

## Student Performance in Reading and Literature: A Case of Middle Secondary Schools in Dagana, Bhutan

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### Abstract

This study aimed to understand the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the performance of Class 10 students in Reading and Literature. Guided by a pragmatic paradigm, the study employed convergent parallel mixed methods. Quantitative data were collected through a survey questionnaire from 305 students of Classes 10 and 11. Qualitative data were collected through focused group discussions and semi-structured interviews with students (n=25) and English teachers (n=7). The study found that students' poor reading habit is a challenge in scoring good marks in Reading and Literature. Similarly, students' limited exposure to Literature is a challenge for them in responding to competency-based questions and in understanding the literary texts in the question papers. Teachers skipped most of the poems and essays to complete the syllabus, which also affected students' performance in literature. Poetry is perceived as the most difficult genre, followed by novels, essays, and short stories. Further, teachers and parents are not able to motivate and encourage students to develop reading habits. Study suggests teachers create adequate avenues for students to read, understand, interpret, and respond to literature in general and poems in particular.

### Keywords

Challenges  
Performance  
Reading and literature  
Perceptions  
Reading habits

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### Introduction

Bhutanese students are required to write two English papers for their English examination: English I and English II. English paper I consist of Writing and Language, where students are required to write essays, letters, and reports and answer grammar questions. English paper II is on Reading and Literature, where students need to respond to objective and subjective questions on literature. The English curriculum is organised into four strands, namely Reading and Literature, Listening and Speaking, Writing, and Language, according to the standards prescribed by The Silken Knot: Standards for English for Schools in Bhutan (Royal Education Council [REC], 2007).

A huge difference in marks obtained by Class 10 students in English I and English II, considering the same facilitator, facilities, learning environment and teaching and learning duration allocated for each area of the subject, is a concern. However, the average English I (Language paper) performance of class ten students of Dagana was 62.12%, 63.04% and 71.29% for 2017, 2018 and 2019, respectively, which is significantly higher than English II (Literature paper- 52.85%, 58.56% and 58.94% respectively). The average mean mark in Language paper was 65.48 %, while it was 56.78% for Reading and Literature for these three years (Bhutan Council for School Examination and Assessment [BCSEA], 2018, 2019, 2020). It is evident from the average mean performance score that students are unable to perform in Reading and Literature as they do in Writing and Language.

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the perceptions of teachers and students on the challenges students face in learning the Reading and Literature component of English in middle secondary schools in Dagana. The study aimed to explore teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the reading habits of Class 10 students in Dagana. It further aimed to identify the areas which are difficult for students in Reading and Literature.

## **Literature Review**

This section presents a review of relevant literature associated with the study. This includes components in the Reading and Literature subject, the importance of students' reading habits in Reading and Literature, and also literature on challenges in teaching and learning Reading and Literature. Understanding relevant literature assists in comprehending the different contexts and perspectives associated with this study.

## **Components in reading and literature**

It is crucial to understand various areas in the literature that Class 10 students and teachers in Bhutan are mandated to teach and learn. The selection of literature used in Classes 9 and 10 will serve as a support and resource to help students practise and develop skills of Listening and Speaking, Reading, Writing and Language (REC, 2019). According to REC (2019), the curriculum includes fiction and non-fiction classical literature, but modern writers are given greater importance. Class 10 students study essays, poems, short stories and a novel for Reading and Literature. The selected literature centres around themes such as culture, identity, language, influence of media, Gross National Happiness, humanity, nature and conservation, friendship, acceptance, environment, survival, responsibility, love, irony in human nature, jealousy, bullying, separation, family bonds and ethics bravery and human values among others (REC, 2007). The recommended literary texts are written by national and international writers from Canada, Japan, America, Bhutan, and other countries. Along with the poems, essays and short stories, Class 10 students are required to study a novel titled 'The Giver' by Lois Lowry (REC, 2007).

## **Students' reading habits in reading and literature**

Reading is an essential basic skill required in learning and understanding literature. According to Novianti (2016), some of the objectives behind learning literature are to enhance

students' social and literary skills, values and attitudes and to understand literary language and traditions. In Bhutan, students at the secondary level should read many varieties of fiction and non-fiction literary texts independently (CERD, 2002). Students are expected to use a variety of appropriate reading strategies to make meaning of the literary texts. Apart from the literature in the curriculum, students at this level need to have an interest in reading literary works from Bhutan and other countries for learning and enjoyment. Through reading, students will reflect and discover meaning in their lives and learn expressions of fundamental values like goodness, truth, and beauty (CERD, 2002).

A study by Choeda et al. (2020) found that one of the factors affecting effective communication is the reading habits of the students. The English Curriculum Framework states that students should enjoy reading as a learning activity. However, BCSEA (2014) reported that most students read three books in a month, and few students do not read even a book in a month. BCSEA reported that most of the students who participated in their study indulged in independent study of English from thirty minutes to two hours every day. However, some students studied English for less than thirty minutes a day.

