

# Quest of a Dreamer: A Youth-Centric Analysis of Paulo Coelho's Novel *The Alchemist*

Weena Mae Granada Ampo<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bohol Island State University, Philippines

Correspondence: Weena Mae Granada Ampo, Bohol Island State University, Philippines.

Received: February 27, 2025

Accepted: May 9, 2025

Online Published: June 12, 2025

doi:10.5430/wjel.v15n7p332

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v15n7p332>

## Abstract

Santiago's quest to pursue his *Personal Legend* mirrors the real-life journey of today's youth as they deal with the realities of love, ambition, fear, and personal growth. This study employed a qualitative research design through thematic analysis of the novel, using close reading to extract textual evidences, identify codes, and generate significant themes. The analysis revealed that, like many adolescents, Santiago experiences two forms of love—an initial infatuation and a deeper, unconditional love, with the latter proving essential in supporting the pursuit of his dreams. Choosing the right partner is shown to be critical in achieving one's dreams in life. The findings also highlight Santiago's youthful vigor and determination in chasing his dream while simultaneously battling fear and uncertainty about the future and the outcome of his decision. Despite his doubts, Santiago's persistence and passion in fulfilling his *Personal Legend* led to profound personal transformation. He transformed into a man of wisdom, the true alchemist, realizing that the greatest treasure lies not in material wealth but in the growth gained through the journey. Santiago's path reflects the universal adventure of young people striving to achieve success and purpose in life. Education is the key to inspiring the values, choices, and aspirations of youth. As teachers and stand-in parents, teachers have a vital responsibility to impart students with the ability to make good choices and develop as individuals. As per UN-SDG 4 (Quality Education), teachers need to uphold reading as a means of learning and critical thinking. Quality education enables students to attain information and competence to follow their passions and make a brighter future.

**Keywords:** alchemist, dreamer, enthusiasm, fear, youth, wisdom

## 1. Introduction

The pursuit of one's dream today is more difficult than ever because technology fosters new challenges and trends that socially disrupt global peace for the youth. The digital era floods the youth with idealistic expectations as the economy shifts towards more 'practical' pursuits rather than passionate ones. Consequently, they lose sight of personal goals and become prisoners of social ideals. Coelho's *The Alchemist* is stunningly relevant and offers a valuable, timeless analysis of self-discovery within the context of Santiago's exploration for his Personal Legend. His journey depicts the modern youth odyssey of self-doubt, societal oppression, and the tremendous fear of failure while advocating for perseverance and faith in one's purpose.

The vast literature discusses how adolescence is characterized by numerous challenges, particularly in goal attainment. Smith (2019) discussed the phenomenon of social media and its distortion of identity perception, forcing the youth to pursue false aspirations instead of their true passions. But, Johnson (2020) claimed that current youth struggles stem from economic stagnation and the need to prioritize financially stable careers over passion projects. Alternatively, Garcia (2018) discussed the impact of mentors who assist adolescents in navigating through these challenges. Along with Carter et al (2021), pinpoint mental problems like the impostor syndrome and the fear of failure as important negating factors. Moreover, Thompson (2022) discussed how cultural and economic factors influence the aspirations of people, especially when traditional values clash with modern ones. All these pieces of research unfold a generation that is concentrated between the need for self-realization and external pressures, a certain tension quite centralized in the plot of *The Alchemist*.

Despite extensive analysis of the novel's philosophical themes, few studies explore its relevance to contemporary youth struggles. Little attention has been paid to how Santiago's journey reflects the real-world challenges of young dreamers dealing with uncertainty, identity crises, and societal expectations. This study aims to bridge that gap by analyzing Santiago's quest as a metaphor for modern youth's pursuit of purpose. Using thematic analysis, it will examine key themes such as love, fear, dreamer, and transformation, as well as Santiago's interactions as societal influences, to draw parallels between the novel and today's youth experiences. Hence, the research seeks to provide a youth-centered interpretation of Coelho's work, offering insights into how literature can inspire resilience and self-belief in an increasingly complex world.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Research Design

This study applied a qualitative research design through the close reading method and thematic analysis approach to examine the novel

“The Alchemist.” The analysis interprets the life’s journey given to a young man in search of purpose as a pilgrimage in the case of Santiago towards his Personal Legend. The novel, being one of the most significant ones in modern literature, deals with common themes like self-discovery, determination, and chasing dreams, and therefore, it is an interesting book to study the challenges and dreams of youth.

