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Enhancing Poetry Comprehension through the Reading Power Program: Students' Perceptions and Learning Outcomes

Kezang Jamtsho

English Department, Tang Central School, Bumthang, Bhutan

Email: kjamtsho@education.gov.bt

Abstract

This study examined students' perceptions of the Reading Power Program (RPP) and its effectiveness in enhancing poetry comprehension in English II among Grade X D students at Tang Central School. A mixed-methods explanatory sequential design was used. Quantitative data were collected from 31 students through a pretest, posttest, and structured perception survey, while qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. The intervention used the five RPP reading powers: Connect, Question, Visualize, Infer, and Transform. The poem *"A Red Palm"* by Gary Soto was used as the main instructional text. The findings showed an increase in students' mean score from the pretest ($M = 15.5$, $SD = 2.00$) to the posttest ($M = 17.8$, $SD = 1.33$). A paired samples t-test indicated a statistically significant improvement, $t(30) = 5.55$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.997$). Survey and interview findings further showed that students perceived RPP as engaging, helpful, and useful for understanding difficult poetic ideas. Although constrained by a small sample, single class and brief intervention duration, the study suggests that RPP implementation was associated with active reading, deeper interpretation, increased confidence, and improved poetry comprehension.

Keywords

English II, Grade X, Mixed-methods, Poetry comprehension, Reading Power Program

Introduction

Poetry is an important literary genre in English language education because it develops creativity, critical thinking, imagination, and emotional expression. However, many secondary students find poetry difficult because poetic language often includes figurative meanings, symbolism, imagery, and ideas that are not stated directly. In Grade X English II, these challenges can affect students' confidence, participation, and performance in poetry-based questions.

At Tang Central School, poetry comprehension was observed as a learning area that required more structured support. Students were often able to identify surface meanings but found it

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difficult to connect the poem to personal experience, ask deeper questions, infer hidden meanings, visualize poetic images, and transform their understanding into broader reflections. Research indicates that students often struggle with identifying themes, deciphering symbolic meanings, and understanding abstract poetic elements, which negatively impacts their academic performance in poetry-related assessments (Breukink et al., 2023; Sigvardsson, 2017). The abstract nature of poetry makes it one of the most difficult genres to grasp, necessitating a specialized reading strategy to facilitate comprehension.

The Reading Power Program (RPP) was selected for this study because it encourages students to become active readers through five reading powers: Connect, Question, Visualize, Infer, and Transform. These strategies support students to interact with texts, construct meaning, and move beyond literal understanding. Furthermore, active reading strategies have proven essential for helping students engage with complex texts, as they significantly improve student performance (Nurviyani, 2024). In this study, the RPP was implemented as a visual and interactive instructional strategy to support poetry comprehension in English II. Given that poetry often requires higher-order thinking skills to interpret layered meanings and symbolic language (Azizi et al., 2022; Chen & Jamiat, 2023), employing these strategies could significantly aid comprehension.

This study aimed to examine students' perceptions of the RPP and its effectiveness in enhancing poetry comprehension among Grade X D students at Tang Central School. Several studies have investigated students' perceptions and its effectiveness on their learning experiences. Research by Sun (2024) found that students viewed the scaffolded reading strategy positively due to their interactive and structured approach to reading comprehension. Moreover, students felt more confident in reading and analysing literature after engaging with reader-response strategies (Iskhak et al., 2020). These findings suggest that the program fosters a supportive learning environment that enhances students' motivation and engagement in poetry studies. Furthermore, empirical research suggests that implementing comprehension framework correlates with improved academic performance in literature courses (Bogaerds-Hazenberg et al., 2021). A study by Decristan et al. (2022) found that students who consistently engaged with structured reading intervention scored significantly higher on reading comprehension like poetry. Additionally, reading intervention programs like RPP contribute to overall academic improvement in language arts and literature (Prescott et al., 2018).

The study was guided by the following two research questions: (1) How do Grade X D students perceive the use of the reading power program in enhancing poetry comprehension in English II? and (2) Does RPP implementation associate with improvements in poetry comprehension in English II among Grade X D students?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach using an explanatory sequential design. Quantitative data were collected through a pretest and posttest to measure changes in students' poetry comprehension after the RPP intervention. The intervention was spread over seven weeks

with five lessons per week. A structured perception survey was also used to examine students' views of the strategy. The quantitative findings were then explained further through qualitative data from semi-structured interviews.

