

The Effectiveness of Audio-Assisted Reading to Enhance English Reading Comprehension Skills for Bhutanese Students

Jamyang Lhamo* and Nipaporn Sakulwongs

*Corresponding author's email: jamyang.l64@rsu.ac.th

Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Suryadhep Teachers College, Rangsit University, Thailand

Received: Sep 11, 2023

Revised: Nov 4, 2023

Accepted: Nov 14, 2023

Abstract

The research aimed to assess the English reading comprehension skills of fifth-grade Bhutanese students through a comparison before and after implementing the audio-assisted reading strategy. Additionally, it aimed to investigate the extent of their learning satisfaction towards the use of this strategy. The research was carried out in one of the primary schools in Bhutan for a period of one month. The study adopted a quasi-experimental design employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Lesson plans were used as the interventional tools while reading comprehension tests and semi-structured interviews were used for the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. The quantitative data were analyzed using a paired sample t-test, and the qualitative data were analyzed using the thematic analysis technique. The analysis of the pretest and posttest scores revealed that the mean score of the posttest was greater than the mean score of the pretest. The data collected from the interviews revealed that the participants were motivated and satisfied with the use of audio-assisted reading strategy. The study recommends incorporating the audio-assisted reading strategy as an effective reading strategy to enhance the reading comprehension skills of the students.

Keywords: audio-assisted reading, reading comprehension skill, learning satisfaction, Bhutanese students

Introduction

The significance of English has grown substantially, emerging as the predominant language across diverse domains. The rise in the use of English as the medium of instruction globally is driven by the need for students to gain proficiency in various subjects through the English language as they progress in their education (Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2018). English has become the language of instruction in schools, aimed at preparing students for the demands of the modern world (Mahavidyalaya & Reddy, 2016). In the Bhutanese education system, English plays a central role as the primary medium of instruction for 80% of subjects, signifying its crucial status as a major and

compulsory subject (Dendup & Onthanee, 2020). Learning English is vital to foster global competence, expand career prospects, and promote personal development.

English language teaching primarily focuses on reading, writing, listening, and speaking, along with language and grammar. In schools across Bhutan, students are continuously taught these four skills in integration with one another, starting from their pre-primary class. Among these four skills, reading is deemed of utmost significance due to its positive impact on students' academic achievements (Senturk, 2015). Therefore, in Bhutan, reading is allocated the most extensive duration, encompassing 38.8% of the total instructional time of the year (Royal Education Council, 2021) as it constitutes the fundamental skill that empowers students to pursue higher education levels.

Despite significant efforts by the Ministry of Education, including the adoption of a revised curriculum, it was reported that the overall English language proficiency in Bhutan, particularly in reading, has declined over the years (Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment, 2016). The average score for the board examination of class X in 2022 was 62.83% in English, which was the lowest when compared to other subjects like Dzongkha (the national language of Bhutan), Economics, and History ((Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment, 2023). Similarly, the mean score of class VI English in the Competency-Based Assessment Test in 2018 was 46.86%, which was the lowest compared to other subjects. Further analysis of the competency scores revealed 32.73% in reading, 35.83% in writing, 35.73% in language, and 33.66% in speaking ((Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment, 2019). Reading was the lowest score obtained by the students. According to Centre for Educational Research and Development (2009), approximately 89% of teachers in Bhutan employed the traditional approach to instruction, and the traditional approach hindered students' ability to learn independently (Fadel & Trilling, 2009). In teaching reading, the traditional method of instruction primarily teaches students to simply read the printed material without giving them the opportunity to develop reading comprehension skills. Concurrently, technology has become essential and necessary in modern education. The use of technology in the 21st-century classroom allows students to be independent learners both during and after their formal education, whereby students become lifelong learners who can adjust to new technologies and challenges. Consequently, teachers must keep up with the most recent reading pedagogies and offer a variety of reading materials to help students develop their reading comprehension skills.

In Bhutan, a prevalent practice among students is reading texts without fully grasping their meaning. This tendency contributes to insufficient comprehension skills, which in turn lead to unsatisfactory performance in other subjects like mathematics and science. Additionally, the lack of reading comprehension skills has been identified as a primary factor contributing to low performance in other academic subjects (Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment, 2013). As a result, among many reading skills, teaching reading comprehension is essential since it helps students comprehend texts, while also positively influencing their broader learning outcomes. Therefore, to address the aforementioned issues, one successful instructional strategy is the use of audio-assisted

reading (AAR). AAR is a reading strategy where students read along in their books while listening to a fluent reader read aloud on an audio recording. AAR is an effective way to learn a language and helps students to be better readers, which ultimately enhances their comprehension skills (Kirchhoff & Mission, 2022). By implementing AAR, particularly through the use of audiobooks, the enhancement of both reading fluency and comprehension becomes attainable, resulting in an enriched experience while engaging with the written content (Esteves, 2009). This approach not only cultivates linguistic competence but also encourages a deeper connection with the text, fostering a more enjoyable and immersive reading journey. Consequently, the use of the AAR strategy would enhance the English reading comprehension skills of fifth-grade Bhutanese students.