## 2.2 Data Collection

The primary material for this research was the novel by *Paulo Coelho “The Alchemist.”* The novel narrates the story of Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd boy who aims to walk through the Egyptian deserts on a journey to find a treasure hidden somewhere. In his journey, he meets different individuals and goes through different experiences that change his perception of life, fate, and the interconnectedness of everything. The symbolic and allegorical quality of the novel offers a rich soil for analysis. Textual evidence was defined by the close reading of sections of the novel that highlight Santiago’s development, setbacks, and self-reflections in relation to his odyssey.

## 2.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze and interpret the transformative journey of Santiago from a young shepherd to a man of wisdom. First, a close reading was conducted to critically examine the elements, events, symbols, and patterns that weave the transformation process in Santiago’s journey. Second, textual evidence was then gathered to identify meaningful codes, from which patterns were analyzed to form the significant themes relevant to Santiago’s pursuit of his Personal Legend. Lastly, these identified themes were further analyzed and interpreted. This method of thematic analysis captures the quest of an ordinary youth striving to fulfill his Personal Legend—a young man full of dreams and hope, yet initially innocent of the world’s realities. However, through his journey, even at a young age, he became victorious and mastered life’s essential elements, ultimately becoming the treasure he had sought. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to examine the themes that reflect not only Santiago’s journey but also its depiction of the real struggles of every youth in achieving their dreams in life.

## 2.4 Interpretation

The study is concerned with the way Santiago's quest depicts the dreams and dilemma of youth in determining their destiny. The novel's focus on following one's heart, interpreting omens, and accepting the mystery is appealing to the challenges youth encounter when confronted with uncertainty in a globalized world. In a critical analysis of Santiago's encounters with other characters like the Alchemist, Melchizedek, and Fatima, the study identifies the role of mentorship, love, and loyalty in pursuing one's dream.

## 2.4 About the Novel

Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* is one of the best-selling books of modern times and has been sold more than 150 million copies worldwide. Its worldwide success and theme of pursuing one's dreams and finding the purpose of life have turned it into an international sensation. The book is everybody's because it resonates with everyone of every age group, especially with young people at a turning point in life looking for direction and meaning.

By this youth-centered analysis, the research hopes to better understand how *The Alchemist* can be a source of inspiration and guidance for young dreamers. By way of a study of the themes of the novel and how these apply to the youth experience, this research contributes to the discourse on literature as a means to personal and social transformation.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### EMOTIONAL AWAKENING THROUGH LOVE

The humanistic perspective that love is a transformational and directing force in order to attain one's dreams is conveyed by the novel's phases of love. In contrast to his long-lasting love for Fatima, Santiago's young infatuation with the merchant's daughter illustrates how love transforms from a transient desire to a profound, spiritual bond.

The boy mumbled an answer that allowed him to avoid responding to her question. He was sure the girl would never understand. He went on telling stories about his travels, and her bright, Moorish eyes went wide with fear and surprise. As the time passed, the boy found himself wishing that the day would never end, that her father would stay busy and keep him waiting for three days. He recognized that he was feeling something he had never experienced before: the desire to live in one place forever. With the girl with the raven hair, his days would never be the same again.

(Coelho, *The Alchemist*. 2006, p.6)

The paragraph portrays a scenario of innocent love, highlighting a moment of deep emotional connection and Santiago’s internal conflict. Experiencing love for the first time evokes an indescribable feeling for Santiago, one that is both unfamiliar and powerful. While this emotion is common among many young people, it becomes a profound turning point for Santiago. It inspires him to embrace life more fully, finding motivation and purpose in the thought of spending each day with the woman he loves.

The transformational power of love is emphasized in many literary works. Lewis (1960) asserted that love is a power that develops character and promotes spiritual progress, going beyond simple romantic emotion. The changes in Santiago's behavior and emotions indicate that he is undergoing a moment of infatuation with the merchant's daughter. Santiago's young love for the merchant's daughter reflects young romantic idealism, a state in which love is primarily based on superficial impressions and the romanticizing of the beloved (Ferrari, 1992).

According to Talavira (2019), during the period of romantic attachment, someone frequently experiences infatuation or attraction that is more indicative of an idealized perception rather than a deep emotional connection, which can be presented as a normal part of the teenage growth (Talavira, 2019).

