



# Decoding "University War (대학전쟁)": STEM Education and Cultural Influence

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**Abstract:** "University War (대학전쟁)" presents a captivating intersection of psychological, educational, and cultural dimensions within the context of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education. The Korean television show phenomenon engages viewers worldwide, transcending cultural boundaries with its gripping narrative of intellectual competition among South Korea's elite universities. Through psychological theories such as Bandura's social learning theory and Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory, the show underscores the significance of academic excellence and the intrinsic motivation driving contestants. Moreover, "University War" promotes critical thinking and problem-solving skills essential for STEM fields, reflecting broader societal attitudes toward education and career aspirations. As educators explore ways to sustain interest in STEM among K-Pop wave culture enthusiasts through initiatives inspired by the series, University War stands as a compelling case study highlighting the transformative potential of popular media in shaping educational outcomes and societal perceptions in the digital age.

**Keywords:** STEM Meta-analysis; Cultural hegemony; Epistemological paradigm; Techno-cultural convergence; Socio-cognitive discourse

## Introduction

In an era of rapid technology breakthroughs and worldwide interconnection, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education has never been more critical. The emphasis on STEM disciplines has risen tremendously in varied educational environments around the world, spurred by the understanding of their critical role in addressing complex societal concerns and encouraging innovation. As students navigate an increasingly complicated and digitally driven world, mastery in STEM courses has become a critical component of academic preparedness and future success (National Research Council, 2014).

Despite the increased interest in STEM education, a fascinating phenomenon has emerged in Korean popular wave culture, grabbing the hearts and minds of followers worldwide. "University War (대학전쟁)," a Korean television sensation, has drawn unequalled interest among Korean Pop (K-Pop) culture followers, transcending geographical and cultural divides (Ahn, 2013; Kim, 2016; Ryoo, 2020). This creation of

intellectual fights, in which the sharpest brains from South Korea's most prestigious colleges compete in severe academic competition, has captivated spectators with its gripping narrative and dramatic intellectual showdowns (JoongAng Daily, 2024).

The program "University War" premiered on October 17, 2023, and features the top 1% of students from famous Korean institutions competing in brain-powered challenges free of politics and affiliations. The show, led by renowned writers and producers, piqued viewers' interest with its novel idea and competitive style. Each university team exhibited various qualities, with Seoul National University exhibiting great individual ability and KAIST adopting creative approaches. Despite initial reservations, the show earned favourable acclaim for its emphasis on pure intelligence and aggressive gameplay. Despite the program's international popularity and surprising success, obstacles such as rule loopholes and marketing concerns arose. Coupang Play's "University War" enthralled global viewers with its immersive narrative and high-stakes competition, revealing the intellectual power and competitive spirit of Korea's best intelligence (JoongAng Daily, 2024; Namu Wiki, n.d.).

As the world's attention shifts to the intersection of STEM education and Korean pop culture, it becomes critical to investigate the educational consequences of this cultural phenomena. Exploring the multifaceted dimensions of University War, it gains an understanding of the intersection of STEM education, psychological theories, and cultural trends, providing a compelling case study that emphasizes popular media's transformative soft power in shaping educational aspirations and societal perceptions. This discussion is crucial to uncover the nuances of University War and its enormous impact on Korean Pop wave culture enthusiasts around the world. The goal is to uncover the intricate interplay between STEM education and popular media through a thorough examination of its psychological underpinnings, educational implications, and cultural significance, paving the way for a better understanding of the changing landscape of education in the digital age.

## Methodology

An interdisciplinary qualitative study approach was used to explore the psychological and educational aspects of "University War (대학전쟁)" in STEM education. This robust technique combines group discussions and observations among educators, a thorough literature assessment, and an analysis of current trend news observations to delve deeper into the phenomenon's multifaceted nature. Structured group discussions allowed for a more nuanced consideration of topics such as academic competition, motives for STEM engagement, and the impact of popular media on educational goals. Concurrently, analysis of "University War" episodes and related content revealed common themes and cultural representations. A thorough literature analysis contextualized the findings within previous research on academic competition, media influences, and STEM education. The incorporation of current trend news observations provides real-time insights into the changing debate surrounding the "University War." Thematic data analysis will provide in-depth insights into the phenomenon's psychological roots, educational implications, and

cultural relevance, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of its impact on STEM education and social perspectives.