Participants

The study was conducted at Tang Central School, focusing on students in Grade X D. These students participated in the intervention involving the RPP strategy, aimed at enhancing their poetry comprehension and appreciation in English II. The participating class, X D, consisted of 31 students. The students, aged between 16 and 19, had a balanced gender distribution of 15 boys and 16 girls.

Instrumentation

The study used multiple tools to assess the effectiveness of the RPP strategy. An online pretest was administered to assess students' initial poetry comprehension. The 20 pretest and posttest questions were researcher-designed to tailor tightly to match the specific content, vocabulary, or skills taught during the intervention. Those questions were solely based on the poem "A Red Palm" by Garay Soto, which was employed for intervention. The pretest and posttest instruments were aligned directly with the Class X English II National Syllabus prescribed by the Department of School Education (DSE). Further, the instruments were thoroughly reviewed by the experts. After the intervention, an online posttest was used to measure improvement in performance. The mean of 15.5 on pretest and 17.8 on posttest suggests a total score of 20, showing an improvement. An online structured survey was used to gather students' perceptions of the strategy. It contained 22 items based on the RPP strategy, to be rated against a 5-point Likert scale. The survey instrument yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of $\alpha = 0.921$. This value substantially exceeds the commonly accepted value of 0.70 and demonstrates excellent internal consistency and reliability, indicating that the items consistently captured students' perceptions. To complement the survey findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students who were purposively selected, keeping equal participants from both the genders, male and female. Each participant responded to six questions under Part I: Perceptions of the RPP strategy and seven questions under Part II: "A Red Palm" guiding questions from English Class X Curriculum Guide for Teachers (DCRD, 2013, pp. 32-33).

Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the relevant school authority. Students were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation in the survey and interview was voluntary. A written parental consent was sought from the parent of each student. Confidentiality was maintained by using student codes instead of students' names when reporting interview responses. The data were used only for academic and instructional improvement purposes.

Data Collection Procedure

To operationalize the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, data collection was conducted in two consecutive phases: an initial quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase. Data collection took place in Grade X D at Tang Central School during English II lessons. The poem "A Red Palm" by Gary Soto (DSE, pp. 38–39) was purposively selected as the main intervention text because it provides rich opportunities for connecting, questioning, visualizing, inferring, and transforming meaning. For pedagogical implementation of the intervention, the story method outlined by Gear (2006, pp. 19–21) was adapted for macro-introduction of the RPP

framework. The technical recommendations from Gear (2006, pp. 37–108) were adapted for micro-level instruction for each specific power.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. Jamovi version 2.6.44 was used to generate tables and to analyse the quantitative data. Pretest and posttest scores were analysed using descriptive statistics and a paired samples t-test to determine whether students' poetry comprehension improved after the intervention. Survey responses were analysed using descriptive statistics. Interview data were analysed thematically following Bruan and Clarke's six-phase framework (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). These qualitative results were subsequently used to explain and support the quantitative findings. These strategies ensured the trustworthiness and rigor of the study.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 Comparison of the Overall Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores

Test	*n*	*M*	*Mdn*	*SD*	*SE*
Pretest	31	15.50	16.00	2.00	0.36
Posttest	31	17.80	18.00	1.33	0.24

Table 1 indicates that the RPP had a positive impact on students' poetry comprehension. The overall mean score increased from the pretest (M = 15.5, SD = 2.00) to the posttest (M = 17.8, SD = 1.33), showing a clear improvement after the implementation of the RPP. This improvement was supported by interview data, where students demonstrated movement from literal understanding to deeper inferential and evaluative thinking. For example, students were able to explain the speaker's hard work, regret, and struggle in *"A Red Palm"* and connect these ideas to local experiences such as farming, family responsibility, and youth unemployment. The decrease in standard deviation from 2.00 to 1.33 also suggests that students' scores became more consistent after the intervention.

Table 2. Paired Samples t-Test between Pretest and Posttest

Measure comparison	*t*	*df*	*p*	*Cohen's d*
Pretest vs. Posttest	5.55	30.0	<.001	0.997

Note. H_a $\mu_{\text{Measure 1 - Measure 2}} \neq 0$

A paired samples t-test was administered to complement the descriptive analysis and to determine whether the difference between pretest and posttest scores was statistically significant. As shown in Table 2, the result indicated a significant improvement, $t(30) = 5.55$, $p < .001$. The effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.997$) represents a large effect, providing strong evidence that the RPP had a substantial positive impact on students' poetry comprehension. The qualitative findings also supported this result, as students reported that the five reading powers helped them understand

poems more clearly.