Crivilare (2019) found that in the United States, family influenced the reading habits of children significantly when compared to peers. Parents who showed genuine interest in reading frequently discussed books or reading, gifted their children with books and demonstrated regular reading had a significant positive influence on the reading habits of the children. English teachers and their instructional practices also influence the reading habits of the students (Crivilare, 2019). Teachers who read in front of students motivated students to read, which developed the reading habit of the student. On the other hand, teachers who instructed students to read without themselves reading were found to be a demotivating factor in reading (Crivilare, 2019).

There are a few challenges that affect the reading habits of the students. According to Annamalai and Muniandy (2013), students in Malaysia consider reading as a difficult activity, and the availability of other learning avenues such as the Internet, computers, games on mobile phones, and music are the possible causes of poor reading habits of the students. Similarly, Zangmo (2007) found that lack of motivation, lack of appropriate materials, and lack of role modelling affected the reading culture of the students in Bhutan. A recent study also found that reading difficulty, negative attitude towards reading, the decline in reading culture with maturity and wasting time on the internet and social media are the factors affecting the reading culture of students in Bhutan (Wangchuk & Zangmo, 2021).

### **Challenges in teaching and learning literature**

Identifying and understanding the challenges in teaching and learning literature will assist in formulating appropriate data collection instruments and focus areas and design measures to overcome the challenges. Chesterman (1983) studied the problems associated with teaching English literature in Iraq and concluded that teachers' teaching approach to teaching

literature is a challenge in learning literature. Gubair and Eltahir (2018) further explained through their research findings that one of the challenges in teaching literature is the lack of well-trained and specialised literature teachers. Teachers are unable to simplify complicated literary texts and motivate the students to read and comprehend the texts. These findings align with the report of BCSEA, where the majority of the teachers expressed that they used English textbooks and Teachers' manuals as the primary teaching learning materials and resources in teaching (BCSEA, 2014). BCSEA (2014) further reported that other modes of presenting lessons, such as ICT tools, newspapers, journals, magazines, audio clips and visual aids, were rarely used in teaching literature to the students. Hence, teachers' teaching approach, their specialisation in teaching Literature, the use of teaching materials, and efforts in motivating students to read affect students' performance in Literature.

Insufficient study resources for the students are also identified as a challenge in teaching and learning literature in Indonesia (Novianti, 2016). Similarly, a study in Sudan found that children do not get enough access to literary text during the initial stages and hence, their experience with literature is limited (Gubair & Eltahir, 2018). Language competency, differences in culture, and limited vocabulary are also identified as a challenge in teaching and learning literature (Alfauzan & Hussein, 2017; El-Helou, 2010; Gubair & Eltahir, 2018; Novianti, 2016). A study conducted in Sudan by Gubair and Eltahir (2018) also revealed that students isolate themselves from literature due to the stigma that literature is difficult. Similarly, Novianti (2016) revealed that poor reading habits of Indonesian children are a major challenge in teaching and learning literature, and the use of social media has adversely affected the culture of reading books. As an English teacher for over a decade dealing with reading and writing, the reading habits of students in Dagana are a matter of concern and have been seen declining over the years. Gubair and Eltahir (2018), through their study, revealed that students' limited knowledge of literary terms and tools and critical thinking abilities also affect the learning of literature. Through personal experiences as an English teacher, all the factors discussed above are relevant and applicable for Bhutanese students and are likely to be affecting the student's performance in Literature in Dagana. However, there is a lack of literature to ascertain this.

Studies in Turkey and Palestine have found that literature texts that are not in the learner's context challenge students, and they fail to understand the text and gradually withdraw attention from literature (El-Helou, 2010; Yavuz, 2014). Similarly, one of the key recommendations from the Consultancy Report on Evaluation of the School (PP-XII) English Curriculum in Bhutan was that Curriculum materials for students must be at par with the standard of the Bhutanese students and a balance of local and foreign texts with appropriate illustrations are required to enhance both the content and the language in a text (REC, 2017). According to Gubair and Eltahir (2018) and Hassan (2018), poetry is the most difficult genre in literature for ESL students due to figurative language, cultural differences with the poet, lack of understanding of the relationship between the poem and the poet, and difficulty in understanding themes in the text.

The literature reviewed in this section provides findings from different countries with regard to students' and teachers' challenges in learning and teaching literature. Literature provides

various factors related to students' performance in literature, which was assessed in this study to see if the students of Dagana were facing similar challenges. Further, it provides additional factors responsible for students' performance in Reading and Literature in the context of Dagana. Pointing out the factors for low performance in literature will enable students and teachers to design mechanisms and enhance performance.

## **Methodology**

### **Research approach and design**

The study used a mixed methods approach with a convergent parallel design (Creswell, 2014). The study collected quantitative data from students (n= 305) of middle secondary schools in Dagana and qualitative data from teachers (n= 7) and a few students (n= 24). The data were analysed separately, but it was converged and triangulated, offering a comprehensive discussion of the issue. Findings from the quantitative data further extend, elaborate and explain the findings of quantitative data (Creswell, 2014).

