

Improving Fifth-Grade Students' Reading Comprehension of Literary Texts by Enhancing Their Academic Emotions

Ugyen Phuntsho 

Trongsa Primary School, Trongsa, Bhutan

Abstract

Teaching and learning English in Bhutan focuses on students' cognitive outcomes with minimal attention to their emotions and self-regulated learning abilities. Using an action research methodology, this study examined how fifth-grade students' reading comprehension of literary texts can be enhanced by improving their academic emotions during reading. The study was conducted with 24 fifth-grade students at a primary school in central Bhutan. Students' academic emotions during reading were measured using a modified version of the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ). Pre-test and post-test questions for reading comprehension were administered, and eight observations were made simultaneously. The results of data analysis using t-test and descriptive statistics revealed a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre-test test (4.14; SD = 2.26) and post-test (M=6.19; SD=1.44) at $p < 0.05$, indicating an improvement in students' reading comprehension. This was further confirmed by analysing the observation notes recorded by a critical friend during the pre-test and post-test. The results showed that students' positive academic emotions enhanced students' reading comprehension abilities. Based on the findings, implications were discussed, and recommendations were proposed for English teachers and students.

Keywords

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Corresponding author:
phuntshoku@education.gov.bt

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Introduction

In schools across Bhutan, English is learnt as a foreign language. All the subjects are learnt in English, except Dzongkha, the subject of the national language (Dendup, 2020). Like in the school curriculum elsewhere, the major areas of English language competency in the Bhutanese school curriculum have four strands, namely - reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Teaching and learning English are based on the four strands starting from their pre-primary class (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2022). Reading is one of the receptive modes of language. It plays a crucial role in language acquisition and is an essential skill for successful function in curriculum delivery for students (Phuntsho & Wangdi, 2020; Nasir & Birria, 2016) to make significant progress in learning (Mutassim et al., 2021). Reading involves more than just learning how to spell words and construct sentences; it also requires the ability to interpret the text in meaningful ways. It is the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded

in language form via the medium of print (Siregar et al., 2019). Comprehension of text is, therefore, an essential skill for students to derive meaning from written materials (Herlindayana et al., 2017).

English is the dominant international language; moreover, in the twenty-first century, students' success in learning is influenced by their reading comprehension skills (Kissau & Hiller, 2013). However, reading with comprehension in the English language can be troublesome for students whose first language is not English and even more so for EFL students (Hezam et al., 2022). This lack of reading comprehension is observed among Bhutanese students, as reported by the Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment [BCSEA] (2013; 2019). However, Bhutan's Programme for International Student Assessment for Development (PISA-D) (MoE, 2019) reveals that students perform slightly better in reading and scientific literacy than in mathematical literacy, though only on tasks requiring lower cognitive skills and less effort (BCSEA, 2019). BCSEA also observed that poor reading literacy is also associated with the low performance of students in the domains of scientific and mathematical literacy due to their inability to comprehend the text properly. There are numerous factors attributed to students' low reading comprehension, such as the complexity of the reading text, learners' interest, motivation, and decoding or word recognition abilities, and ineffective teaching practices (Dennis, 2008; Oktarina & Fitriawati, 2018). Mostly, the teaching and learning process in the Bhutanese classroom is teacher-centred, with the lecture method having detrimental student learning outcomes (Rabgay, 2018; Sherab & Dorji, 2013; Wangdi, 2009). Moreover, a heavy and rigorous examination-oriented syllabus limits the instructional hour only to prescribed content and teacher-centred pedagogical approaches (Gyamtsso et al., 2017; Utha et al., 2016). This indicates that teaching and learning in the Bhutanese content focuses primarily on students' cognitive levels while ignoring their emotions in the classroom. This conventional lecture method of teaching and learning received no time devoted specifically to understanding the students' academic emotions and helping them to be self-regulated learners.