Using digital audiobooks can encourage greater growth in reading fluency and thereby increase reading comprehension (Esteves & Whitten, 2011). Listening to audiobooks gives students the opportunity to access and understand literature that is more complex than what they can read on their own (Kartal & Simsek, 2011). According to Edgar (2022), readers of all grade levels, especially those who are having trouble with reading, greatly benefit from AAR. It is a literacy boost that encourages the growth of reading fluency and comprehension. AAR takes care of all students, inclusive of all struggling readers because this strategy ensures that every student participates fully, providing equal opportunities for critical and creative thinking through better comprehension of the text. AAR has been a well-established approach in education for an extended period, and multiple studies have revealed its effectiveness in improving students' reading fluency and comprehension skills. However, further research is needed to confirm the previous findings in the Bhutanese context. Therefore, this study was designed to fill this gap and to assess the English reading comprehension skills of fifth-grade Bhutanese students through a comparison before and after implementing AAR. Additionally, it aimed to investigate the learning satisfaction of fifth-grade Bhutanese students towards the use of this strategy.

Research Objectives

1. To compare the English reading comprehension skills of fifth-grade Bhutanese students before and after using AAR.
2. To investigate the learning satisfaction of fifth-grade Bhutanese students towards AAR.

Conceptual Framework

The study consisted of independent and dependent variables. The independent variable was the use of AAR while the dependent variables were reading comprehension skills and students' learning satisfaction towards AAR (see Figure 1).

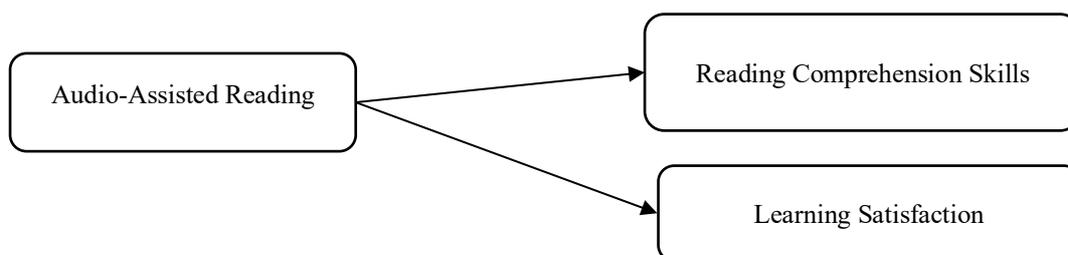
Literature Review

Audio-Assisted Reading

AAR is a reading strategy that uses audio recordings of texts to enhance reading comprehension and fluency (Edgar, 2022). Kuhn and Stahl (2003) defined AAR as a reading strategy in which students read a text while simultaneously listening to a fluent reader reading the text. In this study, AAR refers to a reading strategy where students listen to audiobooks read by the native readers and then read along with the audiobooks. Wagar (2016) asserted that in second language learning, reading and listening to text is widely accepted as a useful strategy to promote comprehension. This strategy gives teachers the option of creating their own recordings or using ones that have already been pre-recorded and read by proficient readers. In this study, the researcher downloaded the audiobooks and used the audio recordings read by the native readers in reading and comprehending poems.

Figure 1

Illustration of the Independent and Dependent Variables



AAR stands as a beneficial approach for a wide spectrum of readers, catering to individuals facing learning challenges, English language learners, and those striving to enhance their reading skills (Manning, 2013). The effectiveness of this strategy relies on various fundamental principles that enhance the learning process. Professional audiobook narrations provide a well-paced and expressive reading experience, familiarizing readers with language rhythms and intonations. Adding text that is synchronized with audiobooks helps readers in tracking the words visually as they listen, leading to better word identification and an overall comprehension of the text (Chang & Millett, 2015). By combining audio with other sensory cues, such as visual aids or tactile materials, a multisensory learning experience enhances understanding and retention (Munoz et al., 2016). Reading aloud while listening reinforces pronunciation and fluency, and subsequent comprehension checks ensure a comprehension of the text (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003). It is crucial to start with simpler texts and gradually introduce more challenging materials to enhance reading skills. Prioritizing audiobook accessibility is of utmost importance, and this involves making sure that the platforms and equipment used are not only readily available but also user-friendly. This ensures that readers can engage with audio-assisted materials effortlessly, resulting in a smooth and enjoyable reading experience. It is crucial to recognize that students learn and progress at varying paces. While implementing audio-assisted reading, teachers

should establish a nurturing atmosphere and exercise patience as readers move forward in their learning journey at their own individual speeds. Consistently incorporating audio-assisted reading into one's routine is crucial for the long-term development and nurturing of reading skills.

When implementing an AAR strategy, several sequential steps should be considered (“Reading Rockets,” 2013). Initially, it is vital to choose a text suitable for the students' reading level. Following this, teachers procure the audio version of the chosen text. Subsequently, students engage in the reading process by listening to the audio while simultaneously following the printed copy of the text, facilitated by the teacher playing the audio reading. To reinforce the connection between spoken and written words and improve reading fluency and comprehension, students read aloud along with the audio, thereby aiding their understanding. Repeated reading and listening-while-reading are two significant strategies that enhance students' fluency and comprehension (Amin, 2022; Cohen, 2011). Similarly, in AAR repetition plays a significant role: if students encounter challenging sections, they should replay those segments multiple times and read along until they feel comfortable reading the text without the audio. After completing the reading, reflection becomes an integral part of the strategy. Reflective reading acts as a significant bridge that combines new information with one's existing knowledge, playing a vital role in enhancing reading comprehension (Asghari & Nourdad, 2017). Therefore, in the post-reading phase of AAR, students are prompted to summarize the text's key points and contemplate the emotional impact or lessons acquired. This reflective exercise significantly strengthens their understanding and retention of the text over an extended period.