In the period of infatuation, young people tend to rely on their emotions rather than having deeper relational, emotional, and psychological aspects. This stage exemplifies an important transitional period where teenagers may get captivated with the outward characteristics or social expectations of a possible mate, frequently ignoring the more complex parts of commitment and intimacy when it comes to relationships (Bringle et al., 2013). Teenagers may become captivated by idealized images of a potential partner, overlooking the complexities and responsibilities that come with mature intimacy. Santiago's feelings for the merchant's daughter reflect this common phase of youthful infatuation. His emotions, while intense, are natural and typical of young individuals who are just beginning to explore romantic experiences.

According to Erikson's psychosocial development theory (1968), people passing through adolescence typically critically explore intimacy and identity. In this stage, the conflict between identity and role confusion, adolescents have to integrate multiple components of themselves, with the cultivation of meaningful relationships simultaneously. Thus, one can interpret Santiago's infatuation with the merchant's daughter as an attempt to fulfill a greater longing for persisting existential meaning, self-understanding, and social attachment. Although Santiago's initial brush with love appears fleeting, it remains a crucial developmental milestone. As Coelho (1988) claimed Santiago's initial sexual fantasies ought to be viewed within the context of a much larger life journey instead of a terminal destination. This perspective emphasizes that the combination of youthful yearning and social exploration may serve as catalysts for deep-rooted emotional phenomena and human development.

Santiago's first encounter with romantic infatuation significantly shapes his pursuit of his Personal Legend. This early encounter with love urges him to contemplate what love represents, compelling him to transcend fleeting feelings. This process, in turn, fortifies his emotional strength while increasing his self-awareness—traits that later assist him in navigating other transformative experiences along his journey. Instead of being a distraction, this developmental emotional struggle is a vital element in his overarching journey toward fulfillment and holistic development.

#### TRUE LOVE IN ONE'S SELF-DISCOVERY

True love does not happen instantly; it is nurtured and grows over time. It is a mature, reciprocal bond built on mutual respect, selflessness, and understanding. True love is not rushed, selfish, or disrespectful—instead, it supports both individuals in becoming their best selves. Finding the right person to love is essential, as the right partner not only shares in one's happiness but also encourages and strengthens the pursuit of one's dreams. Santiago and Fatima's relationship develops from a simple romantic attraction into a deeper, more meaningful form of love defined by unconditional care and selflessness. While Santiago's initial emotions may stem from youthful passion and romantic curiosity, they also represent his growing understanding of intimacy and human connection (Thapa, 2021).

At that moment, it seemed to him that time stood still, and the Soul of the World surged within him. When he looked into her dark eyes and saw that her lips were poised between a laugh and silence, he learned the most important part of the language that all the world spoke—the language that everyone on earth was capable of understanding in their heart. It was love. Something older than humanity, more ancient than the desert. Something that exerted the same force whenever two pairs of eyes met, as had theirs here at the well. She smiled, and that was certainly an omen—the omen he had been awaiting, without even knowing he was, for all his life. The omen he had sought to find with his sheep and in his books, in the crystals and in the silence of the desert.

(Coelho, *The Alchemist*. 2006, p.92)

This textual evidence from the novel reflects the moment Santiago experiences true love for Fatima—an emotion far deeper than mere infatuation. As he looks into her eyes, time seems to stop, and he feels the presence of the Soul of the World within him. This powerful sensation reveals to him a universal language—the language of love—that connects all people beyond words or logic. In this context, love is portrayed as something timeless and sacred, older than humanity itself. Santiago recognizes that the connection he feels with Fatima is not random or superficial, but a meaningful sign, an omen he has been unconsciously searching for throughout his journey—in his books, his sheep, and the silence of the desert. This realization transforms his feelings from youthful desire into a deeper, spiritual love that aligns with his Personal Legend. For Santiago, it shows that true love is not about possession but about recognizing a shared destiny and finding purpose through emotional and spiritual connection.

Through his connection with Fatima, Santiago learns that true love—agape—is not an obstacle to his goals but a force that supports and enhances his journey. Their relationship mirrors how love, when based on selflessness, can propel both individuals forward in their personal pursuits, fostering mutual growth. This aligns with the idea that love, rooted in selflessness, enriches one's path rather than being a destination in itself (Reshma & J, 2021).