## Result and Discussion

The rise of University War (대학전쟁), a Korean television phenomenon that pits the brightest minds from the nation's leading colleges against each other in heated intellectual conflicts, has sparked widespread global interest. This cultural phenomenon creates an intriguing confluence where psychological theories, educational goals, and cultural trends converge, notably in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education. The following discussion explores the psychological underpinnings and educational implications of University War, attempting to provide a comprehensive assessment of this fascinating spectacle.

"University War (대학전쟁)" brings together the best brains from major universities, including Korean best Universities; Seoul National University, KAIST, Pohang University of Science and Technology, Yonsei University, and Korea University in demonstrating the force of intelligence and academic skill. This brain fight survival show features actual geniuses competing in brain-only challenges, in which players rely only on their cognitive ability to complete mind-bending tasks (JoongAng Daily, 2024). The show's goal is simple: to determine the true ranking of these prestigious universities, pushing contestants to demonstrate their intellectual power through strategic maneuvers and analytical prowess.

Beyond its entertainment appeal, University War provides a profound insight into its members' intellectual capacity and the competitive spirit that drives academic brilliance. The show's eight episodes, which premiered to widespread acclaim on November 3, 2023, immerse viewers in the world of rigorous intellectual competition. As players tackle different difficulties, solving puzzles and answering complex questions, their reputations and university pride are on the line, emphasizing the competition's high stakes (Covington, 1992; Gray & Purdy, 2018). In essence, University War is a celebration of minds and brains, competition, as well as the never-ending quest for knowledge. It is an engaging platform that emphasizes intellectual distinction, urging viewers to value the power of intelligence and the quest for brilliance.

## Psychological Perspectives

The attraction and impact of intellectual competition depicted in "University War" stem from a variety of psychological theories that offer light on human behavior and motivation. Bandura's social learning theory (1977) proposes that people learn by observing and copying others. As viewers watch "University War," they may internalize the importance of academic brilliance and the excitement of intellectual competition as they see candidates face tough tasks. The show's engaging nature allows viewers to experience the intensity and intellectual rigor demonstrated by participants, potentially affecting their own attitudes toward academic endeavors.

In addition, Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (2013) provides useful insights on the internal motivation that pushes people to undertake difficult tasks. According to this idea, people are driven by three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the context of "University War," contestants may be intrinsically motivated to participate in intellectual battles because of their desire for autonomy in pursuing academic excellence, their sense of competence in demonstrating their intellectual abilities, and their need for relatedness in competing against peers from reputable universities.

Furthermore, the cognitive dissonance hypothesis (Festinger, 1957) may give light on the psychological strain felt by viewers who sense a misalignment between their current academic endeavors and the intellectual rigor depicted in "University War." This cognitive dissonance may cause viewers to reconsider their academic aims and aspirations, potentially motivating them to pursue higher levels of academic accomplishment and intellectual engagement.

"University War" is a gripping platform that not only entertains but also engages viewers on a psychological level, encouraging them to consider their own academic reasons and goals. Exploring the interplay of psychological theories within the framework of the program provides greater insights into the attractiveness and influence of intellectual rivalry in today's culture (Maspul, 2023; Wallsten, 2024).

### **Educational Implications**

"University War" not only entertains audiences but also has important educational implications, notably in the field of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education and the development of critical thinking abilities. This section investigates how the show corresponds with educational ideas and responds to broader cultural attitudes toward STEM education.

Piaget (1972) and Vygotsky (1978) pioneered constructivist learning theories, which emphasize learners' active engagement in shaping their understanding of the world. In "University War," contestants must solve complex puzzles and apply their expertise to a variety of intellectual obstacles. These challenges demand participants to use critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical reasoning skills, which mirror constructivist learning ideas. Contestants who actively participate in intellectual wars are not passive consumers of information, but active architects of knowledge, which is consistent with the constructivist learning method.

In addition, the success of University War reflects broader social views about STEM education, as well as an increasing acknowledgment of the significance of building a trained workforce in STEM subjects. STEM education is becoming increasingly important in today's quickly changing technology landscape, as students are being prepared for future employment prospects and social challenges. University War is a platform that promotes intellectual brilliance and highlights the importance of STEM-related knowledge and abilities.