AAR, as noted by Spear-Swerling (2010), proves valuable for enhancing reading outcomes, especially for students facing reading difficulties or those learning English as a second language. AAR engages multiple senses, fostering fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary development, offering valuable support for students. AAR exposes students to correct pronunciation, intonation, and phrasing, which enhances students' reading abilities, improving fluency and overall comprehension (Manning, 2013). Additionally, Pluck (2012) states AAR boosts the confidence and competence of struggling readers, ultimately enhancing both listening and reading skills and such success contributes to students' learning satisfaction (Kirchhoff & Mission, 2022). When students engage with expressive and fluent readers through audiobooks, their exposure to literature broadens, fostering a greater appreciation for reading and literature. AAR introduces a fresh learning environment, as highlighted by Asrimawati and Margana (2020). Listening to audiobooks requires students to simultaneously focus on the auditory elements of words and their meanings, therefore, Enderson (2022) states AAR is a cognitive exercise that enhances comprehension. The intensive processing of information during audio engagement emphasizes the importance of fluent reading in promoting active listening. This, in turn, transcends passive hearing and significantly aids students in better understanding text material. Active listening thus plays a pivotal role in improving reading and reading comprehension skills. Additionally, AAR can be readily applied in diverse settings, requiring minimal resources. This includes both classroom

and home environments, and it is adaptable to a range of text genres, encompassing fiction and non-fiction.

Audio-Assisted Reading Using Audiobooks

Audiobooks, digital text recordings meant for listening, have been found to be a valuable tool in education. Anisah (2018) discovered that incorporating audiobooks into the study of informational texts effectively enhances students' reading abilities. Similarly, Wagar (2016) suggests that audiobooks play a significant role in improving the comprehension skills of those students learning English as a second language.

According to Vygotsky's social-cultural theory, learning should be scaffolded, or guided by someone more skilled in the particular skill being learned. This idea aligns with the concept of AAR, where audiobooks act as scaffolding, bridging the gap between the proficient model and the students. The precise pronunciation and intonation in audiobooks provide a supportive framework for students' reading comprehension (Gorsuch et al., 2016). Audiobooks offer substantial benefits for students struggling with reading, as they can follow the printed text while listening to the audio reading. In a broader sense, audiobooks assist struggling readers in transitioning from basic decoding to comprehensive understanding (Friedland et al., 2017). Reading with the aid of audio helps students understand complex ideas more easily and become familiar with vocabulary and language patterns that are not typically used in everyday conversations. Consequently, this enables students to gain a deeper understanding of how books are structured and fosters the development of their self-directed reading abilities.

Reading Comprehension Skill

Reading is the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print (Afriazi et al., 2019). Reading with comprehension is the act of understanding what they read, and when students are able to grasp the content of written text, they extract meaning from them (Albert et al., 2017). Therefore, proficient reading skills are crucial for students, as they form the foundation of learning and are essential in today's constantly evolving world (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). Students who read for a variety of purposes will succeed in school and learn more, as reading opens up new worlds and opportunities for them (Marzuki, 2019). Through reading, students gain a better understanding of themselves and the world around them by being exposed to diverse viewpoints and perspectives, which fosters the development of fresh outlooks on life.

Reading is a key component of the English language, and it plays a significant role in language acquisition for ESL students (Ibrahim et al., 2016). When students read more, they learn languages more quickly. Reading enables students to achieve their maximum academic capabilities and become lifelong learners. However, in Bhutan, several factors negatively impact a student's reading habits, such as insufficient access to suitable reading materials, a lack of motivation to read, and limited support

from parents (Gyeltshen, 2021). Fostering a culture of reading is crucial to equipping students with the essential skills for success in both their educational journey and future endeavors.

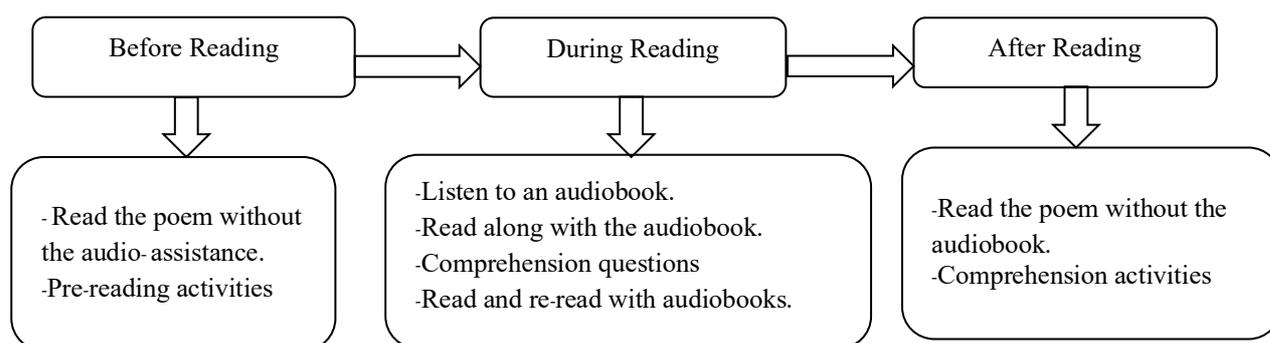
Reading comprehension is understanding, evaluating, and applying knowledge and concepts acquired through dialogue between the author and reader (Anisah, 2018). Reading comprehension requires effective and efficient reading ability because comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading. Students who read with greater comprehension can engage with the text and become active readers. They will also have much deeper understanding of the language, which helps them communicate more precisely and write better in English. Factors like motivation, age, learning preferences, and individual traits can impact reading comprehension skills. Often, English as a Second Language (ESL) learners encounter challenges in independently reading and understanding text, which subsequently affects their academic achievements.