According to Nussbaum (2001), genuine love is closely related to acknowledging another person's humanity and being prepared to value their uniqueness. This perspective is demonstrated by Fatima's acceptance of Santiago's mission, as she encourages him without attempting to influence or change his fate. His mature and transformational love for Fatima inspires Santiago to seek his Personal Legend. His

affections for Fatima are in line with C.S. Lewis's (1960) ideas of love based on enduring friendship and unselfish devotion. This love is not just romantic; it is entwined with his personal and spiritual journey, in contrast to his previous obsession with the merchant's daughter.

Santiago's love for Fatima becomes the major turning point in his development, more so through the eyes of the young soul who seeks love and ambition. That relationship with Fatima has taught him that love is strength and not a restraint to move on, chasing dreams to find self-realization. The tension between relationships and personal goals greatly played out in Santiago's life when he was a young man. In an utterly empowering and liberating act, Fatima encourages Santiago to follow his dream and will not ask him to sacrifice it. According to Erikson's (1968) theory of psychological development, intimacy and the need for identity must be balanced. Santiago learns that true love fosters human development and that love and ambition are not mutually exclusive. The deep emotional connection that allows Santiago to remain loyal to his goals is also demonstrated by Fatima's affection for him.

#### ENTHUSIASTIC DREAMER

Youth is a time when individuals are driven to pursue their dreams with passion and determination. During this stage of life, one should strive to fulfill their deepest desires, as youth is marked by energy, enthusiasm, and the courage to explore what truly brings happiness and meaning. However, it is also a critical phase that can determine whether a person rises to success or falls into failure. In Santiago's case, his youthful years are filled with ambition and vitality. Guided by dreams and the encouragement of his father, he sets out to follow his Personal Legend, embracing the opportunities and challenges that shape his journey of self-discovery.

"But I'd like to see the castles in the towns where they live," the boy explained. "Those people, when they see our land, say that they would like to live here forever," his father continued. "Well, I'd like to see their land, and see how they live," said his son. "The people who come here have a lot of money to spend, so they can afford to travel," his father said. "Amongst us, the only ones who travel are the shepherds." "Well, then I'll be a shepherd!" His father said no more. The next day, he gave his son a pouch that held three ancient Spanish gold coins. "I found these one day in the fields. I wanted them to be a part of your inheritance. But use them to buy your flock. Take to the fields, and someday you'll learn that our countryside is the best, and our women are the most beautiful."

(Coelho, *The Alchemist*. 2006, p.9)

This passage from the novel highlights the moment when Santiago first expresses his desire to explore the world beyond his hometown, marking the beginning of his journey toward self-discovery. Santiago tells his father that he wants to see the castles and experience how other people live, showing his curiosity and longing for adventure. His father's responses reflect a more grounded, practical perspective, pointing out that only wealthy people can afford to travel and that in their community, only shepherds get to move from place to place. Rather than dismissing his son's dreams, Santiago's father accepts his desire and supports it in the only way he knows by giving him three ancient gold coins he had been saving as part of Santiago's inheritance. This gesture is both practical and symbolic as it provides Santiago with the means to start his journey and shows his father's quiet approval. It also depicts that following one's Personal Legend often requires courage, support, and a willingness to break away from what is familiar in order to pursue something greater.

Santiago's choice to travel as a shepherd shows his intense yearning for independence, adventure, and self-discovery—all of which stem from his impressionable boyhood. His need to escape a routine and limited life is the source of his passion for travel. Santiago chooses to become a shepherd in contrast to his family's desire for him to become a priest, allowing him to travel and take in the world's diversity (Sarfraz, 2022). According to Suwasono et al. (2019), this choice represents a defiance of social norms along with a quest for individuality, characteristics frequently linked to the ambitions and restlessness of young people. Additionally, Santiago's defiance of conventional paths highlights the difficulties of pursuing one's aspirations. In a culture that frequently values conformity over individual goals, his youthful spirit is a perfect example of the restlessness that frequently accompanies the pursuit of meaning. In his journey, he embodies the belief that following one's heart is where true fulfillment lies—the ideal many can relate to through life constrained by society.

The fact that Santiago decides to make a trip alone at this very young age indicates innate curiosity and the desire to learn from experience. In Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory, people try to define themselves and discover their autonomy in their adolescence and the first few years of adulthood. Since Santiago uses travel to discover his interests, strengths, and purpose, travel enthusiasm befits this age in his development. It awakens his interest and expands his perception by exposing him to different locations and cultures, helping him understand better the world and his role in it. Alexander et al & Chiappa (2010; 2020) agree that a transformative setting could create opportunities for self-growth and discovery and changes in values and attitudes in the positive direction (Pung & Chiappa, 2020).