Most often, teachers fail to understand that classrooms are emotional settings (Trezise, 2017). Driven by this concern, this researcher reflects on his practices and understands them to improve the student's academic emotions during reading, as emotions can promote reading and enhance reading comprehension (Pekrun, 2022). The emerging literature reveals that a reader's positive emotion during reading improves comprehension of the reading text, and negative emotion hinders it (Bohn-Gettler & Rapp, 2011; Trevors & Kendeou, 2019; Storbeck & Clore, 2005). Other studies reveal neither positive nor negative emotional effects on students' reading comprehension (Bohn-Gettler & Rapp, 2011). The existence of such contradictory results does not necessarily confirm that emotions felt during reading are the same everywhere and have no influence on reading comprehension. Instead, it is arguable that emotions are heavily influenced by the social and cultural setting and are not a universal phenomenon ((Feldman Barret, 2017)). Such discrepant findings may not lead to the conclusion that emotions do not exert any consistent influence on comprehension; rather, they are influenced by contextual and cultural experiences (Pugh et al., 2022). Consequently, understanding the emotions within

diverse cultural settings and their influence on reading comprehension is essential. However, in Bhutan, there is a significant lack of focus on how understanding students' emotions during reading can facilitate the comprehension process.

Situational Analysis

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has caused an unprecedented impact on many aspects of everyday life, including educational services, which are most severely affected (UNESCO, 2020). This situation has offered unusual emotional experiences to both teachers and students in both affordances and constraints in teaching and learning. Like elsewhere, this challenging situation of prolonged isolation and the lockdown restrictions in Bhutan has posed a notable threat to both teachers' and students' emotional health, in addition to academic development and satisfaction. This, in effect, has caused students to lack positive and activating academic emotions in reading and comprehension of literary text (Hezam et al., 2022; Starling-Alves et al., 2023). Moreover, the suffocating restrictions due to COVID-19 health protocols have also affected teaching, learning, assessment, and time devoted to teaching reading comprehension and helping students with positive emotion regulation. Understanding these drawbacks in both practitioners and learners in the school, this study aimed to enhance students' academic emotions in reading and comprehension of literary text using teacher-student positive emotion co-regulation strategies such as socio-emotional learning (SEL) programmes and mindfulness practices such as meditation.

Research questions

- i. What academic emotions do fifth-grade students experience while reading literary texts?
- ii. How does enhancing fifth-grade students' academic emotions affect their reading comprehension of literary text?

Literature Review

Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is an important academic skill that learners develop in schools. Comprehension is one of the goals of reading (Puskorius, 2011) and "understanding what is read" (Syatriana, 2012, p.7). Sin & Siahpoosh (2020) explain that reading comprehension is a process of identifying printed symbols and interpreting the meaning behind the symbols. They defined it as the ability to communicate a text leading to an integrated process that involves identifying form and pronunciation, decoding vocabulary and sentences, employing prior knowledge relevant to the text and using cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies. To achieve comprehension in reading, the reader and text need interaction, which relies on their background knowledge of the text, summarising information, drawing conclusions, and posing questions about the text. Kirmizi (2010) confirmed that comprehension entails building accurate meaning by connecting what readers already know and reflecting on the information grasped from what they have read.

While reading comprehension skills are crucial for students' academic progress, several factors impact their comprehension, including motivation, interest, reasoning ability, strategy

use (Westwood, 2001), and emotions. These factors significantly influence reading outcomes, such as knowledge acquisition, conceptual development, and attitude change (Bohn-Gettler, 2019; Muis et al., 2015).

Academic emotion

In the context of this study, students' academic emotions are based on Pekrun's (2006; 2022) perspective on emotions associated with academic activities and learning experiences. His concept of academic emotion in reading focuses on how emotions experienced during reading, such as enjoyment, frustration, or shame, influence a student's engagement, motivation, and comprehension. He stated that these emotions are shaped by the perceived value and control over the reading task, significantly affecting reading comprehension of literary text. Academic emotions in this study are specifically that emerged directly in anticipation of, before, during, or after reading a literary text. Pekrun (2006) classifies academic emotions into four main categories: achievement emotions, epistemic emotions, topic emotions, and social emotions. This framework is applied in the present study to explore the academic emotions of fifth-grade Bhutanese students while reading literary texts.