Use of Poetry as a Learning Material in ESL Reading Comprehension

Poetry is a literary genre that emphasizes language and structure to express feelings and concepts uniquely (Merentek & Tamara, 2019). Poetry holds a crucial function in elevating the reading proficiencies of young students while also enhancing the pleasure of reading. Therefore, a good poem has a significant impact on the literary development of young readers, inspiring them to nurture their creativity and evolve as imaginative writers. Prior to the start of the lessons, audio recordings of these poems were acquired from the internet (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Framework for the Use of Audiobooks



In this study, the researcher taught four different poems from the prescribed fifth-grade English Textbook of Bhutan, and the lessons were developed into three segments: pre-reading, where students engaged with the poem without audio assistance; during reading, where students listened to audiobooks and then read along aloud with them; and post reading, where students read the poems independently and in groups and subsequently completed comprehension activities. In pursuit of enhancing comprehension of the poems, the researcher offered students a range of class activities and assignments, catering to individual, paired, and group settings.

Related Research

Chang and Millett (2015) examined the impact of AAR on reading rates and comprehension among 64 EFL students. Their study concluded that this strategy surpassed silent reading in enhancing both reading speed and comprehension. Similarly, Dawd et al. (2020) investigated the role of poetry in enhancing students' reading comprehension. Their findings revealed that incorporating poetry in the ESL classroom can effectively improve students' reading comprehension skills.

Similarly, the cumulative research of Wagar (2016), Anisah (2018), Christensen et al. (2013), Hajar and Rahman (2020), and Tusmagambet (2020) highlights the positive impact of audiobooks on various aspects of reading. These studies collectively affirmed that audiobooks enhance reading comprehension skills and enjoyment, catering to diverse age groups and grade levels. The implementation of audiobooks as a pedagogical tool has proven effective in enhancing reading abilities, fluency, and motivation, amplifying positive attitudes towards reading across different educational contexts.

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. Compared to purely quantitative or qualitative approaches, mixed-method research provides a more varied set of techniques, allowing researchers to comprehend research problems in a variety of contexts (Ozturk & Sahin, 2019). As such, by incorporating the mixed method, the study aimed to compare the English reading comprehension skills of fifth-grade Bhutanese students before and after using AAR, and to investigate the learning satisfaction of fifth-grade Bhutanese students towards the use of this strategy. For the collection of quantitative data, the researcher administered pretest before using AAR and posttest after the lessons with intervention were completed. The researcher used semi-structured interview to collect the qualitative data at the end of the study to investigate the learning satisfaction of the students.

The research was conducted during the academic year 2023 at one of the primary schools under Tsirang district, which is located in the southern part of Bhutan. It is situated in the rural area, approximately 17 kilometers away from the main town. As of 2023 statistics, the school has 170 students with nine teachers. The school has grades from pre-primary to six. In Bhutan, most grade levels consist of only one or two sections, and each section consists of a heterogeneous group of students with an almost equal number of boys and girls.

The participants consisted of 30 fifth-grade students with an equal split of 15 girls and 15 boys. Since the school where the researcher conducted the study had only one section of fifth-grade students, the entire fifth-grade students became the research participants. The research participants were of mixed gender and had varied learning abilities, falling within the age range of 11 to 14 years.

Table 1

Demographic Details of the Research Participants

Age	Number of boys	Number of girls	Total
11	4	5	9
12	5	5	10
13	4	3	7
14	2	2	4
Total	15	15	30

Research Instruments**Quantitative data collection instrument.***Pretest and posttest.*

To compare the English reading comprehension skills of fifth-grade Bhutanese students before and after using AAR, the researcher conducted a reading comprehension test with 20 multiple-choice questions and 10 short-answer questions for a total of 30 marks. The reading comprehension test questions were developed by the researcher and the questions were created following the guidelines of the Bhutan Council for School Examination Assessment (BCSEA) and Bloom's Taxonomy. A pretest was conducted before the intervention and a posttest was conducted after the intervention. In order to ensure consistent evaluation, the researcher used the same test items for both the pretest and posttest.

Qualitative data collection instrument.*Semi-structured interview.*

To investigate the learning satisfaction of fifth-grade Bhutanese students toward the use of AAR with audiobooks, the researcher conducted a face-to-face interview with all students after the study. The researcher used a set of six questions for the interview and the questions were developed by the researcher. The researcher posed the questions in English and the students had the choice of responding in English or Dzongkha. Each student's response was audio-recorded and subsequently translated and transcribed into English by the researcher. The collected data were analyzed using the thematic analysis technique.

Validity and reliability.*Validity.*

The research instruments' validity, including lesson plans, test items, and semi-structured interview questions, underwent validation by three experts: one from Rangsit University, Thailand, and two experienced English teachers from Bhutan. The Item Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to determine the instruments' validity, which helped to determine whether the items were aligned with the research objectives. All the instruments for this study were validated and rated +1, which indicated that all the items were valid for the study.

Reliability.