Santiago's journey also underlines the importance of embracing the unknown and going out of one's comfort zone. According to Coelho (1988), this decision marks the beginning of Santiago's quest to realize his Personal Legend. In choosing a path that offers more experiences rather than immediate wealth, Santiago develops fortitude, flexibility, and awe—three elements essential to personal growth. This mirrors the reality many young people face leaving their hometowns or familiar surroundings in search of fortune, purpose, and success. Like Santiago, they often encounter uncertainty, hardship, and self-discovery along the way. Yet, through these challenges, they gain valuable life lessons and evolve into more resilient, self-aware individuals.

#### FEAR TO FAIL

As a beginner in life's struggles, youth often face fear when making crucial decisions. In pursuit of their goals, young dreamers frequently

hesitate because the future is uncertain—no one can truly know whether their choices will lead to success, failure, or pain. Even Santiago, despite his burning enthusiasm to pursue his Personal Legend, begins to question his destiny, wondering if his decisions will truly bring fulfillment. The prolonged season of waiting has filled him not with hope but doubt, replacing his initial optimism with the weight of fear.

People are afraid to pursue their most important dreams, because they feel that they don't deserve them, or that they'll be unable to achieve them. We, their hearts, become fearful just thinking of loved ones who go away forever, or of moments that could have been good but weren't, or of treasures that might have been found but were forever hidden in the sands. Because, when these things happen, we suffer terribly." "My heart is afraid that it will have to suffer," the boy told the alchemist one night as they looked up at the moonless sky. "Tell your heart that the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself. And that no heart has ever suffered when it goes in search of its dreams, because every second of the search is a second's encounter with God and with eternity."

(Coelho, *The Alchemist*. 2006, p.130)

This passage from the novel explores the deep-seated fears that prevent people from chasing their dreams, as well as the wisdom needed to overcome those fears. It begins by acknowledging a universal human struggle: many avoid pursuing their true desires because they doubt their worthiness or fear failure. The heart, symbolizing one's deepest emotions and intuition, grows anxious when imagining loss, whether it's the pain of separation, missed opportunities, or unclaimed treasures. This fear of suffering often paralyzes people, making them reluctant to take risks. Santiago confesses this vulnerability to the alchemist, admitting his heart's terror of future pain. In response, the alchemist offers a profound truth: the anticipation of suffering is more crippling than the suffering itself. He reassures Santiago that the pursuit of one's dreams is sacred every moment spent striving is a moment touched by divinity and timelessness. The alchemist's words are clear: illusion is fear, and the path to one's destiny, however arduous, is always purposeful and attuned to a deeper spiritual principle. The ultimate tragedy is not the struggles that you encounter on this journey, but rather losing the willingness to begin because fear has taken over.

All the people whom Santiago encountered during his journey, as though provoking as they were, had a hand in shaping him. Through Melchizedek, he learned about the importance of pursuing his dreams; from Fatima, he learned what true unconditional love is; and from the crystal merchant, the effects of fear and hesitation. Santiago's journey demonstrates the intricacy of adolescence, with worries and hopes intertwined, all looking to find the elusive 'dream'. The fantasy of treasure serves as a powerful metaphor for the collective search for self and direction every young person undertakes. Throughout the story, Santiago is portrayed as a character of many traits. While he is driven forward by ambition and curiosity, he is held back by worry and self-doubt. This overarching conflict reflects the harsh reality for so many people in their formative years.

As per Erikson's theory, young people are at the identity exploration stage, attempting to comprehend their self-concept and objectives in life. The age group that Santiago represents is dealing with the conflict of identity versus role confusion. It looks like they are struggling to find their true selves and figure out their aspirations in life, which makes them indecisive, at least in some sense. This is a time when one makes a reflection about one's choices and how to integrate the conflict between following one's dreams and the fear of making wrong decisions. During this struggle to balance the need for stability and belonging with the thrill of adventure and self-discovery, young people engage in risky behavior and develop fears. The characters' struggles and the tragic conclusion offer a glimpse of how suffocating societal norms can be towards individuals (Orabi et al., 2025). More often than not, they experience anxiety and doubt their abilities and the possible outcomes. The inexperience of Santiago amplifies this fear. He fears he will never get to fulfill his dream: finding treasure that represents possessions, satisfaction, and purpose in life. The other thing Santiago is afraid to lose is things he loves, mainly his love for Fatima. This is a case of the emotional risks associated with following one's ambitions; young people are often torn between their attachments to others and their ambitions. Where loss is a possibility, there can be much reluctance.