Achievement emotions are defined as "emotions tied directly to achievement activities or achievement outcomes" (Pekrun, 2006, p. 317). Concerning reading comprehension, activity-related achievement emotions, such as frustration, may arise for new readers when they are not able to comprehend while they read (Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2022). She explains that alternatively, an early reader may experience outcome emotion in reading, such as enjoyment when they can comprehend and anxiety or shame when they are unable to comprehend the text. More experienced readers can also experience achievement emotions such as pride due to perceived success at understanding a complex text or disappointment when experiencing perceived failure to comprehend an important text.

Epistemic emotions refer to emotions that arise as a result of the cognitive experience of processing the information or as a result of the task's cognitive incongruity (Pekrun & Stephens, 2012). For instance, readers may experience epistemic emotions such as surprise, curiosity, confusion, and frustration about trouble in reading and comprehension of text and delight when they can read and comprehend the text (Bohn-Gettler, 2019). For example, a student may experience an epistemic emotion of confusion upon learning about the cause of the seasons if she previously held the belief that seasons were caused by the distance of the earth to the sun rather than the tilt of the earth (Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2022).

Topic emotions refer to emotions experienced due to the narrative content (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2014; Pekrun & Stephens, 2012). For instance, readers may experience sorrow at the death of a protagonist. Thus, topic emotions are situated within the text rather than as the function of the individual's experience processing the information. A wide range of emotions are frequently experienced in academic settings (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2014). It is expected that one would expect that these three forms of academic emotions

(achievement, epistemic, and topic) would likely emerge from the act of reading a particular text and thus are likely to affect reading comprehension.

Social emotions, in a sense, are social, such as admiration, envy, care, compassion, contempt, or empathy, as a social achievement emotion. Emotions such as love or hate for peers or teachers are non-achievement emotions (Weiner, 2007). Social emotion strongly influences the students' engagement and interaction with their peers and teachers in group learning (Pekrun, 2014; Linnenbrink et al., 2011). Nevertheless, there are not many studies on the effects of students' emotions on reading comprehension in Bhutan.

Emotions and reading comprehension

Hirsh (2009) explains that emotions play three important roles in cognitive processes. First, they help build academic constructs in the brain and pave the ground for symbolic thought processes. Second, emotions are involved in making sense and meaning from the symbols constructed in the child's environment. Third, emotional development is shaped by the socio-cultural environment of the young child. Therefore, the cognitive processing of a situation determines the emotional experience on the one hand, and it may influence cognitive processing on the other (Pekrun, 2022).

While reading text comprehension theorists acknowledge that diverse contexts and activities trigger emotions, reader emotions were unavoidably left out of reading comprehension frameworks to focus on complex computational models of cognitive processing (McNamara & Magliano, 2009). However, Pekrun (2022) clarified that as the classroom becomes an emotional setting, it is crucial to understand how readers' emotion influences comprehension. Reading texts can evoke strong emotions, which, in turn, have a significant impact on learning from the text. Emotions profoundly promote reading and influence reading comprehension, as documented in earlier studies (e.g., Bohn-Gettler & McCrudden, 2022; Jacobson et al., 2022; Hamedi et al., 2020; Afzali, 2014; Pekrun, 2022; Bohn-Gettler, 2019; Muis et al., 2015). Reading can evoke strong emotions, and these emotions are important for the comprehension process, which affects learning (Pekrun, 2022). In this regard, readers' emotions, both positive and negative, before and during reading can influence the comprehension processing of the text (Scrimin & Mason, 2015). For instance, some studies document how positive emotion enhances processing comprehension, whereas negative emotion hinders this process (Bohn-Gettler & Rapp, 2011; Scrimin & Mason, 2015).

