people perceived a genealogical connection between themselves and these cosmic elements. These entities, believed to be the creators of all things, were also considered foundational to ethnogenesis - the origin of clans and ethnic groups. Conversely, in many traditions, the mythical hero or totemic ancestor was regarded as the creator not only of specific animal or plant species but even of the world itself.

The idea that humans emerged from plants or animals - or that plants and animals shared a lineage with humans - gave rise to various mythological plots. A review of mythic motifs involving animals reveals that in many regions during the primitive era, there existed the belief that animals originated from humans, rather than the other way around.

Meletinsky, in his *Poetics of Myth*, remarks on this notion of the primordial fraternal ancestor, stating: "*In the tribes of Central Australia, among the sub-Saharan African peoples (such as the Bushmen), and among the Papuans, certain animals or plants are not only the creators of their species but also of the human race. They regard the existing lineage of these animals as their own progeny. This signifies that humans do not separate themselves from nature in any respect; rather, they perceive themselves as part of the cosmogony*" (Meletinsky, 1976, p. 178).

In mythological thinking, the concept of time occupies a significant place. Numerous legends exist concerning the creation of the world, and the preservation of this cosmic order is expressed in unique ways within archaic thought. Alongside the elements responsible for the creation of the world, myths also depict guardian figures who protect this cosmic order. Just as mythological thought includes a transition from Chaos to Cosmos, it also encompasses the reverse process - returning from Cosmos to Chaos.

The motif of the world being submerged by water appears in almost all mythologies around the globe. To prevent such a catastrophe - that is, to protect the Cosmos - various rituals were performed. These beliefs are clearly reflected in rites and ceremonies. As Mircea Eliade writes in *Cosmos and History*, the purpose of rituals is to re-enact mythical events. Without such re-enactment, continuity cannot be maintained. Sacrificial ceremonies serve as a means of reviving this cosmic drama. Eliade also asserts that time is periodically extinguished, and in order to return to the origin, everything must begin anew. In this regard, the celebration of the New Year in any form symbolically represents cosmogony. Temporary death is seen

as a precondition for new creation (Eliade, 1987, p. 18). Thus, New Year rituals serve the purpose of overcoming Chaos. The ritual repetition of cosmic acts represents a symbolic return to primordial time.

Mythical creatures representing Chaos - such as the Cyclops, dragons, and others - often symbolize the otherworldly realm. These demonic beings typically seize control of culturally significant objects crucial to human life. In some myths, they swallow the sun (a vital element of cosmogony) or obstruct the flow of water.

In general, many cosmogonic elements within mythological thinking are symbolized by the people, giving rise to calendar myths. These symbolic objects often manifest through elements of nature - mountains, trees, birds, animals, lightning, the moon, the sun, and so forth - each carrying calendrical and ritual significance. These myths, associated with the New Year and seasonal changes, symbolize fertility and abundance.

In this context, certain birds also possess mythological significance. Their migration in autumn and return in spring led to beliefs in the death and rebirth of nature. In Turkic mythology, the eagle is associated with seasonal change: when the eagle flaps its wings once, the ice melts; when it flaps them twice, it signifies the arrival of spring (Uraz, 1967, p. 114).

Likewise, it is said that "*from the egg of a bird called Agbaba (White Vulture), which it lays in its old age, a bird named Itbarak hatches. The Aghbaba also came to devour the wolf that Oghuz had slain*" (Uraz, 1967, p. 114). This narrative is linked to the idea of protecting the world from Chaos and reflects the concept of eternal time. Another related myth concerns the legendary bird Kaknus.

According to the myth, Kaknus has a nest with 360 holes - representing the days of the year - from which various sounds are emitted. Birds, drawn to these sounds, approach, only to be devoured by Kaknus. This bird, with its multicolored feathers (symbolizing nature's hues), lives for a thousand years (a *qarina*). When its end is near, it builds a nest from herbs and dies there. Before death, it flaps its wings so powerfully that sparks emerge, setting the nest on fire and burning itself within. From its ashes, an egg appears from which a new chick is born (Uraz, 1967, p. 116).

The egg is symbolically connected to sacred time. The "world egg," as the primordial germ of the Cosmos, plays an important role in rituals associated with the calendar. In both Slavic traditions (e.g., Pascha, Troitsa) and among Azerbaijani Turks (e.g., Novruz), eggs are painted during New Year celebrations. The colors of these painted eggs carry sacred symbolic meanings.

## CONCLUSION

Nowadays various scientific research efforts are being conducted in developed countries to address the ongoing ecological crisis. Comprehensive action plans are being formulated and implemented in this regard. However, public awareness and education are of primary importance in resolving the ecological crisis. In particular, the education system bears significant responsibility for ensuring that individuals develop a sound ecological consciousness by regulating their relationship with nature from an early age.

In the education systems of various nations, it is advisable to structure different subjects around the concept of the human-nature connection in order to foster ecological awareness among students, instill a love for nature, and cultivate a sense of responsibility for its protection. In this context, the integration of mythological texts into literature lessons, especially for younger students, is of great importance.

Teaching mythological texts to primary school pupils during literature classes allows children to develop a deeper emotional connection with nature and encourages them to perceive unity with the natural world as a meaningful and formative experience.

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