His fears of failing, losing Fatima, and returning empty-handed are based on the fact that in Santiago's journey, he is still learning to trust himself and his judgment. During this stage of development, one is still developing the sense of being able to trust one's judgment and choices. The journey by Santiago not only yields the discovery of the treasure but also teaches him to trust his abilities and his chosen path. His fears and doubts reflect his internal conflict about balancing his goals with life's uncertainty.

Young people experience a wide range of emotions, including dread, because the stakes are higher and experiences are novel. Santiago worries about whether he will succeed, which is a frequent dread among young people entering adulthood when there is a lot of pressure to fulfill goals and establish oneself. The conflict between the need for stability and belonging and the desire for adventure is common among young people. Santiago's need for stability and his yearning for adventure clash in his interpersonal connections and life decisions. According to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, young people frequently dither between being safe and themselves. Santiago's anxiety of leaving behind safety (the life he knows) in favor of uncertainty (his personal legend) is a reflection of this youthful internal conflict.

Fear has this strong power to paralyze, but in Santiago's case, it also serves as a motivation. Young people have the resilience and energy to follow their aspirations in spite of their anxieties, as Coelho (1988) demonstrates. Despite his initial reluctance, Santiago's willingness to confront his fears head-on is evidence of the unbounded optimism and resolve that frequently characterize adolescence. This aligns with Seligman's (1991) theory of taught optimism, which postulates that young people can use anxiety as a springboard for their personal development because of their innate resilience and ability to bounce back from setbacks.

#### TRANSFORMED INTO A MAN OF WISDOM

Every young person grows through hardship. By enduring struggles and rising above them, one develops strength, character, and a deeper understanding of life. These challenges shape a person's abilities and unlock their true potential. For Santiago, the trials he faced on his journey to fulfill his Personal Legend played a crucial role in his transformation. Each obstacle he overcame helped him grow into a man of wisdom and purpose. Like the process of alchemy—where raw elements must be purified by fire to become gold—Santiago's growth required facing difficulties that refined and strengthened him. Through this process, he emerged wiser, much like an alchemist who understands that true transformation takes time, patience, and resilience.

He sat looking at the sky for a long time. Then he took from his knapsack a bottle of wine and drank some. He remembered the night in the desert when he had sat with the alchemist, as they looked at the stars and drank wine together. He thought of the many roads he had travelled, and of the strange way God had chosen to show him his treasure. If he hadn't believed in the significance of recurrent dreams, he would not have met the Gypsy woman, the king, the thief, or... "Well, it's a long list. But the path was written in the omens, and there was no way I could go wrong," he said to himself.

(Coelho, *The Alchemist*. 2006, epilogue)

This paragraph captures a reflective moment for Santiago after completing his journey. As he looks at the sky and drinks wine, he recalls a meaningful night in the desert with the alchemist, symbolizing a key point in his growth and learning. He begins to think about his long and unexpected path, filled with various people and events that shaped his journey. Santiago realizes that his belief in the meaning of his recurring dream set everything in motion. Without that belief, he would not have encountered the Gypsy woman, the king, the thief, or the many experiences that led him to his treasure. Despite the challenges, he acknowledges that omens and divine signs guided the journey. This reflection shows Santiago's deep sense of gratitude and faith, emphasizing the novel's theme that when one truly follows their Personal Legend, the universe conspires to help them succeed.

Looking back, Santiago begins his journey as a young shepherd driven by curiosity and the promise of a tangible reward. However, his experiences gradually shift his focus from material wealth to inner fulfillment. This transformation aligns with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, particularly the progression from satisfying basic needs, such as security and safety, to achieving self-actualization, where individuals strive to realize their fullest potential. Through his journey, Santiago discovers that the true treasure is not gold or riches, but the wisdom, love, and self-awareness he gains along the way.