Bohn-Gettler and McCrudden (2022) found that participants who experienced higher positive emotions before reading a dual-position text engaged in more assimilative processes when reading texts consistent with their beliefs and more reproductive processing when engaging with texts inconsistent with their prior beliefs. Those with low positive emotions showed an opposite pattern. A study by Jacobson et al. (2022) found evidence of the potential benefits of positive epistemic emotions such as surprise, curiosity, or confusion during reading refutational text and suggested that these more positive epistemic emotions may help to support belief and knowledge change.

Findings for negative emotions were mixed and varied based on the type of task. For instance, Mensink (2022) found that overall, negative emotions positively predicted recall, as it helped readers to engage in a more detailed focusing process of the informational text. In contrast, Jacobson et al. (2022) found that among all readers, negative emotions such as hopelessness and fear negatively predicted change in knowledge and attitudes, respectively.

Within the time of reading a text, a person might experience a host of different emotions together or in sequence, which may function in different ways (Pekrun, 2022). For instance, if someone is reading a text that directly contradicts their views, they might initially experience anger at the researcher for attempting to alter their beliefs. Or they might initially experience surprise at the new information but later frustration that the passage was one-sided. These emotions experienced concerning refutational texts may be very different from emotions they experience when reading an informational text. In the latter case, the experience of anger may reflect a lack of understanding or a reaction to unreasonable task demands for a valued task.

Negative emotion, for example, anxiety, may emerge when deep cognitive conflict is experienced (e.g. one is reading a text that starkly contradicts one's current beliefs), when one perceives that one is failing to understand a text, or when a character is encountering an uncertain situation, which could be classified as epistemic, achievement, and topic emotions respectively. It is also possible that multiple types of emotions (achievement, epistemic, topic) could emerge simultaneously and/or overlap (Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2022).

The current study acknowledges the wide range of strategies that enhance the students' positive academic emotions during reading, in the specificity to the context of the learner and understanding that emotions are cultural phenomena (Feldman Barret, 2017). He said that researchers elsewhere argue that emotions are not innate or universal but rather constructed based on culture or the environment in which people live. Similar to his concept on the variation in Western understandings and origins of emotion, emotions in Bhutanese culture are conceptualised in various ways through the influence of Buddhism (Choegy, 2022). For instance, the practice and aspiration of *tshemayzhi* (four boundless qualities) by both the teacher and students can generate pleasant experiences in teaching and learning in the classroom. The practice of boundless qualities such as *zoedpa* (frustration tolerance) and *Tshuelthrim* (discipline) help teachers and students to skillfully relinquish disturbing emotions in the process of teaching and learning (Padmasambhava & Erik Pema Kunsang, 1990, as cited in Choegy, 2022). Children acquire emotional concepts through language and social interactions within their cultural context (Hoemann et al., 2019). Moreover, emotions are constructed to help individuals achieve culturally important goals and adhere to social norms. What is considered an appropriate emotional response can vary significantly across cultures (Mesquita et al., 2016).

As an intervention strategy, the current study used Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs and mindfulness practices such as meditation before and during reading to enhance the participants' academic emotions in reading. Research indicates that the SEL program

encourages children to exert greater effort and perseverance in the face of difficulties, which increases their emotional intelligence to cope with the pressures of negative emotions in the future (Durlak et al., 2011; Payton et al., 2008; Aronson, 2002; Zins et al., 2004). Similarly, mindfulness practices such as meditation allow students to disengage from distractions such as anxiety and stress and, thus, improve the ability to observe one's own emotions during reading (Wallace, 2006; Napoli et al., 2005).

Considering the paucity of research on the role of emotions in reading comprehension in the context of reading literary texts in Bhutan, this study will help English teachers to enhance their pedagogical practices in teaching literary text by enhancing the student's emotions before and during reading. Moreover, it will help teachers to reflect, identify, and prepare context-relevant intervention strategies to co-regulate the students' positive emotions in reading literary texts.