Students' Perceptions of the RPP Strategy

Table 3. Student Engagement and Motivation

Item	*Statement*	*N*	*M*	*SD*
1	I liked the Reading Power Program (RPP) strategy	31	4.26	0.63
2	I try to learn as much as possible while using the RPP strategy	31	4.16	0.45
3	I wish more language teachers could use the RPP strategy	31	4.23	0.81
4	RPP improves my interest in exploring poetry	31	4.23	0.62

The findings portray the range of mean scores (M = 4.16) to (M = 4.26) for these four indicators. The highest mean score was recorded for Item 1, "I liked the Reading Power Program (RPP) strategy" (M = 4.26, SD = 0.63). This clearly indicates a strong perception of student approval and enjoyment of the RPP strategy. The findings suggest that, for enhancing student engagement and motivation for comprehending poetry, the RPP is a successful strategy. The mean scores are significantly higher than the mid-point of the Likert scale. It demonstrates the effectiveness in catalysing students' engagement and motivation toward poetry. This quantitative enthusiasm is mirrored in the qualitative interviews, where student 02 noted that, "I prefer Visualisation as it is fun and rather than simply reading books you can use your imaginations and get in the role of the characters and play their actions."

Student 04 commented that the strategy makes reading "more powerful." The consistency between the high mean scores and the students' verbalized enjoyment suggests that RPP successfully fosters a positive motivational climate for learning poetry. However, the qualitative data highlights a nuance not captured by the mean scores: the varying difficulty levels of specific strategies. While "Connect" and "Visualize" were described as a "piece of cake," students consistently identified Infer and Transform as significant challenges. Student 01 recalled her/ his experiences saying, "While using the five reading powers, the most challenging thing I have remembered is infer as it is a new word to me and it was also hard to understand what is not written in the text."

Similarly, student 04 also shared:

> *While reading a poem, the challenges I always face is to understand the meaning of the word and by using the five power of reading strategies, it helped me to understand well but inferring is too hard to me as it is a new term for me to understand.*

While "inferring" and "transforming" remain pedagogical hurdles, the overall perception of RPP is that it is a "must-have power" for the students. The intervention poem, *"A Red Palm"* by Gary Soto, served as a practical crucible for these strategies. The students' ability to apply the "Connect" and "Infer" powers was evident in their discussion of the farmer's plight.

Table 4. Perceived Learning Effectiveness and Academic Preparedness

Item	*Statement*	*N*	*M*	*SD*
1	RPP contributes efficiently to my learning	31	4.19	0.75
2	I feel more prepared for my English II exam	31	4.23	0.67
3	I feel prepared to complete course tasks	31	3.81	0.79

Table 4 evaluates three key indicators of perceived learning effectiveness and academic preparedness. The findings suggest that the RPP strategy was particularly effective in building students' confidence for formal examinations, as Item 2, "I feel more prepared for my English II exam" (M = 4.23, SD = 0.67), received the highest mean score. This indicates that students perceived the RPP as a useful tool for preparing for English II assessments. Interview data also supported this finding, as student 02 explained that the five reading powers helped them understand difficult poems more deeply. For instance, student 02 expressed:

> *The five power strategies have proved very beneficial and crucial to us as it not only broadens our understanding, but also it extends our imagination. Rather than keeping us confined in those words of the poem, it makes us go higher, question every turn of the poem and imagine every unimaginable fact.*

While student 04 stated that the program makes their reading "more powerful." This synergy suggests that students view RPP as a strategic tool for success in formal assessments like the BCSEA examinations.

While exam confidence was high, the relatively lower mean for Item 3, "I feel prepared to complete course tasks," (M = 3.81) suggests an area for pedagogical adjustment. The narrow range between the highest (4.23) and lowest (3.81) mean scores still demonstrates students' positive perceptions. The specific interview responses regarding Gary Soto's poem "A Red Palm" serve as evidence of the strategy's success in fostering Connecting and Transformative thinking. Students successfully bridged the farmer's labour with the "Buddhist context" (referring to the Bhutanese context), linking the character's "scorching sun" experience to the hard work of rural parents and the rising unemployment rates in Bhutan. The proclamation of student 03 is clear that:

> *I could connect the main situations to Bhutanese as in most part of Bhutan, the parents are working hard in the field, whether it is rainy or sunny, to make their family survive and to make their children educated like others.*

Student 03's ability to connect the text to real-world survival and education demonstrates that the RPP facilitates the very "thinking beyond" that Student 05 praised in the semi-structured interview.