To assess the reliability of the reading comprehension test questions, the researcher conducted a reliability test involving 30 sixth-grade students from the same school. The test consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions and 10 short-answer questions, totaling 30 marks. The Kuder-Richardson formula (KR-20) was used to compute the reliability coefficient of the test items. The reliability coefficient for the test was 0.78, which revealed that the test items were reliable. As a result, all the test items were used for the data collection.

Lesson plans.

The researcher prepared four lesson plans of 90 minutes (1 lesson plan = 2 sessions) each to teach four poems from the prescribed English curriculum textbook for fifth-grade Bhutanese students. The researcher conducted two 90-minute sessions per week to teach each poem. Altogether, the researcher taught eight sessions for a period of one month to the sample group. Over the course of one month, the researcher successfully completed teaching all four poems and assessed the students' comprehension through a posttest.

Each lesson plan was structured into three sections: pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading. In the pre-reading phase, students acquired vocabulary, explored meanings, and constructed sentences. They then read the poems without audio assistance. During the reading phase, students listened to fluent readers reading the poems, followed by revisiting the text while listening. They practiced reading the poem aloud along with the audio until they could read it competently without assistance. In the post-reading phase, students engaged in various comprehension activities, both individually and in groups. At the end of the lessons, they received grades and feedback.

The researcher selected four different poems from the fifth-grade English textbook of Bhutan, and the poems were 'My Mother Saw a Dancing Bear', 'The Owl and The Pussy Cat', 'Jimmy Jet and His TV Set' and 'Mum, Dad and Me'. The selection of these poems was based on the students' interests and thematic structure.

Data Collection Procedures

Approval and ethical consideration.

The researcher obtained prior approval from the Research and Development Institute of Rangsit University, Thailand. This approval was subsequently forwarded to the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) in Bhutan. After obtaining approval from these authorities, the researcher then sought consent from the school principal, class teacher, and subject teachers. Following this, the data collection procedures were initiated.

Participants' consent approval.

As the research participants were below the legal age of 18, the researcher requested the parents to sign on their behalf after reading and understanding the purpose of the consent letter. The data collected was kept confidential at all times, and the participants' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained through the use of number codes.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis.

The data obtained from the reading comprehension test (pretest and posttest) were analyzed through comparative analysis technique. A comparative statistical analysis using paired sample t-test was drawn by computing the mean, standard deviation, and significance value (*p*).

Qualitative data analysis.

In order to investigate the learning satisfaction of the participants towards AAR, a semi-structured interview was conducted to gather data. This approach provided the researcher with a more profound understanding of the participants' contentment, perspectives, and viewpoints. Consequently, the researcher analyzed and identified themes using thematic analysis technique.

Research Results

This section delves into the findings of the study. These findings revolve around two key aspects: the reading comprehension test, which includes both pretest and posttest data, and the semi-structured interview. The reading comprehension test was analyzed using comparative analysis technique, while the semi-structured interview was subjected to thematic analysis.

Results of Quantitative Data – Reading Comprehension Test

The data collected from both the pretest and posttest revealed a significant increase in posttest scores compared to pretest scores. This indicates a substantial improvement in students' comprehension skills following the introduction of AAR with audiobooks. Overall, it indicates an improvement in students' learning achievement as a result of implementing AAR.

Table 2

Comparison Between Pretest and Posttest of the Sample Group

Group	Pretest		Posttest		Mean Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> -Value
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD			
Sample group	18.75	2.84	25.18	2.57	6.43	-6.195	.01

According to table 2, the posttest mean score of the sample group ($\bar{x} = 25.18$) was significantly higher than its pretest mean score ($\bar{x} = 18.75$), with a mean difference of 6.43. This increased average score emphasizes the effectiveness of implementing AAR with audiobooks. Furthermore, the *p*-value for the study was .01, indicating the statistical significance of the test. The standard deviations for the pretest and posttest were 2.84 and 2.57, respectively. Collectively, these scores revealed the effectiveness of AAR in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of fifth-grade Bhutanese students.

Results of Qualitative Data - Semi-Structured Interview

After the intervention, the participants were interviewed to assess their level of satisfaction with the use of AAR. Each participant responded to six questions, and their responses were recorded in audio format, maintaining the integrity of their original responses. Subsequently, the data was translated into English, transcribed, and then subjected to coding and thematic analysis, leading to the identification of four themes: shift in learning, improved comprehension, motivating learners, and learning satisfaction.

It was evident that the implementation of AAR represented a significant shift in learning. In the past, students were not acquainted with this strategy, and this study served as their initial exposure to AAR in their educational journey. During the interview, all students expressed that they had never listened to an audiobook before, and it was their first experience learning to read using this strategy. Therefore, the data revealed that AAR is truly a transformative change in the learning journey of fifth-grade Bhutanese students. A participant shared, "I am listening to an audiobook for the first time. In the past, we relied solely on traditional methods of reading, either by listening to our teacher's reading or reading ourselves. It introduced me to a new way of acquiring knowledge." (Participant no. 12)

A significant portion of the students asserted that their comprehension of the poems improved, notably due to the guidance they received by listening to native readers. Exposure to audiobooks enabled them to grasp accurate word and phrase pronunciation, thereby fostering the development of both reading fluency and pronunciation abilities. Consequently, this enhancement facilitated better comprehension of the poems.