### **Data collection techniques and tools**

The study used focused group discussion, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to collect data from students and teachers. A self-designed survey questionnaire was used to gather data from sample students in five schools. The questionnaire covered areas such as students' perception of their reading habits and their perception of challenges they face in learning Reading and Literature. It also studied students' perception of different genres of literature that they study and also their perception of curriculum issues, teaching styles and assessment practices in Reading and Literature. For the five-point Likert scale, the following mean range of 1.0 to 1.80= strongly disagree, 1.81 to 2.61= disagree, 2.62 to 3.42= neutral (not sure), 3.43 to 4.23= agree and 4.24 to 5= strongly agree was adapted from Joy and Ventayan (2017).

Focus group discussions (FGD) and semi-structured interviews were used to gather the perception of students and teachers on Reading and Literature, challenges in teaching and learning literature, areas in the literature that are difficult, teaching and learning process in the subject, assessment strategies, and other relevant areas.

### **Sampling strategy and sample size**

Teachers teaching Class 10 English were selected to be the primary participants for the interview. Seven teachers were interviewed to acquire in-depth information regarding the subject. There were six student participants representing both genders in all four focused group discussions. Purposive sampling was used to identify the student participants for focus group discussions by the teachers of the respective schools, considering the inclusion of students with different academic performance levels (Creswell, 2018).

Students studying in Classes 10 and 11 in all five middle and higher secondary schools in Dagana were the target population for quantitative data collection through survey questionnaires. Class 11 students were included as they had experience studying the Class 10 curriculum. The study used random stratified sampling to select the sample (Creswell, 2018).

After confirming the population, Cochran's (1977) method of sample size determination was used at a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. From the five secondary schools of Dagana Dzongkhag, 315 students participated for the required sample size of 234 students. However, ten responses were discarded due to incomplete data.

### **Data analysis procedure and presentation**

Data gathered from focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were recorded, compiled, transcribed, coded and categorised into themes using In Vivo coding for interpretation of the result. Data collected from questionnaires were firstly prepared and managed by screening for missing values, normality tests were run on each item to screen abnormally distributed items and outliers were checked before the analysis. The cleaned data were processed and analysed through SPSS to describe and interpret the result. Mean and standard deviation are the main analyses conducted. The results from the three methods mentioned above for data collection were compared to see the similarities and differences in the findings.

### **Results and Discussion**

This section discusses the findings of the study carried out in the secondary schools of Dagana Dzongkhag on the perception of students' performance in the Reading and Literature component in Class 10 English. The section discusses the findings in two broad themes, such as teachers' and students' perceptions of students' reading habits and challenges in reading and literature. The findings from qualitative and quantitative data are presented simultaneously. The mean from quantitative data is analysed using point five Likert scale interpretation adapted from Joy and Ventayan (2017), where a mean range of 1.0 to 1.80 is strongly disagree, 1.81 to 2.61 is disagree, 2.62 to 3.42 is neutral (not sure), 3.43 to 4.23 is agree and 4.24 to 5 is strongly agree.

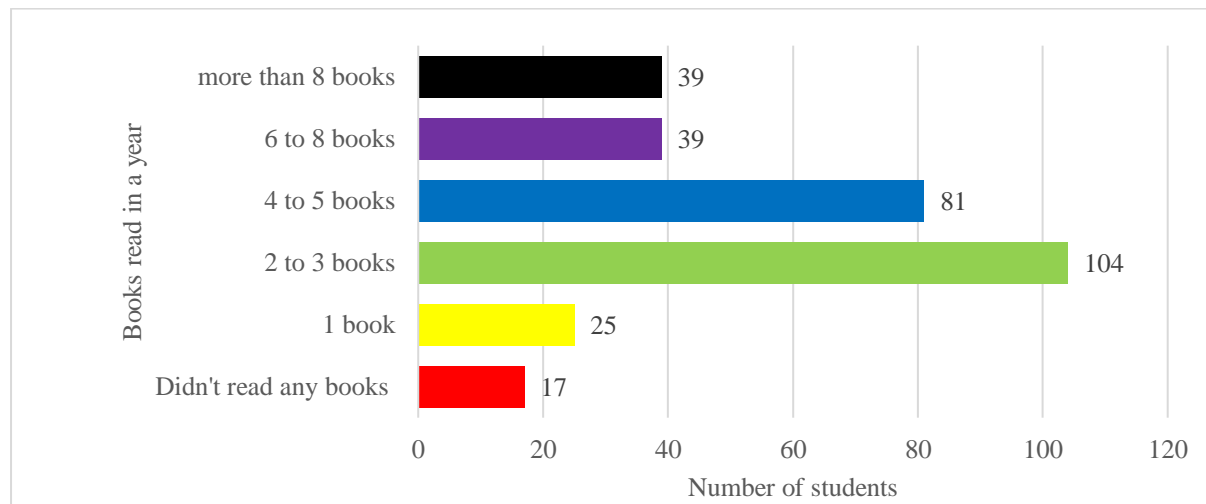
#### **Teachers' and students' perceptions of students' reading habits**