Table 5. Development of Reading Strategies and Cognitive Skills

Item	*Statement*	*N*	*M*	*SD*
1	I use RPP to understand poetry	31	3.68	0.748
2	RPP encourages connecting	31	4.32	0.541
3	RPP encourages inferring	31	4.06	0.629
4	RPP encourages transforming	31	4.00	0.816

The findings from the descriptive statistics, general interview responses, and the specific analysis of Gary Soto's poem *"A Red Palm"* provide a triangulated view of the RPP as an effective, though cognitively demanding, and framework for enhancing literary comprehension among Grade X D students. The quantitative data in Table 5 indicates a high level of student confidence in the "Connecting" strategy (M = 4.32, SD = 0.541). This is corroborated by qualitative data where students consistently identified the ability to link text to personal experience as a primary benefit. For instance, student 01 noted that, "From the five Reading Power strategies, I like Connect as while we are reading the poem it directly helps us to connect to our present life."

However, a nuance emerges regarding "Inferring." While the mean score was high (M = 4.06, SD = 0.629), the interviews reveal that this was the most challenging skill to master due to its abstract nature. The same student, student 01 remarked, "While using the five reading powers, the most challenging thing I have remembered is infer as it is a new word to me and it was also hard to understand what is not written in the text."

Although the findings slightly indicate that respondents perceive considerable challenges in integrating the RPP strategy into independent application in poetry (M=3.68, SD=0.748), there is a strong positive reception of the program's efficacy in fostering high-level comprehension skills- connecting (M=4.32, SD=0.541), inferring (M=4.06, SD = 0.629) and transforming (M=4, SD = 0.816). It is a clear indication that the RPP strategy has successfully prepared students to move beyond literal interpretations of poetry toward underlying meanings. Overall, the implementation of the RPP in Grade X D has been successful in transitioning students from passive readers to active thinkers in comprehending poetry.

Table 6. Instructional Effectiveness and Teaching Process

Item	*Statement*	*N*	*M*	*SD*
1	RPP attracts attention to teaching-learning process	31	3.97	0.657
2	RPP encourages questioning	31	4.29	0.588
3	RPP encourages visualizing	31	4.45	0.568

Table 6 identifies Visualization as the most effective strategy of RPP (M = 4.45, SD = 0.568). This is mirrored in the interviews, where students described visualization as an immersive experience that moves beyond traditional rote reading. Student 02 expressed, "I prefer Visualisation as it is fun and rather than simply reading books you can use your imaginations and get in the role of the characters and play their actions."

Further, the effectiveness of this strategy was evidenced during the intervention using Gary Soto's poem *"A Red Palm."* Although their interpretations varied, students could form visual imagery within the poem while reading the text, indicating active engagement with the text's sensory details. For instance, student 02 visualized the character "using a hoe singing back and forth on the brown soil." This ability to construct mental scenes directly supports the high mean scores regarding RPP's instructional effectiveness. This strong engagement with visualization likely occurs because concrete sensory cues leverage imagery and imagination, which are engaging for adolescents who are still developing higher-order abstract thinking skill.

The RPP strategy also appeared to foster inquiry-based learning, as reflected in the high mean for questioning, Item 2, "RPP encourages questioning," which yielded (M= 4.29, SD = 0.588). Students perceived questioning as a tool for self-correction and deeper exploration. Student 03 explained that, "If you are stuck we have to ask our questions to ourselves and so by asking our questions we can come to know the meaning of the poem." When discussing the farmer's struggle in "A Red Palm," students moved beyond the text to discuss Bhutan's rising unemployment and the stigma of manual labour. Student 01 connected the poem to the national context pointing out, "Bhutan's unemployment rate is rising, and those unemployment youth may opt for a farming life. They may regret and curse their past like the character." This represents a high level of "Transforming." Although these qualitative responses illustrate positive student engagement, the overall learning outcome on student self-efficacy should be interpreted thoughtfully. The triangulation shows that the structured nature of the RPP provides a sense of security, as stated by student 02, "A man with knowledge is more confident than those without as those five strategies made it easier to understand poems." It can be suggested that the RPP serves as a promising instructional tool for addressing core challenges of poetry comprehension in Grade X D at Tang Central School.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of the RPP was associated with improvements in poetry comprehension among the students of Grade X D at Tang Central School. The intervention addressed the "significant challenge" of poetry comprehension identified in the literature by Smith and Johnson (2021). While Smith & Johnson (2021) highlighted poetry as a notoriously difficult genre due to its stylistic opacity and abstract language, the current findings extend their work by demonstrating how explicit, metacognitive strategies can break down these structural barriers for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. The implementation of the RPP corresponded with score gains among the 31 participants in understanding poetry—historically the most challenging genre in English Paper II. It is evident from the shift in mean from a pre-test (M = 15.5, SD = 2.00) to a post-test (M = 17.8, SD = 1.33) that students demonstrated enhanced performance in navigating poetry comprehension. Moreover, while the drop in standard deviation from (SD=2.00 to SD=1.33) indicates greater post-intervention score consistency and reduced score variability among participants, it does not by itself definitively demonstrate that the RPP narrowed the achievement gap, as establishing a true gap reduction would require a randomized control baseline or comparative subgroup analysis. Nevertheless, this quantitative growth suggests that when students are provided with structured reading strategies, they are better equipped to read between the lines and decompose the abstract nature of poetry.