Listening to a poem being read by native speakers gave me additional guidance. It helped me to read the poems with correct pronunciation, intonation, and expression, which helped me to understand the poems better. (Participant no.16)

This reading strategy was helpful for struggling readers like me. Audio reading provided me with additional support and made my reading experience more immersive. The combination of audio and visual text helped me understand the poems better. (Participant no. 24)

The majority of the participants expressed significant enthusiasm for learning through AAR. All participants shared their desire to continue using this strategy for their learning endeavors. Additionally, they conveyed a keen interest in utilizing the strategy to explore diverse literary genres. Since this strategy had a positive impact on their reading abilities, they shared their willingness to recommend it to their friends as well.

I would like to continue using this reading strategy, as it helped me to read and understand the poems better. I would love to read other literary genres like short stories and essays using this strategy. It would be truly exciting. (Participant no. 11)

In the future, I would like to read other literary genres using this strategy. Reading short stories using this strategy would be fun. (Participant no. 20)

All participants shared that they enjoyed the lessons because they were different from their usual reading activities. The inclusion of audio elements heightened their interest and involvement throughout the lessons. The experience of listening to the audio reading of the poems was both entertaining and enjoyable. Some slow readers mentioned that reading along with the audiobooks was particularly enjoyable, boosting their self-confidence in reading. They appreciated the interactive nature of the lessons, which helped them to hone their pronunciation and fluency skills, subsequently enhancing their comprehension of the poems. Therefore, it was evident that the utilization of AAR was well-received and yielded favorable responses from the participants.

I loved the lessons. Listening to the poem read aloud helped me understand the pronunciation and meaning of difficult words. It made me feel more confident in my reading and improved my comprehension too. (Participant no.15)

As a slow reader, it was so much fun reading along with the audiobooks. I found it easier to follow the poem and understand the meaning. It also helped me to improve my pronunciation and fluency. (Participant no.30)

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that the use of AAR with audiobooks effectively enhanced the English reading comprehension skills of fifth-grade Bhutanese students. Additionally, the students expressed a high level of satisfaction with this strategy. To further support these findings, the following sections provide a comprehensive explanation of both students' learning achievement and their satisfaction with the use of AAR.

Reading Comprehension Skill of Bhutanese Students

The study showed significant improvements in students' learning achievements as evidenced by a substantial increase in posttest mean scores compared to pretest mean scores. The findings align with previous research by Chang and Millet (2015), emphasizing the effectiveness of AAR with audiobooks in enhancing reading rates and comprehension. The study also resonates with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, highlighting the importance of scaffolding and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Fani & Ghaemi, 2011). In this study, audiobooks acted as scaffolds, improving comprehension through correct pronunciation, intonation, and expression, consistent with Anisah's research (2018). Exposure to audio materials led to improved word comprehension and usage, aligning with Hajar and Rahman's findings (2020). The integration of auditory and visual inputs contributed to better interpretation and critical thinking. Similar results were observed in the study by Dawd et al. (2020) emphasizing the effectiveness of poetry in enhancing reading comprehension skills in ESL students. The immersive quality of audiobooks engaged students by combining auditory and visual components, establishing a profound connection with poems.

Additionally, Tusmagambet's research (2020) supported the idea that engaging with audiobooks improved reading fluency among students. The study's outcomes revealed that audiobooks provided students with precise pronunciation and a sense of natural reading rhythm, contributing to the refinement of their pronunciation abilities and overall reading fluency. Students enjoyed the lessons, attributing their improved reading skills to AAR, which served as a model for correct pronunciation, intonation, and expression.

Learning Satisfaction

The introduction of AAR through audiobooks was well-received by students, resulting in increased satisfaction and a deeper connection with the text, making their reading experiences more enjoyable and immersive (Esteves, 2009). The approach was found to improve linguistic competence and foster positive attitudes among students, where they found it captivating and motivating. Listening to audiobooks created vivid mental imagery and sustained engagement, ultimately enhancing comprehension, aligning with findings from Wagar's study (2016). Esteves (2007) reported that AAR improved word recognition and comprehension while generating enthusiasm for continued use, particularly at-home reading practice. Similarly, Fisher et al. (2005) found that AAR with authentic

children's literature captured students' interest, motivating them to read more. The positive impact on reading and comprehension skills served as an incentive to use the strategy for various literary genres and to recommend it to friends, consistent with Tuszmagambet's study (2020).

The use of audiobooks proved invaluable for struggling readers, enabling them to follow and process text effectively while enhancing pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. The multisensory nature of AAR provided an immersive and enjoyable learning experience, building confidence and fostering a positive attitude towards reading, corroborating the findings of Christensen et al. (2013). Consequently, students' reflections revealed that the utilization of AAR with audiobooks brought them a sense of fulfillment in their learning experience.

Conclusion

The findings from the study on the implementation of AAR with audiobooks revealed significant improvements in reading comprehension skills and overall learning satisfaction for fifth-grade Bhutanese students. By seamlessly integrating auditory and visual elements, students were immersed in a captivating learning journey that greatly heightened their understanding of poems. Furthermore, this strategy not only helped the good readers but also addressed the needs of all struggling readers, creating an inclusive learning platform. Therefore, the study recommends incorporating AAR as an effective reading strategy to enhance the reading comprehension skills of the students. As education continues to evolve, embracing innovative strategies like AAR with audiobooks can pave the way for more holistic and impactful learning experiences across the spectrum of learners.