Methodology

Research design

This study employed an action research design to examine how fifth-grade students' reading comprehension of literary texts can be improved by enhancing their academic emotions during reading. Action research, which emphasises action and the transformation of people's practices (Maxwell, 2003; Kemmis, 2010), provided valuable insights into enhancing students' reading comprehension by improving their academic emotions through targeted interventions designed to enrich their learning experiences. Kemmis and McTaggart's action research spiral model - Reconnaissance, Plan, Act and Observe, and Reflect (Grundy, 1995; Maxwell, 2003) was applied.

Participants

This study was conducted in fifth grade involving 24 students (12 female, 12 male) in one of the primary schools in Trongsa district. This class was chosen because students required improvement in reading comprehension, as observed by their subject teacher. Moreover, they needed support with their academic emotions.

Data collection approach

The data for the study was collected using a reading comprehension test, academic emotions questionnaire and critical friend's observation journal as described below:

Reading comprehension test

The reading comprehension test comprising multiple-choice questions and extended response questions was conducted at pre-test (baseline) and post-test (post-intervention). The pre-test was conducted before the use of intervention strategies to assess students' basic reading comprehension, and the post-test was administered to find the effectiveness of the implemented intervention strategies in improving the student's academic emotions and reading comprehension. The text was taken from the fifth-grade English textbook on language and

literature. The test items for reading comprehension were developed, and validity and reliability were confirmed for a proper test proposed by Bordens and Abbott (2018).

Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ)

To measure students' academic emotions during reading, a reduced and modified version of the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ) developed by Pekrun et al. (2005; 2011) was used. The original instrument has 24 scales measuring nine distinct emotions in class-related, learning-related, and test-related settings. However, the items were modified to accurately reflect the reading emotions of the participants in their cultural setting, as the emotions are not universal; they vary from one culture to another (Barrett, 2017). More specifically, the modified questionnaire focused exclusively on class-related and reading-related emotions, namely, enjoyment, anxiety, hopelessness, shame, pride, surprise, curiosity, delight, and confusion. These selected emotions are specifically relevant to the reading activity for this study (Massimini & Delle, 2000).

Critical friend's observation notes

The current study employed the principal of the school as a critical friend. The critical friend is used in this study mainly to prevent the researcher from being too close to their action. Being too close can often lead to overlooking important data or developing narrow, biased interpretations (Maxwell, 2003). The critical friend in this current study is competent in educational research and has attended numerous professional developments on mindfulness and emotion, such as neuroscience-based mindfulness, emotional intelligence and helping skills, SEL for students and SEL for teachers. Eight observations were made by the critical friend using observation journals both during baseline and post-intervention data collection. Observations were made while students were reading the short story titled *Like An Animal In A Cage* by Dennis Perrin from their reading and literature textbook. The observations were made to understand the various academic emotions experienced by the students while reading the text changes in academic emotions while reading and to understand the students' improvement in their comprehension skills.

Intervention Strategies

Socio-emotional learning programs

SEL program in the school allows students to recognise and manage their emotions, build healthy relationships, set positive goals, achieve personal and social needs, and make ethical and responsible decisions (Durlak et al., 2011; Payton et al., 2008). It has been suggested that SEL programs result in students putting forth more effort and persistence in the face of challenges (Aronson, 2002), and that, in effect, increases the student's emotional intelligence to prepare for future stressors by giving them an increased capacity for problem-solving (Durlak et al., 2011; Zins et al., 2004). Moreover, research suggests that SEL programs in the school enhance students' connection to school and teachers and enhance classroom behaviours, which are both correlated with academic achievement (Zins et al., 2004). Research

also suggests that SEL programs build the student's greater cognitive-affect regulation and, thus, improve their reading comprehension (Aygün & Taşkın, 2022).