Furthermore, the show's emphasis on intellectual competitiveness and academic brilliance may motivate viewers, especially young kids, to pursue STEM education and improve their critical thinking skills. University War portrays STEM-related issues in a gripping and competitive manner, which not only entertains but also encourages audience interest and engagement in STEM subjects. University War has major educational significance since it promotes constructivist learning methods, emphasizes the value of STEM education, and encourages viewers to acquire critical thinking abilities in pursuit of academic achievement.

### **Cultural Significance**

Beyond its instructional consequences, University War is culturally significant, showing Korean entertainment's global reach (Lee, 2011). This following discussion section delves into how the show's success reflects broader cultural trends and influences public conceptions of schooling and professional goals. As Korean wave culture and entertainment, such as K-dramas and K-pop, continues to fascinate audiences around the world, University War stands out as a testament to the growing reach and influence of Korean pop culture. The show's popularity transcends geography, attracting viewers from a variety of cultural backgrounds who are drawn to its captivating storyline and intellectual challenge (Kim, 2016; Wang *et al.*, 2016).

Aside from its educational implications, University War is culturally significant, demonstrating Korean entertainment's global reach; exploring how the show's success; reflects broader cultural trends and shapes popular perceptions of education and career objectives. As Korean continues to captivate people all over the world, University War stands out as a testament to the rising reach and influence of Korean popular culture. The show's success transcends geography, attracting viewers from a wide range of cultural backgrounds who are drawn to its compelling plot and intellectual challenge (Kim, 2016; Yang, 2012).

The fusion of "University War (대학전쟁)" within the expansive realm of Korean wave (Hallyu) culture carries profound implications for learners who immerse themselves in its captivating narratives (Huang, 2009; Lee, 2011). As an integral part of the Korean wave phenomenon, which encompasses a spectrum of cultural exports spanning K-dramas, K-pop music, and entertainment, "University War" emerges as a unique conduit for championing academic excellence and intellectual competition. For learners engrossed in Korean wave culture, the show not only delivers entertainment but also serves as a compelling ode to intellectual prowess and collaborative problem-solving—values deeply ingrained within Korean society (Kim, 2013; Kim & Lee, 2024).

Through their interaction with University War and other facets of Korean wave culture, learners are exposed to diverse cultural perspectives and educational paradigms, enriching their understanding of global issues and educational methodologies (Kim *et al.*, 2024; Tran *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, the widespread popularity of Korean wave culture among global audiences enhances the accessibility of educational content like University

War, making it increasingly probable for learners from disparate backgrounds to encounter and engage with STEM-related themes. The ramifications of this engagement are manifold. Firstly, learners who delve into Korean wave culture may cultivate a heightened appreciation for academic achievement and intellectual pursuits, mirroring the ethos championed in shows like *University War*. Besides, in turn, can ignite their passion for STEM education and careers, recognizing the intrinsic value of critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative endeavor within these disciplines (Irmak *et al.*, 2024; Paek & Kim, 2024).

Moreover, exposure to Korean wave culture facilitates cross-cultural exchange and collaboration, fostering a milieu where learners from diverse corners of the globe converge to explore shared interests and aspirations. This intercultural dialogue not only enriches the educational journey but also nurtures a sense of global citizenship and cooperative spirit—essential attributes for navigating the complexities of the 21st century (Kang, 2024; Rijo Lopes da Cunha, 2024). The integration of *University War* within the mosaic of Korean wave culture offers learners an unparalleled avenue to engage with STEM-related themes in a culturally resonant and intellectually stimulating manner. By delving into the profound significance and far-reaching implications of this symbiotic relationship, educators can harness the transformative power of popular culture to inspire and empower learners to soar to new heights in STEM education and beyond (Lum & Wagner, 2019; Ranieses, 2024).

Moreover, the success of *University War* show has the ability to influence the aspirations and career paths of its viewers, particularly young people. The show, which glorifies academic excellence and emphasizes the benefits of intellectual rivalry, may drive viewers to pursue higher education and strive for academic achievement. In this approach, *University War* both entertains and changes cultural attitudes toward education and job progression. The *University War* is culturally significant because it reflects the global influence of Korean entertainment and depicts societal values and goals toward education and academic accomplishment.