Limitations and Future Research

The study was carried out with a sample size of 30 fifth-grade students in Bhutan, which could potentially restrict the applicability of the findings to other fifth-grade students both within Bhutan and beyond. To address this limitation, it is recommended that future researchers consider a more extensive sample size and a longer research duration to capture a more diverse range of perspectives on the effectiveness of AAR. Due to time constraint, the content of the study was limited to just four poems from the fifth-grade English Textbook. Consequently, the results of this research may not be applicable to other literary genres. Subsequent researchers may consider conducting a similar study to investigate its effectiveness in teaching different literary genres. Furthermore, this study focused exclusively on the efficacy of AAR with a single audio tool (audiobooks) which limits the generalizability of the outcomes to diverse audio tools. Therefore, it is recommended that similar studies be undertaken employing alternative audio tools.

References

- Afriazi, R., Arasuli, A., & Siregar, N. O. (2019). The correlation between reading strategies and reading comprehension achievement of the sixth semester in English education study program of Bengkulu University. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literacy (JALL)*, 3(2), 122–132
- Albert, A., Herlindayana, H., & Sahlan, S. (2017). The effect of flipped classrooms on students' reading. *Journal of Language Education and Educational Technology*, 2(1). <http://doi.org/10.33772/jleet.v2i1.6699>
- Amin, A. A (2022). Using repeated-reading and listening while reading via text to speech apps. In developing fluency and comprehension. *World Journal of English Language*, 12(1), 211. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v12n1p211>
- Anisah, (2018). *Applying Audiobooks Media to Build Up Students in Reading Comprehension*. https://digilibadmin.unismuh.ac.id/upload/1156-Full_Text.pdf
- Asrimawati, I. F., & Margana, M. (2020). Using reading while listening to develop students' receptive skills: A review literature. *Journal of English Educators Society*, 5(2), 213–218. <https://doi.org/10.121070;jees.v5i2.840>
- Asghari, R., & Nourdad, N. (2017). The effect of reflective reading on reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 6(6), 267. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.6n.6p.267>
- BCSEA. (2013). *National education assessment*: Thimphu, Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment.
- BCSEA. (2016). *Pupil performance report 2017*. Thimphu: Bhutan, Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment.
- BCSEA. (2019). *Education in Bhutan: Findings from Bhutan's experience in PISA for development*. Thimphu: National Project Center.
- BCSEA. (2023, February 6). *Bhutan Certificate of Secondary Education (BCSE) 2022 Examination Results*. <http://www.bcsea.bt/uploads/Announcements./Press Release 1675666880.pdf>
- Centre for Educational Research and Development. (2009). *RABSEL, The Educational Journal*, 12, 1–110. <https://www.pce.edu.bt/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Rabsel-Volume XII. Pdf>
- Chang, A. C. S., & Millett, S. (2015). Improving reading rates and comprehension through audio-assisted extensive reading for beginner learners. *System*, 52, 91–102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2015.05.003>
- Christensen, R., Huffman, S., Mcallister, T., & Whittingham, J. (2013). *Use of Audiobooks in a School Library and Positive Effects of Struggling Readers' Participation in a Library-Sponsored Audiobook Club*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1012831.pdf>
- Cohen, J. (2011). Building Fluency through the Repeated Reading Method. *English Teaching Forum*, (3), 49, 20-27. http://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/49_3_4_cohen-1.pdf

- Dawd, L., Dubi, Y. B., Kebede, G., & Yifru, K. T. (2020). The role of poetry in learners' EFL reading comprehension: Mekdela Preparatory and Secondary School in Focus. *Journal for Language Research and Professionals of English Language Teaching*, 4(22), 1–4. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3741726
- Dendup, T., & Onthanee, A. (2020). Effectiveness of cooperative learning on English communicative ability of 4th grade students in Bhutan. *International Journal of Instruction*, 13(1), 255–266. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2020.13117a>
- Doiz, A., & Lasagabaster, D. (2018). Teachers' and students' second language motivational self-system in English-medium instruction: a qualitative approach. *Wiley Online Library*, 52(3). <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.452>
- Edgar, L. (2022, April 5). Back to Basics: Audio-Assisted Reading [Web log message]. <https://decoda.ca/back-to-basics-audio-assisted-reading/>
- Enderson, E. (2022, January 31). Say It Loud: 5 Benefits of Reading Aloud in Your Classroom [Web log message]. <https://www.carnegielearning.com/blog/5-benefits-reading-aloud/>
- Esteves, K. J. (2007). Audio-Assisted Reading with Digital Audiobooks for Upper Elementary Students with Reading Disabilities [Doctoral dissertation, Western Michigan University]. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/304799113?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true>
- Esteves, K. (2009). Audiobooks for struggling readers: using audio-assisted reading in a balanced literacy program. In *Scholarship and Professional Work–Education*. https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/coe_papers/73/
- Esteves, K., & Whitten, E. (2011). Assisted reading with digital audiobooks for students with reading disabilities. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts Language Arts*, 51(1). https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1021&context=reading_horizons
- Fadel, C., & Trilling, B. (2009). *21st century skills: learning for life in our times*. San Francisco, CA: Islamic University.
- Fani, T., & Ghaemi, F. (2011). Implications of vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) in teacher education: ZPTD and self-scaffolding. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 29(29), 1549–1554. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.11.396>
- Fisher, D., Flood, J., & Lapp, D. (2005). Neurological Impress Method PLUS. *Reading Psychology*, 26(2), 147–160. [Doi.org/10.1080/02702710590930500](https://doi.org/10.1080/02702710590930500)
- Friedland, A., Gilman, M., & Johnson, M. (2017). Does Reading-While-Listening Enhance Students' Reading Fluency? *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(7), 82–95. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1137555.pdf>
- Gorsuch, G., Lems, K., Rosszell, R., & Taguchi, E., (2016). Scaffolding in L2 Reading: How Repetition and an Auditory Model Help Readers. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 28(1), 101–117. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1098663>