Reading is an important component for successful performance in literature. However, the findings from this study revealed that the reading habits of the Class 10 students are not satisfying. Many teachers believe that only a few students in each school have developed good reading habits (Teachers A, B, C, D and E). Teacher A remarked, "Maybe about 25% of the students have the reading habit." The Centre for Educational Research and Development (2002) states that children at the secondary level should read a variety of fiction and non-fiction literary texts independently. BCSEA (2014) reported that most students read three books in a month, although a few students do not read even a book in a month. However, the findings (see Figure 1) from this study revealed that most students in Dagana have read only two to three books in a year, while a few have read more than eight books. Considering the number of books students read in a month in BCSEA's report, the books read by students in Dagana in a year are too little.



**Figure 1**

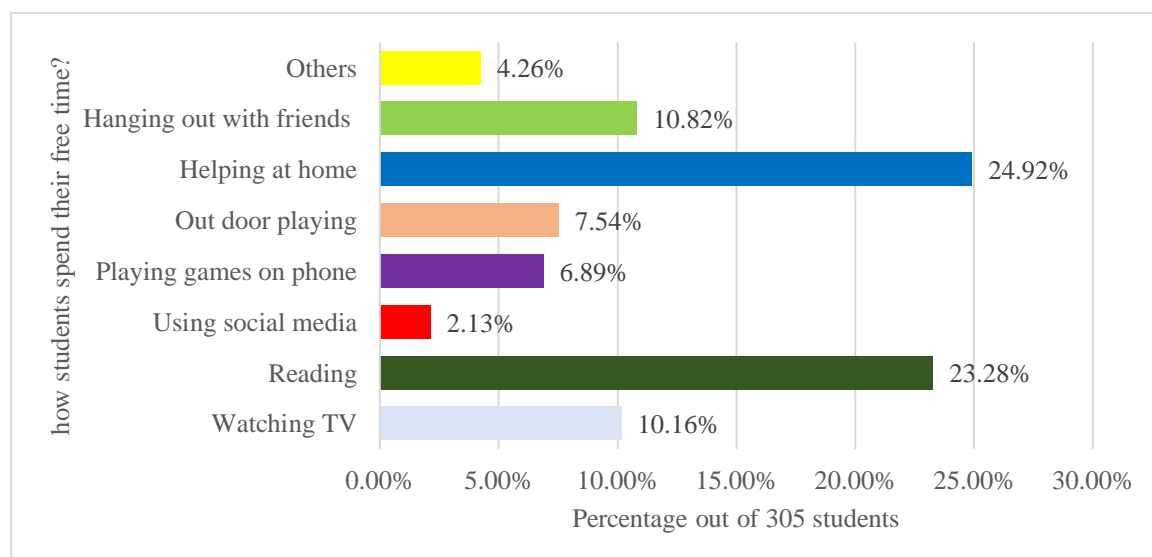
*Number of Books Read by the Students*



The possible reason for reading fewer books could be because 76% of the students (Figure 2) are engaged in activities other than reading, such as watching TV, using social media, outdoor playing, hanging out with friends and helping with the household chores during their leisure time.

**Figure 2**

*How do Students Spend Their Free Time?*



Literature shows that students who read more than three books perform academically better than students who read less than three books in a year (BCSEA, 2014). A similar study

in Malaysia pointed out that students view reading as a difficult activity and are keen on other learning avenues such as the Internet, computers, games, and music (Annamalai & Muniandy, 2013). Similarly, Wangchuk and Zangmo (2021) found that reading difficulty, negative attitude towards reading, decline in reading culture with maturity and wasting time on the internet and social media are factors affecting the reading culture of Bhutanese students.

Students have shared challenges in reading in terms of time, resources and peer pressure. Many students from different focused group discussions were of the view that it is challenging to manage time for reading since they have many tasks to complete at home (FGDA-P3, P4, FGDB-P5, FGDC-P1, and P4). Similarly, limited resources such as library books and access to the internet facility also pose challenges in reading. The findings from this study corroborate an earlier study by Zangmo (2007) that lack of motivation, lack of appropriate materials, lack of role modelling, and child's engagement in reading with parents at home affect the reading culture of the students in Bhutan. Zangmo further pointed out that parents do not take adequate responsibility in building the reading habits of their children, which is crucial because, according to Crivilare (2019), peers and family have a positive influence on the reading habits of the students. Moreover, family influences the reading habit of children significantly when compared to peers (Crivilare, 2019). According to the findings of his study, parents provide smartphones to the students without proper supervision and monitoring. As a result, students deviate their time and concentration away from reading to the services of smartphones. Wangchuk and Zangmo (2019) also agreed that poor parental role is one of the concerns in the development of students' reading habits.