### **Cultivating STEM Enthusiasm Through Korean Arts: A Pathway to Innovation**

A multidimensional approach is required to sustain and increase Korean arts fans' global engagement in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education through projects such as "*University War*." This includes infusing parts of Korean arts and culture into STEM-related content and educational activities, encouraging cross-disciplinary partnerships, and harnessing Korean entertainment's influence to raise STEM awareness.

One method is to create STEM-themed content that incorporates elements of Korean arts and culture, appealing to K-Pop wave culture enthusiasts. Educational videos or online courses, for example, could incorporate compelling graphics from K-Pop music videos or Korean drama scenes to demonstrate scientific concepts or engineering principles. Connecting STEM principles with recognized and cherished cultural references, such as

classic K-Pop choreography or dramatic storytelling, increases learners' motivation and excitement about STEM subjects.

In addition, forming connections between STEM institutions and Korean entertainment companies can help to create collaborative initiatives that bridge the arts and sciences. For example, cooperative activities may include K-Pop wave culture personalities taking part in STEM-themed events or campaigns to promote STEM education among their fans. Such collaborations, which leverage the impact and reach of K-Pop celebrities, can effectively boost awareness of STEM options and career paths among Korean art enthusiasts.

Furthermore, hosting STEM-focused events alongside Korean arts and entertainment gatherings, such as K-Pop concerts or fan conventions, can give unique chances for hands-on learning and participatory experiences. These events may include STEM-themed booths, workshops, or demonstrations that highlight the interplay of technology, creativity, and innovation in disciplines such as music creation, digital media, and entertainment technology. Such events can promote a stronger awareness for the connections between the arts and sciences by engaging Korean arts fans in STEM-related activities in familiar locations.

In addition, incorporating STEM content into Korean arts and entertainment channels, such as streaming services or fan websites, can provide an entry point for fans to go deeper into STEM themes. For example, by including STEM-related articles, videos, or quizzes alongside K-Pop news and content, users can be encouraged to explore and engage with STEM content in a familiar and accessible format. Engaging Korean arts fans in STEM education requires a comprehensive approach that capitalizes on Korean culture's attraction, develops cross-disciplinary cooperation, and employs novel techniques to integrate STEM content into existing platforms and events. Making meaningful linkages between Korean arts and STEM areas is essential for inspiring a new generation of learners to follow their interests in both creativity and innovation, resulting in more diversity and excellence in STEM.

### **Sustaining University War Among K-12 Students in K-Pop Culture Enthusiast Countries to Foster STEM Interest**

Integrating multidisciplinary approaches to sustaining University War's impact among K-12 students in K-Pop wave culture enthusiast countries and fostering STEM interest entails combining elements from various academic fields to create rich and immersive learning experiences (Boman, 2024; Kim & Kawano, 2024). One approach is to create interdisciplinary projects or challenges that combine STEM concepts and skills with those from other fields such as the arts, humanities, and social sciences. Educators, for example, can create projects that combine science, technology, engineering, and math concepts with music, dance, history, or cultural studies inspired by K-Pop culture. Students could learn about the science of sound waves and music production, engineering concepts for stage design and lighting effects, and the mathematics of rhythm and dance.

Furthermore, including elements of language arts, communication, or media studies might improve students' critical thinking, creativity, and communication abilities (Cruz *et al.*, 2024; Farris, 2024). Students could evaluate and critique K-Pop wave culture through videos or lyrics from a cultural or literary viewpoint, delving into subjects such as identity, society, and globalization. Furthermore, incorporating components from social sciences such as sociology, psychology, or economics might help students better appreciate K-Pop wave culture's cultural importance and impact on society. They could look into fan culture, personality influence, or the economics of the entertainment industry, employing analytical techniques and methodologies from these fields in conducting their studies.