Mindfulness meditation

Another way to increase positive emotions is through mindfulness meditation (Fredrickson et al., 2017). In mindfulness meditation, teachers instruct their students to focus on their senses, breathing, internal thoughts, present-moment sensations, and body parts. While the mind still thinks, meditation teaches people how to pay attention to certain thoughts only when they arise (Wallace, 2006). The practice allows students to actively disengage from distractions like anxiety and stressors (Napoli et al., 2005). It also fosters the ability to recognise one's emotions (Waters, 2016). This is a promising intervention for increasing positive emotions in the classroom before reading, as frequent meditators have empirically shown a more positive effect (Broderick & Metz, 2009). The mindfulness sessions, lasting five minutes each, were held with participating students before reading the literary text for eight weeks.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the pre-test and post-test on reading comprehension achievement test results were analysed using t-test and descriptive statistics. Content analysis was used to analyse the data gathered by a critical friend using an observations journal.

Results

Academic emotions experienced by the students during reading

The data summary of academic emotions experienced by the participant during reading is presented before the analysis of the results to understand the pattern of academic emotions experienced by the students during reading (see Table 1).

Table 1

Data Summary of Students' Academic Emotions

Academic emotions		Baseline (N=24)		Total	Post-intervention (N=24)		Total
		Male	Female		Male	Female	
Achievement emotions	Enjoyment	0	1	1	3	4	7
	Anxiety	2	1	3	1	0	1
	Frustration	4	2	6	0	1	1
	Shame	2	2	4	0	0	0
	Pride	0	0	0	2	2	4
Total				14			13
Epistemic emotions	Surprise	0	1	1	1	2	2
	Curiosity	1	1	2	1	0	2
	Delight	0	1	1	4	3	7
	Confusion	3	3	6	0	0	0
Total				10			11

Before the use of intervention strategies, 14 participants experienced achievement emotions; the achievement emotions mostly experienced negative emotions such as frustration (6), anxiety (3), and shame (4). Ten respondents reported epistemic emotions such as confusion and curiosity, and 1 participant claimed social emotions. In contrast, during the post-intervention, 13 participants experienced achievement emotions, mostly positive achievement emotions such as pride (4) and enjoyment (7). Ten participants indicated epistemic emotions such as curiosity and delight, and one participant reported having experienced social emotions. The shift in the participants' academic emotions from negative to positive suggests that SEL and mindfulness sessions, used as intervention strategies, effectively supported students' emotions.

Reading comprehension achievement test result

Table 2 represents the descriptive and t-test of the pre-test and post-test of the participants' reading comprehension achievement test results. The descriptive statistic indicated that the mean for the pre-test before the implementation of intervention strategies was 4.14, and the standard deviation was 2.26. The mean for the post-test after the implementation was 6.19, and the standard deviation was 1.44 with $p < .05$. The comparison of pre-test and post-test data analysis indicates the improvement of the participants' academic emotions was significant, that in effect in enhancing the participants' reading comprehension of their literary text.

Table 2

Comparison of Students' Pre and Post-reading Comprehension Test Score

	Test	N	Mean	SD	p-value
Reading comprehension result	Pre-test	24	4.14	2.26	
	Post-test	24	6.19	1.44	0.00

Analysis of critical friend's observation journal

The analysis of the observation notes from the critical friend's journal before the intervention strategies revealed that students presented and expressed ideas and information in the text only. They did not understand the most important concepts and emotions presented in the text. Additionally, observation notes showed that students' connection with text and text-to-world was not clear. As pre-intervention observation notes read:

“Students were able to remember key plot points but had difficulty articulating the emotional complexity of characters' decisions or linking them to larger societal issues. For instance, when talking about a tale of losing someone important, students mainly recounted what happened without acknowledging how it affected the characters emotionally.”

“Students had difficulty making personal connections to the text. For example, when reading the short story, students know how one feels to have freedom but fail to connect the text-to-other life connection.”

