

# RAGAMALA ARTS INTEGRATION: ENHANCING EMOTIONAL LITERACY IN PROSPECTIVE ENGLISH TEACHERS

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## Abstract

English teachers should focus on developing language skills. They also need to equip the students with skills to understand complexities of feelings and to express it during interpersonal communication. Prospective teachers must receive training to achieve this goal. It is possible through miniature paintings which depict women's status at different times. One effective method involves using miniature paintings to portray the historical status of women, fostering empathy towards them. Research shows that Ragamala paintings, a form of Indian art, was influenced by the everyday experiences of women. It also depicted women as the epitome of all emotions. Training English prospective teachers to interpret these paintings can enhance students' emotional vocabulary, which is crucial for effective interpersonal communication. The unique feature of Ragamala paintings is that each painting may relate to a ragini which has the power to evoke different emotions. The National Education Policy 2020 supports this approach of art integration and language learning, as it aims to promote the holistic development of the students. It would also add to the appreciation of the Indian heritage and diversity. In the present study, the researcher aims to train prospective teachers to integrate music and paintings specifically for language learning to foster a more immersive experience of developing emotional literacy among the students. The purpose of the present qualitative study is to check the preparedness of prospective teachers to connect language learning to Ragamala paintings for developing emotional literacy. The researcher would employ an open-ended questionnaire to assess prospective teachers' perceptions regarding the use of Ragamala miniature paintings in developing emotional literacy as a component of language proficiency.

The present study aims to answer the following research questions.

Q 1 What are the perceived benefits of using Ragamala paintings for developing emotional literacy as a component of language proficiency?

Q 2 What are the perceived challenges in using Ragamala paintings for developing emotional literacy as a component of language proficiency?

**Keywords:** Miniature paintings, Ragamala, National Education Policy 2020, Art integration, Language learning, Emotional literacy, Prospective teachers.

## INTRODUCTION

Recent neuroscientific research has unveiled how emotions and social identity influence language use at a neural level. Contrary to traditional linguistic paradigms, which often overlook these aspects, studies using Electroencephalography technology have revealed that emotional context significantly impacts language comprehension and usage. This perspective suggests that the grammatical system may function as a flexible resource, dynamically adapting to the emotional and contextual demands of language use. (Dwivedi, 2021). Language education encompasses more than just grammar and vocabulary; it delves into the intricate interplay between language, culture, and emotions. In the pursuit of fostering holistic language learning experiences, educators are increasingly turning to innovative pedagogical approaches that embrace cultural diversity and emotional literacy. Emotional literacy is the ability to understand, express, and manage one's own and others' emotions healthily and appropriately. Students need to develop emotional literacy, as it can enhance their academic performance, social skills, mental health, and well-being.

In the vast landscape of Human Knowledge, the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), stands as a testament deeply rooted in ancient wisdom, encompassing a diverse array of disciplines such as traditional medicine, astrology, yoga, and meditation, among others. Passed down through generations, these systems have played a pivotal role in shaping India's history and culture (Tiwari, 2023,). Despite women having played a vital role in shaping and contributing to this system, their works and achievements are often overlooked or forgotten. The present study focuses on how we can bridge this gap through education.

In the present study, by integrating Ragamala arts- a rich tapestry of Indian miniature paintings and music – into English language education. which intricately weave together music, painting, and emotion, into English language teaching, educators can provide prospective teachers with a holistic understanding of language that encompasses its emotional dimensions. This approach not only enriches their appreciation of Indian heritage and diversity but also equips them with tools to effectively communicate insights and engage in cross-cultural dialogues. Through this innovative pedagogical method, we aim to bridge the gap in acknowledging the contributions of women in the Indian knowledge system while fostering emotional literacy and cultural awareness among English learners.

English, as a global language, serves as a bridge between IKS and contemporary education. Despite the potential benefits of integrating Ragamala paintings and music into English language teaching, there is a lack of research on effectively training prospective teachers in this regard. Therefore, the primary objective of this paper is to assess the preparedness of prospective teachers in connecting language learning to Ragamala paintings and music, aiming to develop their emotional literacy and cultural awareness among English learners.

### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Constructivism expects the learners to engage in knowledge-construction processes based on their mental frameworks. It helps learners to delve into the shared perspectives, thoughts and emotions related to a concept. The use of ragamala paintings in the present study expects the participants to have shared opinions based on social interaction. They may collectively encounter the same emotions. The cultural backgrounds of the viewers may affect their ideas about the use of ragamala paintings in developing emotional literacy. If the learners are expected to develop appreciation and empathy through the ragamala paintings then before that the teachers need to have a sense of appreciation for ragamala paintings. The shared experience that the teachers and students build up helps to know the emotions of the women that are depicted through these paintings. It may also help to understand the contributions of women as a source of inspiration in these paintings. Prospective teachers play a significant role in developing appreciation of Ragamala paintings as one of our lost Indian art forms in the Indian knowledge systems. Thus the researcher aims to test the perceptions of the prospective teachers about the use of ragamala paintings in developing emotional literacy in English classrooms.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Capaldi (2020) conducted a study on picture book stories to understand how these can develop emotional literacy. In this study, the researcher used picture books as a mirror where the texts helped children to understand their own lives. It also acted as a window where children got the opportunity to peep into life on a remote island away from the Scottish mainland. Importantly the work was related to the present study as it showed how picture books can offer a door for the viewer to move through and to understand the feelings of the characters and their relation to their own emotions. For this, the author has made use of the Theory of Mind and empathy. The present study agrees to the Theory of Mind used in the research as it talks about one's ability to have a deeper understanding of the knowledge, beliefs, desires or intentions that may be different from our own.

Rivers & Brackett (2010) conducted a study in which they used a RULER Approach to understand social and emotional learning. They developed the Feeling Words Curriculum in which they aimed to build the critical emotional skills of the students through the use of English Language arts education. Importantly, the authors thought of developing this curriculum as they argued that the social, emotional, and academic developmental needs of students are significant in their future lives as it could be useful to develop schools as successful learning communities. The researchers have contributed significantly through the innovative feelings word curriculum as there were better student teacher relationships, peer-to-peer relationships and lesser incidences of bullying, better parent-child communication and more importantly improved academic performance in the schools that implemented this model. This gave an insight for the present study that working on socio-emotional learning would also help in making children successful as it attended to the needs of the whole child. Saputro et al. (2023) made use of Graffiti art as a tool for building the emotional engagement of students in a language classroom as graffiti art included multimodal literacy. Interestingly, this art form was used by the researchers to project the messages of real-life issues through the pictures displayed in public places. To sum up, the researchers found that the use of graffiti art could help students to develop positive emotions as students were happy in learning English through the use of Graffiti art. It was also beneficial to develop critical thinking and problem-solving.

Rahmatullah (2020) investigated whether students could be taught the English language through the use of paintings. The author assumed that paintings could be used to teach language in an implicit way as learning through the paintings students learn enthusiastically and use interpretation on their own. More importantly, the researchers specify that senses as well as emotions can be vibrated through the use of paintings. To add to this, it was mentioned in this study that paintings can help in discovering stories of particular societies. The

researchers agree with the idea that paintings give a platform for the students to have a deeper understanding of themes, subjects, and issues. Thus the researchers in the present study thought of making use of miniature art forms to train teachers to interpret and narrate the women's experiences & emotions to develop English proficiency.

In a virtual symposium facilitated by Mia's Centre for Visual Arts and Empathy, a panel at the Empathy Lab explored the potential of art to foster greater empathy among individuals (Curry, 2021). The author mentioned how a particular artwork related to war has the power of eliciting a profound empathetic response, surpassing mere aesthetic appreciation. Importantly, the author focussed on the painting's grand scale, composition, and intense imagery which plunged the viewer into the narrative, creating a shared emotional experience with the character (the victims of war) in the paintings. This incident underscores art's ability to transcend its visual boundaries, becoming a vessel for empathy and a prompt for deeper reflection on the human condition and its capacity for suffering and resilience.

From the literature review it can be concluded that picture books helped to develop emotional literacy. Research has also proved that art has the power to develop critical thinking, problem solving & empathy through deeper reflection. Since the use of paintings also helps to develop sense of understanding of issues and no such study has been done on using specifically Ragamala paintings at Teacher Education level, thus in the present study the researchers decided to conduct a try out study to know if the use of Ragamala paintings could build language proficiency through emotional literacy.

## RESEARCH ELABORATIONS

Under the pre-mentioned theoretical framework, the researchers picked 8 teachers from the English method course who took up the initiative to volunteer to participate in the project for designing Multicultural lesson plans based on the contribution of women in the Indian knowledge systems. The prospective English teachers were chosen to develop an understanding of the use of miniature paintings to develop emotional literacy among the learners. It was made sure that they get to know the contributions of Ragamala paintings as well as the family of Ragas, their wives' raginis and raga putras. They were encouraged to make use of narrative essays to develop emotions through the integration of paintings and music.

## CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

The researcher began this study to develop an understanding as well as an appreciation for the contribution of women as a source of inspiration in Indian miniature paintings. The stories of women and their feelings are included in the paintings to evoke different emotions. It is not only important to develop emotions in adults but children need to be trained to express the right emotions in interpersonal communication. Especially in English, communication must be sufficiently strong to make an impact, and emotions are a major component of expression. Thus the researcher tried to make use of Ragamala miniature paintings to develop appreciation as well as emotional literacy as a part of language proficiency. For this, the researcher makes use of the Contributions approach given by James Banks in the designing of the lesson plans. This helps to bring in women's stories to develop an appreciation towards our Indian knowledge system. The researchers thought of using the approach of developing narrative essays as it could help in bringing out the thoughts and emotions of the viewer.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is centred on the following research problem:

**RQ1.** What are the perceived benefits of using Ragamala paintings for developing emotional literacy as a component of language proficiency?

**RQ2.** What are the perceived challenges in using Ragamala paintings for developing emotional literacy as a component of language proficiency?

### Methods

The present research adopts a qualitative approach using a one-shot case study. The study aims to collect the perceptions of a single group of 8 pre-service teachers towards end of the intervention based on use of Ragamala paintings for developing emotional literacy.

### Participants

8 prospective teachers opting for English as pedagogy were a part of the study. They were selected through purposive and convenient sampling technique.

### Study Setting

A two-hour workshop was conducted in the online mode through the zoom platform. Prospective teachers were expected to have familiarity with English vocabulary, grammar, and writing skills. They were also expected to be familiar with the components of a narrative essay, such as characters, setting, plot, etc. The procedure of conducting this study went as follows.

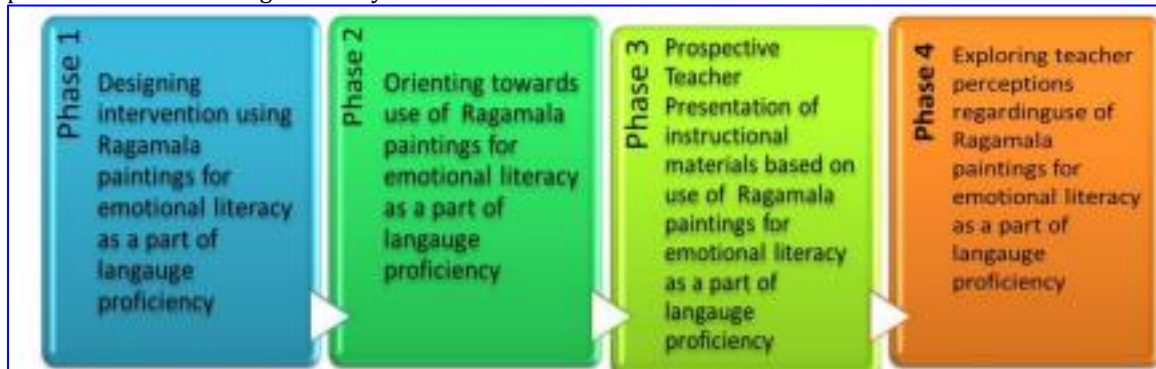


Fig.1. Phases of the research study



Fig 2: Participants delve into exploring narratives through Raagamala Paintings

### Data collection

The present study made use of an online questionnaire for collecting data from prospective teachers who had volunteered to be a part of this study. The content was validated by one content expert. This questionnaire was shared using a Google form at the end of the workshop.

### Data Analysis:

The responses of the participants collected through the questionnaire were coded to allow themes and patterns naturally from the data.

#### **RQ 1 What are the perceived benefits of using Ragamala paintings for developing emotional literacy as a component of language proficiency?**

The prospective teachers perceived the use of Ragamala paintings positively as it was found that the teachers felt Ragamala paintings could be a **powerful tool for understanding emotions and for developing language proficiency**. It can be seen in the following responses.

*"The combination of colours and emotion is a great way of expressing feelings. Each colour says a different feeling and sometimes we don't need words to express emotions, our facial expressions are enough. Similarly, natural elements also have their own significance and meaning. All these combinations are very effectively used by the Ragamala paintings."*

*"Ragamala paintings, while primarily a visual art form, can indeed contribute to improving the expression of emotions in the context of language proficiency. Studying and analysing the intricate details, expressions, and moods depicted in these paintings can enhance one's understanding and ability to articulate emotions verbally, enriching their language proficiency through visual inspiration and interpretation."*

The teachers also perceived the use of Ragamala integrated approach to learning English can help to **develop language proficiency through multiple emotional explorations & vocabulary development**. It can be seen in the following responses.