The study by Choeda et al. (2020) regarding the communicative competence of secondary students of Bhutan found that one of the factors affecting effective communication is the reading habits of the students. Similarly, Lee (2014) asserts that a positive attitude and good reading habits will contribute to the development of lifelong readership in students. Furthermore, Owusu and Larson (2014) concluded that good reading habits of the students can enhance their academic achievement. Therefore, a sound reading habit in students is necessary to make them competent to participate meaningfully in a knowledge-based society and to raise their learning outcomes (MoE, 2014). Hence, designing activities and strategies to motivate and encourage students to build a sound reading habits is the responsibility of all teachers and parents.

### **Challenges in reading and literature**

BCSEA results pointed out that students in Class 10 score low marks in Reading and Literature compared to Writing and Language. Students' priorities towards the components of English could determine their performance in the literature paper. Out of the 5549 students, 93% of them felt that grammar was important among all aspects of English learning. Second on the list was reading, followed by writing, dictionary use, and literature at the bottom of the preference list of aspects of English learning (BCSEA, 2013). However, findings from this study show that 76.07% of students enjoy the Reading and Literature component of English, while 23.97% enjoy Writing and Language. Though students enjoy literature, they are unable

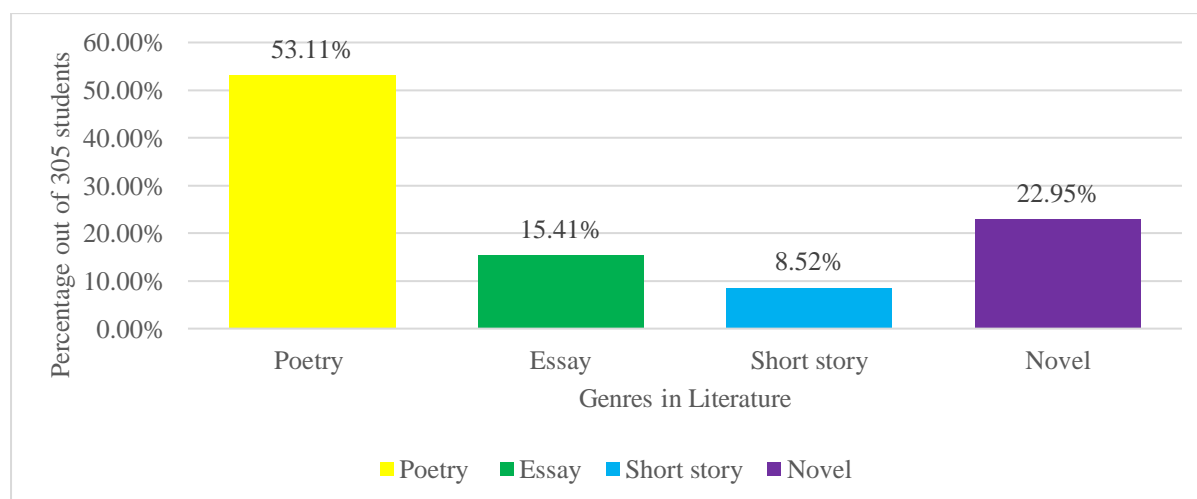


to score high marks in it due to some inherent challenges in teaching and learning. According to the findings of this study, poor reading habits of the students are a major factor affecting students' performance in Reading and Literature. Earlier research has also revealed that poor reading habits of students are a major challenge in teaching and learning literature (Novianti, 2016). The use of social media has adversely affected the culture of reading books. However, the findings from this research suggest that 23% of students involved themselves in reading while only 2.13% were using social media during their leisure time.

Findings from this study revealed that poetry is the most difficult genre for students in Reading and Literature, followed by novels, essays and short stories (see Figure 3). Findings also suggest that limited time to understand the poem in the exam, use of creativity, difficult words, figures of speech, and multiple meanings in the poem make it a difficult genre in the exam. Similarly, Gubair and Eltahir (2018) and Hassan (2018) state that poetry is the most difficult genre in literature for ESL students due to figurative language, cultural differences with the poet, lack of understanding of the relationship between the poem and the poet, and difficulty in understanding themes in the text. An earlier study by BCSEA also pointed out that children in Class 10 were generally weak in poetry. Most of the students could not identify figures of speech in the poem despite the curriculum requirement for the students to learn and know about it (BCSEA, 2014).

**Figure 3**

*Difficult Genre for Students*



Teachers are aware that students get fewer marks in poetry compared to other genres. However, poems and essays are the least discussed genres in Reading and Literature as the text for these two genres is not given from the textbook (unseen) in the exam. Data (see Table 1) shows that teachers do not teach all the prescribed poems and essays considering the examination point of view. As a result, students are not trained adequately in the skills and experiences required to deal with poems.