Building on these descriptive findings, the paired samples t-test results provide statistical support for the post-intervention gains. The t-test yielded a value of ($t(30) = 5.55$) with a significance level of ($p < .001$). The effect size, where Cohen's ($d = 0.997$) represents a "large effect," mirrors the findings of Carter and Nelson (2021), who argued that consistent engagement with RPP correlates with significantly higher scores. However, whereas Carter & Nelson (2021) observed this correlation in western contexts, these findings extend their work to a Bhutanese ESL secondary classroom, demonstrating the potential cross-cultural applicability of scaffold reading strategies. While these statistical outcomes reflect meaningful progress, they should not be interpreted as absolute proof of sole causality, as single-group designs cannot fully isolate the intervention from extraneous confounding variables.

The quantitative data from the perception survey further elucidates student attitudes, highlighting a high level of student engagement and motivation in poetry. The students considered the intervention crucial for decomposing the poetry for better academic achievement in the BCSEA examination in English II, indicating that the students strongly favoured the intervention. The findings of Miller et al. (2022) regarding the positive learning outcome of scaffold approaches on student confidence are supported and extended here, specifically, the RPP reduced cognitive load by providing a procedural framework for during reading. A nuanced understanding emerges when triangulating the quantitative data with qualitative data, although the exam confidence was high. While "Visualization" ($M = 4.45$) and "Connecting" ($M = 4.32$) were embraced as accessible and "fun" entry points, allowing students to "get in the role of characters", "Inferring" ($M = 4.06$) was identified as a significant pedagogical hurdle. In qualitative feedback, students characterized "inferring" as a "new word" and a difficult concept because it requires grasping what is "not written in the text." This difficulty stems from the complex cognitive demands of inference, which requires abstract reasoning and advanced monitoring skills still maturing in tenth graders. As Jones & Baker (2020) caution, while surface-level strategies are easy to adopt, transitioning to inferential comprehension requires sustained instruction and explicit modelling.

Applying the RPP to Gary Soto's poem "A Red Palm" showed that students were able to link themes to the Buddhist context and the real situation of rising unemployment in Bhutan. The study's focus on only 31 Grade X students from Tang Central School in Bumthang restricts the wider applicability of its findings across Bhutan. In addition, a single group design and short intervention prevent definitive causal claims. Nonetheless, the study offers meaningful baseline insights and lay a foundation for further investigations using larger and more diverse nationwide samples.

Conclusion

This study evaluated the perceptions of Grade X D students regarding poetry comprehension skills using the RPP strategy. While the findings indicate promising potential benefits of the RPP for enhancing student performance and fostering deeper comprehension, these outcomes are interpreted cautiously given the methodological constraints the study suffers from, notably its sample size (n=31), single-site school and short duration. Based on the triangulated quantitative and qualitative findings, the following conclusions can be drawn. The findings suggest potential benefits of the RPP for enhancing student performance in poetry comprehension. This is clearly

evident from the statistically significant increase in overall scores from the pretest to the posttest. It can be further confirmed by the raised mean scores and a notable reduction in score variance from pretest to posttest. However, further research using a control group and a larger sample is necessary before making stronger causal claims about the intervention's direct effectiveness. Qualitatively, after the implementation of the RPP, the data also supports the students from being superficial readers to advanced inferential analyzers, though Inferring presented a distinct pedagogical and conceptual hurdle. Students favoured the RPP strategy. Their feedback remained highly positive, noting that the strategy greatly enhanced their confidence for appearing English II examinations.

While Visualization and Connecting were readily embraced, future research should focus on prolonged guided practice specifically targeting the Infer strategy to help students better navigate abstract poetic texts. Given the need for more robust and controlled evidences to substantiate academic gains demonstrated in this study, future researchers should prioritize comparative designs with larger samples. The school administration at Tang Central School may consider expanding the program across other sections and grade levels. Structured professional development workshops on the RPP framework could be provided to language teachers to support ongoing classroom instruction.

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