“Before the intervention, students needed significant teacher prompts to engage with the emotional or explain the event in the story according to the elements of the short story. For example, when asked to predict what would be Miguel’s parents’ decision on raccoon in the next event, many students relied on suggestions from their peers rather than forming their own predictions.”

However, after the implementation of intervention strategies, observation notes revealed that students could access their existing knowledge and relate the text to their lives and the world around them by independently analysing, interpreting and grasping the emotional components of the text and themselves. The observation data also demonstrated that students could reflect and connect from many viewpoints to make logical predictions, maintain assertions, and integrate complicated knowledge. The following observation notes evidenced this:

“After the intervention, students made connections between the characters' emotional struggles and their own lives, which led to more insightful analyses. For example, a student linked the grief of the raccoon in earlier events and how it feels like to be for the raccoon when he is freed in the end. The text to their life connection with lack of freedom for life, showing a deeper understanding of the narrative's emotional weight.”

One student shared, 'I felt like the character’s struggle with loss reminded me of how I felt last year when I lost my dog. It made me think about the importance of holding onto memories.'”

This shift from surface-level recall to deeper emotional and intellectual engagement indicated that the intervention helped students develop higher analytical skills to improve their reading comprehension.

It was also observed that post-intervention, students showed more independence in making logical predictions, reflecting on the material from multiple viewpoints, and integrating complex knowledge into their understanding of the text, as evidenced by the following excerpt:

“After the intervention, students were more confident in making predictions about the text and reflecting on its emotional components. For instance, one student predicted the resolution of the story based on the character's emotional development, drawing on their understanding of similar real-world situations.”

The observation notes revealed that both intervention strategies to enhance academic emotions positively impacted students' reading comprehension. Students’ positive academic emotions enabled them to connect with texts, analyse complex ideas, and reflect on literary texts and emotions. These changes were reflected in students' ability to make more independent predictions, integrate knowledge, and demonstrate a deeper understanding of the read text.

Discussion and implications

This study aimed to investigate how the students' reading comprehension can be enhanced by improving their academic emotions while reading the literary text. The findings revealed a shift in participants' academic emotions while reading, transitioning from negative emotions before the SEL and mindfulness intervention sessions to positive emotions afterwards. The improvement of participants' academic emotions demonstrates that such interventions can have a significant effect in enhancing the reading comprehension of the literary text.

The students' positive emotions were prompted and triggered by the effectiveness of context-based intervention strategies used in this study. That agrees with earlier findings of Durlak et al. (2011) that SEL programs significantly enhance students' emotional regulation skills by improving self-awareness and self-management of emotions. It helps students to identify, understand, and effectively manage their feelings, leading to reduced emotional distress, anxiety, and depression. These programs also foster resilience, optimism, and coping strategies, enabling students to handle emotions more positively in various situations (Zins et al., 2004). Similarly, the use of mindfulness sessions helped students to pay attention to certain thoughts when they arise, and this allows students to actively disengage from distractions like anxiety and stressors), thus fostering the ability to recognise one's emotions (Napoli et al., 2005; Waters, 2016). In addition to this, another intriguing plausible factor might be the Bhutanese cultural values' particular emotions. For instance, *zoedpa* (frustration tolerance), this specific emotion is embedded as a part of social and cultural values in the Bhutanese curricula, where students learn to tolerate any difficult social situation and are equipped to deal with stressful situations. Admittedly, as sought by Chogyal (2022), it is probable that students' positive emotions were amplified in the post-intervention strategies by the teacher and students' practice of *zoedpa* and *Tshuelthrim* as cultural value-specific emotions. This finding suggests that students' emotions during reading were not only shaped by the text itself but were also shaped by cultural values, which is consistent with the findings of studies conducted by Pugh et al. (2022), Hoemann et al. (2019) and Feldman Barret, (2017).