**Table 1**

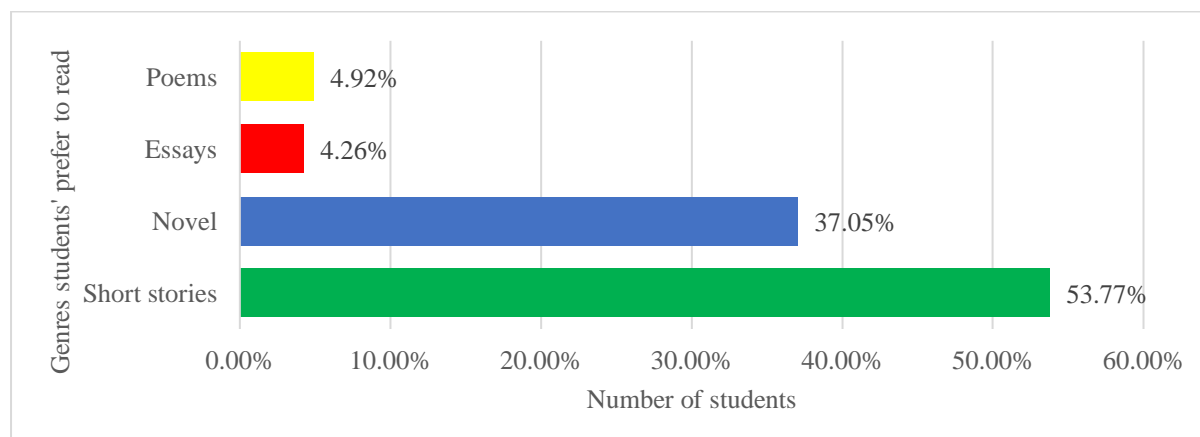
*Students' Opinion on the Selection of Literary Texts (n= 305)*

Items	Mean	SD
Teacher teaches all the short stories from the text	4.56	0.87
Teacher teaches all the poems prescribed in the textbook	2.39	0.77
Teacher teaches all the essays prescribed in the textbook	2.27	0.67
Teacher teaches the supplementary texts	1.89	0.96
Teacher teaches the novel	4.32	0.90

Data (see Figure 4) also reveals that only 4.92% of students prefer to read poems, and 4.26% prefer to read essays, while other students either read short stories or novels.

**Figure 4**

*Students' Preference in Reading*



According to the findings, understanding and interpreting literary texts is challenging for the students. Studies have found that literature texts that are not in the context of learners challenge students as they fail to understand the text and gradually withdraw attention from literature (El Helou, 2010; Yavuz, 2014). Students are not allowed to use dictionaries in the exam, which leads to poor understanding of the texts due to difficult vocabulary, which ultimately affects the responses students write to the questions. Students face challenges in creating new ideas from the text, connecting the text to their lives, analysing the text and understanding the deeper meaning of the text. In the context of literature, 88% of the students would prefer to read literature in the Bhutanese context, and the rest of the students were satisfied with the Western context (BCSEA 2014). However, 15 literary texts (including the

novel) out of 16 in Class 10 are based on Western contexts, and this is one of the reasons for students having difficulty understanding and interpreting them.

Chesterman (1983) studied the problems associated with teaching English literature and concluded that teachers' teaching approach to teaching literature is a challenge in learning literature. Although teachers in this study agreed that they use a variety of strategies while teaching literature to the students, the students opined that most teachers read and explained the texts line by line, which could also have affected the students' understanding of the literary texts. For instance, FGDA-P1 remarked, "Poems are generally taught through lecture methods and completed within a period or two." Answering the competency-based questions in the tests was one of the challenges in securing marks in literature. According to BCSEA (2019), students face difficulty in areas where they are required to form a broad understanding. Similarly, items which demand text interpretation, reflection and evaluation of a part of content are difficult for students, indicating a lack of critical thinking in the students. Findings from this study revealed that students are more comfortable answering objective-type questions in Reading and Literature papers. Students either leave out most of the questions that require higher-order thinking requiring analysing, synthesising, evaluating and applying the ideas of the text, or they copy the exact text from the passage.

Table 2 shows that students' perception of understanding literary texts using higher-order thinking is in the 'neutral' category, with an average mean score of 3.1. Hence, the confidence of students in understanding, analysing, applying and evaluating literary texts which require higher-order thinking is quite low.

**Table 2**

*Students' Perception in Understanding Texts (n= 305)*

Items	Mean	SD
Understanding elements (plot, characters, setting, themes) in literature is difficult for me	2.8	1.19
Analyzing the text is difficult for me	3.1	1.09
Applying the ideas of the text to new context is difficult	3.3	1.06
Evaluating the text is difficult for me	3.3	1.07
Average	3.1	1.10

According to REC (2019), questions in each genre will assess students' competence in understanding the text, interpreting the contents of the text and recognising points of view, ideas, themes and elements. Questions in the literature paper will also test the student's ability in analysing, synthesising and evaluating the text and applying the ideas. It was found that teachers could not provide enough training to the students in terms of answering competency-based questions. However, teachers expressed that students are dependent on teachers for the

explanation of the texts, and they do not try to comprehend the texts by themselves, indicating the absence of ownership in learning.