*"There are millions of emotions in the world and millions of words for expressing those emotions. This leaves scope for learning a new word every day or every hour of the day. Also, there are multiple ways of saying the same thing. These shared opinions offers scope for developing language."*

*"This approach helps us as here we can use better words, phrases and also use figurative language every time we narrate a given painting. And every time we do that, it enhances our language skills to a great extent."*

Apart from this the teachers also felt that the Ragamala paintings helped to **develop empathy** and that it had **real life applications**. It could be seen through the following responses.

*"Yes, through the paintings, students are given the choice of thinking in numerous situations where they can also feel the same emotion portrayed in the painting. They can relate to many real life situation/s which lead to the experience of similar emotion."*

*"In my view, expression of emotions is best represented in art. The subtle emotions can be inculcated in day-to-day life when we are familiarized with art like Ragamala paintings."*

### **RQ 2 What are the perceived challenges in using Ragamala paintings for developing emotional literacy as a component of language proficiency?**

The researchers found that **Lack of Awareness of Intercultural differences** is one of the challenges in using it in English classrooms for language proficiency. It could be seen through the following responses

*"The narratives of the Ragamala paintings are complex which makes the communication a little challenging due to cultural differences."*

*"Using Ragamala paintings for emotional understanding might be hard because they come from a different culture, making them understandable requires clear explanations."*

The researchers identified one of the challenges in the use of Ragamala paintings for emotional literacy in English classrooms as perceived by the prospective teachers is the **Unfamiliarity with the Genre of Music & Paintings**. It was found in the following statements

*"I was not aware of the significance of each natural element like snake or peacock so I took time to understand what the artist might have to say. Also, I tried to listen to the Ragas associated with those paintings but could not feel the emotions that they wanted to convey because of my lack of exposure to this kind of music or art."*

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*"One difficulty encountered in using Ragamala paintings for enhancing emotional literacy is the potential cultural and contextual barriers. The intricate symbolism and cultural nuances embedded within the paintings may be unfamiliar to learners from different cultural backgrounds, making it challenging for them to fully grasp the intended emotions and meanings portrayed. Additionally, interpreting the emotions depicted in the paintings can be subjective, leading to varying interpretations among learners. Furthermore, some learners may struggle to connect emotionally with the historical or mythological narratives depicted in Ragamala paintings, especially if they do not resonate with their personal experiences or cultural upbringing. Addressing these difficulties requires careful scaffolding, contextualization, and providing diverse perspectives to make Ragamala paintings more accessible and relevant to learners' emotional literacy development."*

Apart from this, it was also noted by the researcher that another challenge could be **Lack of contextual resources**. It could be seen in these responses.

*"Accessibility to high-quality reproductions or resources featuring Ragamala paintings may pose a challenge"*

*"It is difficult as there are no resources available on making lesson plans based on Ragamala paintings for developing emotions in English classrooms."*

### **CONCLUSION:**

Prospective teachers realised the benefit of use of Ragamala paintings in developing emotional literacy as they perceived it as a holistic approach to developing emotional intelligence. However the responses of prospective teachers pointed towards a call for increased awareness of different cultures if ancient miniature paintings have to be used effectively in the English classrooms.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

#### **For the teachers:**

1. The in-service teachers need to attend workshops on use of Ragamala Paintings in developing emotional literacy as a component of language proficiency.

2. The in-service teachers need to work in collaboration with the art teacher to develop a better understanding of miniature paintings.

**For Teacher Education Institutions:**

1. Ancient Arts forms as a significant part of Indian Knowledge systems should be given due weightage in the curriculum.
2. Prospective English teachers can be trained in designing innovative lesson plans using Ragamala Paintings by focusing on development of emotional literacy.
3. Faculty development programs need to be conducted on how to design resources using lost miniature art forms in English language proficiency.

**For Curriculum framers:**

1. Teacher handbook with resources based on the use of miniature paintings can help the teachers to design more such instructional materials. They can then develop student appreciation towards miniature paintings as a significant contribution in Indian knowledge systems.
2. School textbooks should focus on infusion of lost minority art paintings in the curriculum & it should be created in all the languages if teachers have to implement it in the classrooms.

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