The classroom practitioner research should thus focus on exploring how students can best learn regardless of their emotional state, effective strategies to support student learning, irrespective of their emotional state. In doing so, stakeholders such as policymakers, administrators, teachers, and parents are recommended to consider student emotions while planning educational engagement programs. Moreover, to respond to the emergence of negative emotions during reading in any setting and situation, the findings of this study suggest the importance of teachers being aware of their potential to influence students' academic emotions by supporting the students' positive emotional development. It can be supported by providing contextual and cultural value-based intervention, as emotions can also be shaped by cultural values ((Feldman Barret, 2017)

The review of literature from the emerging work on reader emotions influencing comprehension has generally revealed that reader positive emotion improves comprehension

of the reading text, whereas negative emotion hinders (Bohn-Gettler & Rapp, 2011; Bohn-Gettler & McCrudden, 2022; Jacobson et al., 2022; Hamed et al., 2020; Afzali, 2014). In the current study, findings from the reading comprehension achievement test revealed that there was a significant improvement in the student's reading comprehension of the literary text. The observation made in post-intervention strategies also found that students were able to connect with their existing knowledge, make connections of the text with themselves and the world around them to analyse it and interpret and grasp the emotional components of the text independently. It also demonstrated that students could reflect and connect from many viewpoints to make logical predictions, maintain assertions, and integrate complicated knowledge from the text. This finding acknowledges the concept of reading comprehension asserted by Sin and Siahpoosh (2020) and Kirmizi (2010). The improvement of students' reading comprehension, as revealed in this study, is noteworthy and acknowledges the improvement of student academic emotions during reading in the post-intervention. Further, as suggested by Pekrun (2022), reading can prompt strong emotions, and these emotions are pivotal in enhancing the students' reading and comprehension of the literary text. Hence, this study suggests that a teacher, as a role model, can foster students' positive emotions by displaying their positive emotions (Frenzel et al., 2018) by scaffolding and stimulating students' self-regulation of emotions (Goetz et al., 2005; Pekrun et al., 2022). The use of SEL-infused pedagogy and mindfulness sessions in reading lessons may also help teachers and students practice emotional intelligence skills, such as the ability to identify positive and negative emotions (Brackett & Rivers, 2014) and navigate through negative academic emotions in reading (Wang et al., 2016).

Conclusion

This action research investigated how students' reading comprehension was enhanced by improving their academic emotions during reading. It was needed as the teaching and learning in the Bhutanese context focuses primarily on students' cognitive level outcomes with minimal focus on understanding students' academic emotions and helping them to be self-regulated learners. Moreover, studies on students' academic emotions in reading are not available in the Bhutanese context. The study concluded that improving students' academic emotions significantly enhanced the students' reading comprehension of the literary text. Although existing studies on how reader emotions influence comprehension have discrepant findings across the different contexts, emotions are certainly culturally shaped and contextually specific; therefore, the current study suggests that it is worthy for English teachers in similar context across Bhutan to explore, research, and discuss in understanding the students' academic emotions in reading that profoundly influence the reading comprehension. Policymakers and administrators may contribute to enhancing students' academic emotions by incorporating emotions-oriented courses and professional development programs for teachers, and finally, for parents to initiate the discussion with their children on mastery-oriented learning goals influencing their children's emotions and fostering their self-regulation of emotions.

This action research has generated a basis and scope for future studies to examine how students' reading comprehension can be enhanced by improving their academic emotions

during reading. However, the findings are limited to the fifth-grade students at the target school only. Generalising the findings to learners in other schools in Bhutan might not be appropriate. Emotions are heavily influenced by cultural and societal values (Pugh et al.,2022; Hoemann et al., 2019; Barrett, 2017). Thus, it would be interesting to explore how cultural factors influence students' emotions in other schools in Bhutan in teaching and learning English literary texts.

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About Author

Ugyen Phuntsho is a teacher at Trongsa Primary School in Bhutan. His research interests include pedagogical practices in primary education, 21st-century teaching skills, and action research as a professional development. He has published research papers in both international and National Journals. His published works were made available in his ResearchGate (<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ugyen-Phuntsho-6>) profile.