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Students' perspective on the benefits of EFL literature education

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ABSTRACT

Understanding students' perspectives on the foreign language (FL) curriculum could be considered as a vital step in curriculum design and lesson planning. This study drew on data provided by a single open question survey to investigate the perspective of Dutch secondary school students ($N=635$) from 15 different schools with regard to the benefits of literature education in English as a foreign language (EFL). This study also sought to find out whether there are any differences in these perspectives between the different schools. The Comprehensive Approach to Foreign Language Literature Learning was used to analyse the students' answers. Results show that the majority of the students consider literature in a FL primarily as language education. Furthermore, a comparison between the 15 schools indicated that there were differences in the way students from different schools perceive the benefits of the EFL literature curriculum. The article concludes with a discussion of pedagogical issues and suggestions for ways in which the student perspective can be studied on a small scale.

KEYWORDS

Student perspective; FL literature education; integrated language and literature curricula; secondary education

Introduction

Teachers, teacher educators and researchers often discuss what happens in classrooms around the world without inviting students to take part in these discussions. Especially in situations where part of the curriculum is in transition, such as foreign language (FL) literature teaching, it is all the more valuable to include the voice of those who experience the curriculum first hand. It was precisely such a voice, a secondary school student's deceptively simple question, 'What's the point of reading this novel in English?' addressed to the first author of this paper, which was the starting point for this study. This question led us to investigate the benefits of literature in English as a foreign language (EFL) through the perspectives of Dutch secondary school students, for whom this component is a compulsory part of their English language course.

We start with a short survey of the re-emergence of literature as a valuable component in FL teaching, with a focus on integrated language and literature programmes. This is followed by a discussion of the importance of studying student perspectives and how this has been researched within the field of FL education so far. We then present the findings from a study in which we analysed the responses to a single open question regarding the benefits of FL literature education. We end with a discussion of the implications of our findings in a theoretical as well as practical light.

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Review of the literature

Integrated language and literature curricula

The idea that literature can be considered an integrated component in the FL curriculum has been around for several decades. Herr (1982), for example, spoke about literature as ‘an integral and revitalized part of foreign language education at every level’ (205). The position of literature teaching in FL education later moved from being a ‘welcome guest’ to an ‘unwelcome ghost’ (Pulverness 2014), and finally back to being regarded as a valuable component of the FL curriculum (Paran 2008). The notion of an integrated language and literature curriculum was further emphasised by the Modern Language Association, which in 2007 proposed a reform replacing the language-literature divide with an integrated FL curriculum. The idea that literature can serve as the actual content of FL classes has also resulted in an increasing number of papers that promote the idea of integrated language and literature curricula, such as Hoecherl-Alden (2006) and Barette, Paesani and Vinall (2010). However, Paesani and Allen’s (2012) review of the merging of language and literary-cultural content suggests that the language-content divide still exists (see also Paran 2008).

Our research into integrated FL curricula has resulted in the formulation of a model of a Comprehensive Approach to Foreign Language Literature Learning (Bloemert, Jansen & van de Grift 2016; Bloemert et al. 2016, *in preparation*). This comprehensive model consists of four approaches, each operationalised in several different elements (Figure 1). Bloemert et al. (2016, *in preparation*) empirically validated the components of this model by conducting a series of consecutive Thinking Aloud Protocols with Dutch FL teacher trainers (so-called peer debriefing), EFL secondary school teachers and secondary school students (so-called member-checking).

The text and context approaches are both linked to the ‘study of literature’ (Maley 1989). The text approach is concerned with elements such as literary terminology and setting, whereas the context approach focuses on, for example, the historical or cultural contexts of literary texts. The reader and language approaches on the other hand, are linked to using literature as a resource (Maley 1989). The reader approach emphasises the connection between the reader and the text and the language approach focuses on using literary texts to advance students’ language skills, such as reading and speaking, but also knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. The place where the four approaches overlap would describe a classroom where the teacher deals with all these areas, bringing together a focus on the text itself and information about the context, and encouraging the learners to make

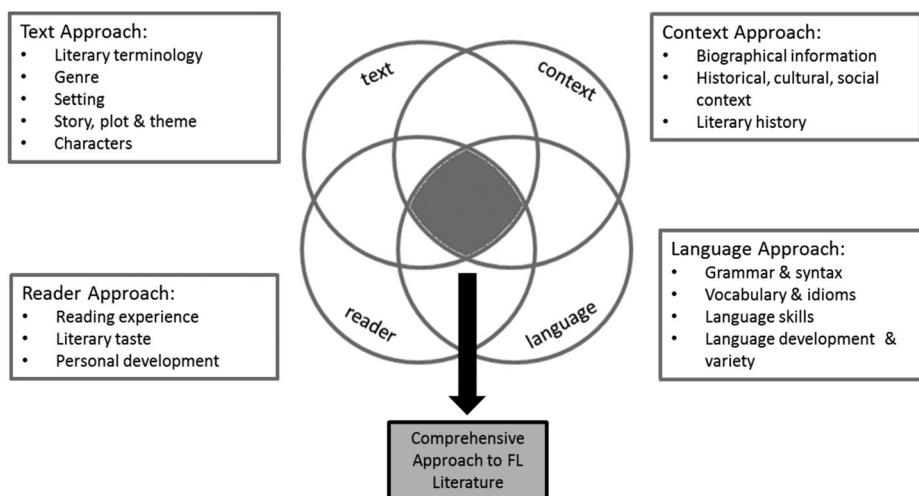


Figure 1. Comprehensive approach to FL literature learning (Bloemert et al. *in preparation*).

connections with the text, all the time ensuring that support is being given to language learning. This then results with what we have called the Comprehensive Approach which, we suggest, is likely to support high quality teaching and learning.