Teachers shared the concern that students are not adequately exposed to literature, which affects their performance in literature papers. Students do not get enough access to literary text during the initial stages of their schooling, and hence, their experience with literature is limited (Gubair & Eltahir, 2018). Although students study different literature pieces from Class Four, they still face challenges in responding to the literature in Class 10. The challenge in learning literature is due to limited exposure to literature and also partly due to the effectiveness of the teachers in teaching and delivering the lesson in literature (Teachers A, C and D). Similarly, Alfauzan and Hussein (2017) found that one of the challenges in teaching literature is the lack of well-trained and specialised literature teachers. Teachers are unable to simplify complicated literary texts and motivate the students to read and comprehend the texts. Hence, though teachers are trained to teach literature effectively and efficiently to students, they develop complacency in delivering the lessons through creative and engaging teaching methods and fail to arouse the curiosity and motivation of students towards Literature. It is possible that teachers were not efficient enough to motivate students to learn and appreciate literature from an early age.

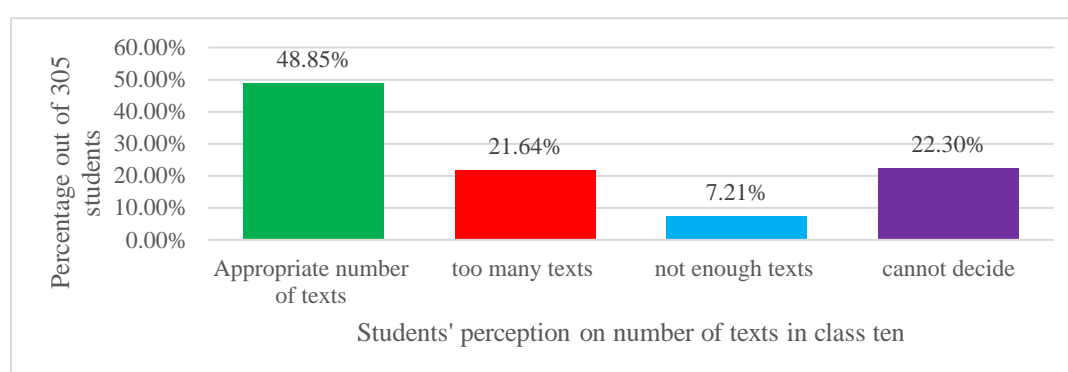
Gubair and Eltahir (2018) also found that students isolate themselves from literature due to the stigma that literature is difficult. The findings from this study reveal that students prefer English Paper I (Writing and Language) to English Paper II (Reading & Literature) as they perceive Literature as more difficult than Writing and Language. The experience of students towards literature from an early age could also contribute to less interest in learning Literature at a later stage of students' lives (Gubair & Eltahir, 2018). Moreover, it is evident in schools that students who are encouraged by teachers and parents to read passionately from an early age tend to perform better than students who have developed reluctance towards reading. Due to a lack of motivation, as pointed out by El-Helou (2010), students' perception regarding literature is only to appear and clear exams. As a result, students, due to a lack of enthusiasm, develop a reluctance in reading and a lack of appreciation towards Literature, and these attitudes of students contributed to making learning Literature difficult (El-Helou, 2010).

Findings suggest that one of the challenges in Reading and Literature is the vast syllabus prescribed by REC. Teachers expressed that it is a burden for students to study all the literary pieces in the allotted class time. Hasim and Din (2009) revealed that students' limited knowledge of literary terms and tools and critical thinking abilities also affect the learning of literature. Hence, if there is not enough literature in the syllabus, it will be difficult to develop the required skills in students to deal with the literature, as fewer texts would mean less exposure to literary terms and thinking abilities. On the contrary, teachers feel that they have to focus on the completion of the syllabus rather than building the skills to examine and respond to different types of texts if they have to teach all the prescribed texts (Teachers B & D). Therefore, teachers skip many poems and essays to gain time for stories and novels (Teachers A, B, D, & E). Similarly, none of the supplementary texts are discussed in the class. Language competency,

differences in culture and limited vocabulary are also identified as a challenge in teaching and learning Literature (Alfauzan & Hussein, 2017; El-Helou, 2010; Gubair & Eltahir, 2018; Novianti, 2016). Therefore, students are required to read and learn a variety of Literature to enhance their language and vocabulary. Moreover, as shown in Figure 1.5, about 48% of student participants felt that the number of texts in Class 10 was appropriate, although about 28% felt that there were too many texts. Hence, it is unlikely that the number of recommended texts for this level has an adverse implication on the performance of students.

**Figure 5**

*Students' Reaction to a Number of Literary Texts in Class Ten (n= 305)*



The current practice suggests that the focus in classroom teaching and learning is more towards the novel and the short stories, whereas essays and poems are the least discussed genres (P3 of FGDA, P2 of FGDD, P4, and P5 of FGDB). The majority of the teachers expressed that they used English textbooks and Teachers' manuals as the primary teaching learning materials and resources in teaching (BCSEA, 2014). BCSEA (2014) further reported that other modes of presenting lessons, such as ICT tools, newspapers, journals, magazines, audio clips and visual aids, were rarely used in teaching literature to the students. Although findings in this study suggested that teachers have used a variety of strategies to teach literature, students' responses suggested that they were not satisfied with the teachers' usage of ICT tools in teaching. PowerPoint presentations and video clips on YouTube were the only two activities related to ICT.