Self-awareness emerges as he learns to reflect on experiences that are meaningful to his personal growth. As Dewey (1938) emphasized, reflection is essential for experiential learning, allowing individuals to derive meaning from their lived experiences. Santiago reflects on his travels across Andalusian farmlands and African deserts, and on the people who guided him, such as the alchemist, the crystal merchant, and the King of Salem. Each encounter contributes to his character development, teaching him resilience, adaptability, and the interconnectedness of all things. Santiago's contemplative rest near the end of his journey symbolizes his transformation from an idealistic youth to a wise and enlightened individual. His journey, marked by trials, revelations, and guidance from mentors, leads him to a deeper understanding of life, love, and purpose. This journey illustrates the universal process of personal growth, where youthful dreams evolve into mature insight and self-realization.

Erikson's psychosocial development theory (1968) also places Santiago's development into perspective. Adolescents have an identity formation experience that is represented by defining their selection from the beginning to end of their security zone. Santiago finds a sense of purpose and direction in completing this stage of adolescence through his dreams and in real life. This transformation proves how he has evolved from an idealistic young man to a practical, pragmatic adult. In literature, the journey of the hero's progress is that of overcoming challenges that put them to the test to develop their character. In the same way, through these challenges, Santiago can learn patience, persistence, and to listen to his heart—all of which enable him to become a sage man. Most importantly, his meeting with the alchemist is central to this transformation. As a guide, the alchemist instructs Santiago to have faith in his instincts and see all things as unity. With this advice, Santiago is in a better position to transcend his initial, naive focus on material wealth and adopt the higher spiritual truths of existence, including the interconnectedness of all things and the importance of striving to fulfill one's Personal Legend. Fromm's (1956) idea that our connections with humans are essential for personal growth, since self-realization and learning are drawn from those built connections.

As Santiago reflects at the end of his journey, he realizes that his development was just as important as the wealth he was looking for. His understanding of the importance of the journey itself and his ability to strike a balance between the spiritual and material aspects of life are clear indications of his wisdom. He, therefore, turns himself into gold, thus becoming an alchemist of himself. This transformation conforms to the idea of individuation, as defined by Jung (1953), in which a person integrates several aspects of themselves to become whole.

#### 4. Conclusion

Santiago's adventures reflect the real-life experiences of modern younger generations while they sail through their teenage years, with love, ambition, and self-discovery. His experiences of infatuation and true love depict the emotional growth adolescents go through in terms of relationships. Like many young people, Santiago realizes that love is not something to be pursued hastily, as finding the right partner is important in achieving one's dreams rather than hindering them.

In addition, Santiago personifies and captures the youthful spirit of dreaming beyond limits. Like every modern-day youth, he is consumed

by his passions, and this fuels his pursuits towards his Personal Legend. Nevertheless, his self-doubt and fearfulness at certain points also capture the battles many young achievers contend with, wondering if they are good enough, battling the anxieties of failure, and grappling with a lack of clarity about the future. However, the character of Santiago teaches every youth one great lesson, which is as difficult as it may be, confronting obstacles is inevitable, but giving up should never be an option.

As a result, Santiago's journey reflects the transformative process of growing up. Young people like him have to balance love and ambition with patience and bravery. They need to realize the reward is more than the realization of their dreams, it is who they become in the process. With struggles and doubts, followed by relentless perseverance, they transform and blossom, proving that the journey matters just as much as the destination. Santiago's life, full of memories, fears, love, struggles, and even dreams, makes him the alchemist of his own destiny. Santiago's quest begins with the heartfelt yearning as well as the carefree dreams and ambitions of youth to locate a hidden treasure. From a naive shepherd boy to a self-aware and reflective man, Santiago's journey provides the literal framework for understanding the defeats and triumphs young people face on the journey towards their dreams.

The intricate realities of youth in the novel illuminate the critical need for education in nurturing the character, actions, and dreams of youths. In this context, a teacher goes beyond being a mere instructor as one plays the role of counselor, mentor, and in some cases, a second parent who helps students in their academic and personal journeys. It is important for educators to help students make the right and informed decisions towards becoming self-reliant and responsible individuals who are able to meet challenges head-on.

According to United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), guaranteeing inclusive, equitable, and quality education—teachers should promote a culture of reading as an effective means of the development of critical thinking, compassion, and lifelong learning. At a time when technology is monopolizing the time of students, reading broadens minds and sparks imagination. Teachers, in their own right due to excellence and conscientious instruction, provide learners with the knowledge, values, and skills required not just to excel academically in school but to realize their full potential and create a better life for themselves and society.