- Gyeltshen, D. (2021). Why Aren't Children in Bhutan Reading? *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 22(3), 4–9. https://www.academia.edu/72452110/Why_Aren't_Children_in_Bhutan_Reading
- Hajar, I., & Rahman, A. (2020). The Effect of Audiobook on Reading Comprehension of the Eleventh Grade Students of SMA Negeri 2 Buru. *ELT Worldwide: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 7(2), 104. <https://doi.org/10.26858/eltww.v7i2.14931>
- Hoffman, J. V., & Rasinski, T. V. (2003). Oral reading in the school literacy curriculum. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 38(4), 510–522. <https://doi.org/10.1598/rrq.38.4.5>
- Ibrahim, E. H. E., Muhamad, A. J., & Sarudin, I. (2016). The Relationship between Vocabulary Size and Reading Comprehension of ESL Learners. *English Language Teaching*, 9(2), 116. [doi:10.5539/elt.v9n2p116](https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n2p116)
- Kartal, G., & Simsek, G. (2011). The use of audiobooks in EFL classes to improve reading and listening skills. In *2nd International Conference on New Trends in Education and their Implications* (pp. 27–29). <https://docplayer.net/21569531-The-use-of-audiobooks-in-efl-classes-to-improve-reading-and-listening-skills.html>
- Kirchhoff, C., & Mission, M. (2022). Audio-assisted extensive reading: learners' experience and attitudes. *The Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal*, 22(2), 1–12. <https://www.readingmatrix.com/files/29-6olhvphk.pdf>
- Kuhn, M. R., & Stahl, S. A. (2003). Fluency: A review of developmental and remedial practices. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(1), 3–21.
- Manning, A. (2013). *Ways to Improve Reading Fluency: The Addition of Podcasting and Tape-Assisted Reading to Readers Theatre*. <https://www.scss.tcd.ie/publications/theses/diss/2013/tcd-scscs-dissertation-2013-073.pdf>
- Marzuki, A. G. (2019). The implementation of SQ3R method to develop students' reading skill on islamic texts in EFL class in Indonesia. *Register Journal*, 12(1), 49–61. <https://doi.org/10.18326/rgt.v12i1.49-61>
- Merentek, R. & Tamara, M. (2019). Improving Poetry Reading Skills in Grade V Elementary School Students using the Emotive Approach. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, 5(5), 147-158. https://www.ijicc.net/images/vol5iss5/5511_Tamara_2019_E_R.pdf
- Munoz, C., Spada, N., & Tragant, E., (2016). Maximizing Young Learners' Input: An Intervention Program. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 72(2), 234–257. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.2942>
- Ozturk, G., & Sahin, M. D. (2019). Mixed method research: theoretical foundations, designs and its use in research. *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*, 6(2), 301–310. <https://doi.org/10.33200/ijcer.574002>
- Pluck, M. (2012). Providing assistance for struggling readers with audio-assisted reading

- programs. *Research-based Best Practices 2nd ed.* (pp. 156–171). The Guilford Press.
- Reading Rockets. (2013). Classroom Reading Strategies. Audio-Assisted Reading. <https://www.readingrockets.org/classroom/classroom-strategies/audio-assisted-reading>
- Mahavidyalaya, P., & Reddy, M. S. (2016). Importance of English language in today's world. *International Journal of Academic Research*, 3, 179-184. [http://ijar.org.in/stuff/issues/v3-i4\(2\)/v3-i4\(2\)-a021.pdf](http://ijar.org.in/stuff/issues/v3-i4(2)/v3-i4(2)-a021.pdf)
- Royal Education Council. (2021). *Curriculum guide for teachers*. Thimphu, Bhutan: Ministry of Education.
- Senturk, B. (2015). EFL Turkish University Students' Attitudes and Motivation Towards Reading in English. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 199, 704–712. <https://cyberleninka.org/article/n/569145/viewer>
- Spear-Swerling, L. (2010). *Learning Disabilities in English Language Learners*. <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/learning-disabilities-english-language-learners>
- Tusmagambet, B. (2020). Effects of Audiobooks on EFL Learners' Reading Development: Focus on Fluency and Motivation. *English Teaching*, 75(2), 41–67. <https://doi.org/10.15858/engtea.75.2.202006.41>
- Wagar, C. (2016). *The Impact of Audiobooks on Reading Comprehension and Enjoyment* (Master's Thesis, Columbia Basin College). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304674071_The_Impact_of_Audiobooks_on_Reading_Comprehension_and_Enjoyment#pf12

About the Authors

Jamyang Lhamo is an English teacher at Doonglagang Primary school, Tsirang, Bhutan. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Primary English from Paro College of Education, Bhutan, and is presently pursuing her master's degree at Rangsit University in Thailand. She is focused on researching vocabulary learning and teaching strategies, with the aim of improving reading comprehension, particularly in the context of teaching English as a second language.

Nipaporn Sakulwongs is the program director for the Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction at Rangsit University in Thailand. She is an assistant professor in the field of education and is actively involved in research pertaining to curriculum and instruction, with a substantial body of published work in these domains.