There were varieties of responses related to the study of the novel, "The Giver", in Class 10. Some students felt that the novel is easy to understand, though it is lengthy, while others shared that there are many difficult words in it. While some students believed that they learned values from the novel, others felt that the current novel was not relevant to them. Similarly, many teachers felt that the novel is difficult for the students to comprehend as it has an abstract context. Teachers believed that the novel was beyond the social and cultural context of the students in Bhutan (NEA, 2010). Many teachers also pointed out that they spend too much time on the novel, which affects their engagement in other genres. Many students shared that they leave out the novel while preparing for the exam as it consumes more time. Students also shared

that the novel is mostly taught and discussed through group discussions, presentations and movie clips. However, there were a few students who did not have a pleasant experience learning the novel. They felt bored and sleepy in the class as the teachers read the novel line by line and explained it.

## Conclusion

According to the findings, the key factors responsible for low academic performance in Reading and Literature are the students' poor reading habits and teachers' and parents' insufficient pedagogical practices in motivating and encouraging students to develop the habit. Students' poor reading habits adversely affect the responses they make to the questions in the examination. The findings pointed out that difficulty in managing time for reading due to home tasks and not finding books of students' choice are the challenges in reading. Similarly, teachers skipping most of the poems and essays in the curriculum text from discussion in the class also affected students' performance in these two genres. Striving to complete the syllabus by teachers is also found as a reason for teachers not being able to spend sufficient time developing skills required by students while dealing with Literature. The findings show that the most difficult genre in Literature for Class 10 students is poetry, followed by novels, essays and short stories. However, teachers focused more on short stories and the novel, considering the examination point of view.

This study also found that students' limited exposure to literature at an early age was a challenge in learning literature efficiently. Similarly, students have difficulty understanding the literary texts in the examination. Students are not allowed to use dictionaries during the examination, which affects their understanding of the text and ultimately affects their responses to the questions. Students do not possess adequate skills to respond to competency-based questions, and the development of skills becomes a shared responsibility of teachers and students. Teachers and students believe that students lose marks in extended response questions in the question paper, which is mostly competency-based questions.

Additionally, teachers are aware of the challenges students face in Literature papers. However, the pedagogical practices involve conventional lecture methods, PowerPoint Presentations, and YouTube videos discarding other relevant and engaging teaching and learning tools while teaching Literature to students. Teachers face a challenge in developing critical thinking capabilities and reading habits in students, which adversely affects students' responses to competency-based questions. Due to pressure on completion of prescribed curriculum within the given time frame, consistent practice and mastery of essential skills in Literature for students is seen as a hurdle by teachers.

## Limitations

This study does not cover the response and perception of the students and teachers of the entire country. Hence, the results and findings of this study cannot be generalised to all the schools in the country. Data collection is limited to survey questionnaires and interviews from teachers and students. However, documents such as Class 10 students' answer sheet analysis



could have provided data on responses students write for Literature papers, and students' notebooks could inform about the preparations done by students and teachers in dealing with literature.

There was limited research conducted, particularly in this area, which could have limited the quality of the research. Although BCSEA, NEA and REC have conducted studies on students' performance in English subjects in general, there is no particular focus on the comparison between English I and English II.

### **Recommendations**

Though students and teachers are aware of poor performance in poetry, the study suggests that poems are the least discussed genre in the class by the teachers. Hence, a possible remedy to enhance academic scores in Reading and Literature could be either through a thorough discussion of the poems prescribed by the REC or resources outside the curriculum. Students should be adequately equipped with the skills required to read, understand, interpret and then respond to the different levels of questions on poetry. Therefore, teachers teaching literature to Class 10 students are recommended to provide more experience and exposure to students by discussing more poems and essays with the students.

The study found that the reading habits of the Class 10 students are generally poor. Hence, developing sound reading habits in students by teachers and parents is crucial to enhance performance in Reading and Literature. Reading habit of the students has to be developed from the initial stage of students' schooling. Therefore, the study recommends all teachers concentrate on building the reading habits of the students from the primary level.

The study found that students are not comfortable answering competency-based questions. Hence, if concerned teachers could give training to respond to the questions from students' initial experience with literature, students would enhance their skill in responding to the competency-based questions. This will enable students to score better marks in competency-based questions when they reach the middle and higher secondary levels. Hence, teachers teaching literature to primary-level students are recommended to provide enough practice to the students in responding to competency-based questions. Further, although completion of the syllabus is necessary, teachers are recommended to ensure that students are provided opportunities to practise various skills required while learning Literature and are confident in answering competency-based questions and developing critical thinking skills.

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