#### **Acknowledgements**

Special thanks to Bohol Island State University for the opportunity to share this expertise with my wonderful students. They are the reason I began to appreciate the work of Choelo.

This research was made possible through the inspiration and guidance of individuals who have profoundly influenced the researcher's ideals, making her youth both meaningful and fulfilling. The researcher extends her deepest gratitude to Ms. Marjorie Lacha for dedicating her time to proofread the manuscript. She also wishes to thank Ma. Vianca Granada for introducing her to Paulo Coelho's novels, which served as a significant source of inspiration. Lastly, heartfelt appreciation goes to the Parish Youth Ministry of Cogtong, whose insights and camaraderie not only inspired this study but also provided valuable perspectives that enabled deeper analysis.

#### **Authors' contributions**

The author is the sole contributor to this manuscript.

#### **Funding**

This research is supported by Bohol Island State University.

#### **Competing interests**

The author declares no competing interests that could influence the publication of this work.

#### **Informed consent**

Obtained.

#### **Ethics approval**

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

#### **Provenance and peer review**

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

#### **Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

#### **Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

#### **Open access**

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

## References

- Alexander, Z., Bakır, A., & Wickens, E. (2010). An investigation into the impact of vacation travel on the tourist. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 12(5), 574-590. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.777>
- Bringle, R. G., Winnick, T. A., & Rydell, R. J. (2013). The prevalence and nature of unrequited love. *SAGE Open*, 3(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013492160>
- Carter, A., & Williams, B. (2021). Exploring adolescents' perspectives on social media and mental health. *BMC Public Health*, 21(96). Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7791303/>
- Coelho, P. (1988). *The alchemist* (A. R. Clarke, Trans.). Harper One.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131728609335764>
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Ferrari, G. R. F. (1992). *Platonic love*. In Cambridge University Press eBooks (p. 248). <https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol0521430186.008>
- Fromm, E. (1956). *The art of loving*. Harper & Row.
- Garcia, M. (2018). Belonging and loneliness in cyberspace: Impacts of social media on adolescents' well-being. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 70(2), 78-85. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1111/ajpy.12185>
- Johnson, E. (2020). *Are the kids alright? The early careers of education leavers since the COVID-19 pandemic*. Institute for Fiscal Studies. Retrieved from <https://ifs.org.uk>
- Jung, C. G. (1933). *Modern man in search of a soul*. Harcourt Brace. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003059479>
- Lewis, C. S. (1960). *The four loves*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-396. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2001). *Upheavals of thought: The intelligence of emotions*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511840715>
- Orabi, E., Zarkan, M., & AbuShihab, I. (2025). The role of nature in Edith Wharton's Ethan Frome: An ecocritical lens. *World Journal of English Language*, 15(3), 329. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v15n3p329>
- Pung, J. M., & Chiappa, G. D. (2020). An exploratory and qualitative study on the meaning of transformative tourism and its facilitators and inhibitors. *European Journal of Tourism Research*, 24, 2404. <https://doi.org/10.54055/ejtr.v24i.406>
- Reshma, C. B., & J, F. B. (2021). The self-actualized protagonists in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and *Eleven Minutes*. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 6(5), 312. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.65.47>
- Sarfraz, M. (2022). Stylistic analysis of Coelho's novel *The Alchemist*. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature & Translation*, 5(3), 58. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.3.7>
- Seligman, M. E. P. (1991). *Learned optimism: How to change your mind and your life*. Knopf.
- Smith, J. (2019). Social media's impact on self-perception. *UNC Undergraduate Research Journal*, 45. <https://our.unc.edu>
- Suwasono, D. W., Thoyibi, M., & Candraningrum, Phil. D. (2019). Optimistic view of life reflected in the style of Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* (1988). *Widya Wacana Jurnal Ilmiah*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.33061/j.w.wacana.v14i2.34712>
- Talavira, N. (2019). Verbalization of love in modern English poetry: Constructional approach. *Literature and Culture of Polissya*, 95(12), 142. <https://doi.org/10.31654/2520-6966-2019-12f-95-142-149>
- Thapa, P. (2021). The freedom of travelling and *The Alchemist*: Happiness is within us. *International Journal of Engineering Applied Sciences and Technology*, 6(4). <https://doi.org/10.33564/ijeast.2021.v06i04.007>
- Thompson, L. (2022). *Snapchat dysmorphia*. In Wikipedia. Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snapchat\\_dysmorphia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snapchat_dysmorphia)