Engaging K-12 students in K-Pop culture enthusiast countries with STEM education through efforts such as *University War* necessitates a deliberate approach that takes advantage of the series' unique aspects while aligning with educational goals (Goldberg, 2021). Focusing on essential parts of *University War* and incorporating them into STEM efforts allows educators to effectively attract students' attention and build a passion for STEM areas. Here are some targeted techniques to accomplish this:

- Develop STEM challenges. Inspired by the *University War* shows: Create STEM challenges and tournaments based on the framework of "*University War*" to interest K-12 students. Create scenarios in which students must use scientific principles, mathematical concepts, and engineering abilities to solve intellectual hurdles similar to those depicted in the series. For example, host a "STEM Battle Royale" in which teams of kids fight to solve hard STEM challenges, conduct experiments, or propose inventive solutions to real-world problems. Educators can inspire and motivate students to thrive in STEM disciplines by reflecting the fierce and competitive nature of "*University War*."
- Incorporate the show of *University War* themes in STEM curriculum: Incorporate themes and components from *University War* into STEM classroom materials to enhance learning relevance and engagement. Create lesson plans that combine case studies from the series, talks about strategic decision-making, and analysis of contestants' problem-solving strategies. For example, in mathematics and computer science lectures, use episodes of *University War* to investigate themes like game theory, logic problems, and algorithmic thinking. Educators can spark student interest and curiosity while reinforcing critical skills by contextualizing STEM subjects within the framework of the *University War*.
- Organize STEM competitions with a *University War* theme: To attract K-12 kids who are fans of the series, hold STEM competitions and events with a theme focus inspired by *University War*. Create challenges that require players to demonstrate critical thinking, teamwork, and innovation, similar to the intellectual conflicts featured in the series. For example, host a "STEM Showdown" in which teams compete in rapid-fire quizzes, problem-solving races, and hands-on engineering

tasks similar to University War challenges. Incorporate theatrical presentations, strategic alliances, and unexpected twists to increase interest and imitate the series' adrenaline-fueled environment.

- **Encourage Interdisciplinary Projects with University War Elements:** Encourage multidisciplinary collaboration among students by incorporating University War themes into STEM projects and programs. Collaborate with teachers from various disciplines to create integrated projects that incorporate STEM principles with elements of strategy, competition, and teamwork inspired by the series. For example, challenge students to create STEM-themed escape rooms based on scenarios from "University War," in which players must answer STEM-related riddles to continue through the game. Educators can provide students with immersive learning experiences that are relevant to their interests and goals by encouraging cross-disciplinary collaboration and innovation.
- **Utilize Digital Platforms for the University War STEM Integration:** Use digital platforms and online resources to broaden the reach and impact of "University War"-themed STEM endeavours. Create interactive websites, virtual simulations, and educational apps that allow students to feel the excitement of University War challenges online. Create online forums and social media communities where students may talk about STEM topics, share insights, and compete in virtual STEM competitions inspired by the series. Using digital technology, instructors may give students accessible and immersive chances to engage with the STEM curriculum in a way that is relevant to their interests and preferences.

In summary, sustaining University War among K-12 kids in K-Pop culture enthusiast countries to develop STEM interests necessitates a specific approach that incorporates essential parts of the series into STEM activities. Educators can catch students' imaginations and inspire them to pursue STEM subjects with enthusiasm and passion by creating University War-themed challenges, curriculum materials, competitions, projects, and digital tools.

## Conclusion

University War provides a diverse prism through which to study the relationship between psychology, education, and culture. Exploring the psychological bases of learning and motivation, as well as the pedagogical implications for STEM education, helps us obtain a better understanding of this cultural phenomena. As it grows in popularity, it serves as a compelling case study demonstrating the digital age's interconnection of media, culture, and education. Further study could explore more into numerous facets of the University War and its impact on STEM education and cultural perception. To begin, longitudinal research may look into the long-term consequences of watching University War on viewers' academic goals, job choices, and attitudes toward intellectual competition. Furthermore, comparative research across different cultural contexts could shed light on how the themes

and ideas of University War resonate with people from various backgrounds and educational institutions.

Additionally, studying the potential of University War as a tool for educational innovation and outreach could lead to intriguing future research opportunities. This could include creating and analyzing educational interventions based on the series' concepts and themes, such as interactive learning modules, outreach activities, or curriculum improvements aimed at increasing STEM interest and engagement among K-12 students. Educators and academics can investigate creative ways to STEM education that engage with modern youth culture by capitalising on the attractiveness of "University War" and its cultural importance.

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