Students' perspectives on FL literature education

Recent understandings of teaching show that teachers' approaches to teaching influence the way in which learners learn (Beusaert, Segers & Wiltink 2013). Many and Wiseman (1992) found that different approaches to literature taught in the first language (L1) significantly affected the content of the students' written responses. In a FL context, Tutaş (2006) found that how literature is taught affects the learners' stance towards the texts as well as texts they read later. In other words, whether teachers teach through a Comprehensive Approach or only through, for example, the text approach, could have an effect on how students experience and learn from FL literature.

Students' perceptions of a learning environment influence how much they learn and therefore have an impact on the efficacy of the instructional environment (Brown 2009; Entwistle 1991). Indeed, whenever a teacher's teaching approach is compatible with a student's learning approach, it creates a situation of *congruence* (Vermunt & Verloop 1999). In other cases, existing learning strategies are called upon but are not necessarily compatible between teacher and students. This may lead to so-called *constructive frictions*, which Vermunt and Verloop (1999) claim 'may be necessary to make students willing to change and to stimulate them to develop skills in the use of learning and thinking activities they are not inclined to use on their own' (270). Understanding how students view FL literature could not only help teachers create a situation of congruence and constructive frictions but also help them design a strategy in order to reconcile possible differences. In our view, therefore, a move towards an integrated language-literature curriculum should take into account student perspectives as well, in order to maximise learning (see also Peiser & Jones 2013).

However, few researchers have studied students' perspectives in the field of FL literature education. An early study in the Higher Education context, Martin and Laurie (1993), found that the main reason students of French at an Australian University were studying French was related to linguistic interest. In contrast, Liaw (2001) found that her Taiwanese management students enjoyed the inclusion of literature in a language course. Moreover, the students gained confidence in reading English literary texts and most preferred the short stories to the course book.

Paran (2008), however, warns that we should consider the findings of these studies with caution. Most of the courses investigated were electives or were part of a curriculum the students had voluntarily selected as part of their university degree. In addition, it is secondary schools rather than universities that are 'the locus of most language learning in the world' (Paran 2008: 490). Since EFL is compulsory for most secondary school students in the Netherlands (as opposed to the elective nature of other FLs such as French or German) this group of students is relatively large. Therefore, due to this large number, we believe that this particular group of students is extremely valuable for educational research and curriculum design.

Two large scale studies shed some light on secondary school students' perspectives on EFL literature courses. Akyel and Yalçın (1990) surveyed students in five different secondary schools in Turkey. They demonstrated that students' English language proficiency was related to their appreciation of the inclusion of literature in the EFL classes. Schmidt (2004), taking a narrower focus, explored the reality of German EFL classes using Shakespeare and the possible connection between pupils' interest in Shakespeare and the ways in which Shakespeare was taught. Most students indicated that they accepted Shakespeare as an obligatory author in their EFL course, but this was not related to an actual interest in his works. However, despite Paran (2008) call for more 'systematic enquiries into the views of the learners' (490), such studies are still few and far between. Our study seeks to explore this under-researched area.

Research questions

The principal objective of the present study was to use the perspectives of adolescents to inform EFL literature teaching. Furthermore, due to the divergence in EFL literature curricula in Dutch secondary education (Bloemert & van Veen [accepted](#)), we wanted to find out whether the perception of students from different schools would vary. Studying the difference between schools could suggest a possible relation between how literature is taught and how students perceive literature education. These objectives led to the following two research questions: (1) What are the benefits of EFL literature education according to Dutch secondary school EFL students and (2) are there differences between the perception of students from different schools?

Context of this study

The changing position of FL literature teaching as described above can also be seen in the FL curricula in Dutch secondary education. In 1863, FLs became a compulsory component in Dutch schools and till 1968 only canonical works were studied and translated (Wilhelm [2005](#)). In the next 30 years (till 1998, when more emphasis was put on practical language skills), literature was still mandatory, but students were now requested to study FL literature independently. With the educational reforms of 1998, 13 core curriculum standards for FL literature were introduced and the number of works students had to read was reduced from 12 to 13. Importantly, it was argued that teaching FL literature in the target language could provide an obstacle for discussing literary texts. The preferred language of instruction became L1, although the literary works were read in the original FL. Moreover, teachers were not allowed to test language skills and literature in an integrated manner (Kwakernaak [2016](#)).

Nine years after the educational reforms of 1998, the government introduced a revised version, which is still in use today: the required minimum remained three literary works but the core curriculum standards for FL literature were reduced from 13 to the following three: (1) the student can recognise and distinguish literary text types and can use literary terms when interpreting literary texts, (2) the student can give an overview of the main events of literary history and can place the studied works in this historic perspective and (3) the student can report about his/her reading experiences of at least three literary works with clear arguments (Meijer & Fasoglio [2007](#)).

Apart from these three standards, Dutch FL teachers have complete freedom regarding text selection, the number of hours they wish to teach literature, how they wish to teach literature, and also how they wish to test literature. The extent of this curricular freedom is reflected in the variation between learning trajectories in different schools (Bloemert & van Veen [accepted](#)). Despite the apparent language-literature divide and the 'uneasy position' literature occupies in Dutch secondary education (Bloemert et al. [2016](#)), an increasing number of literature lessons, resources, and tests in Dutch secondary education are again, at least partially, in the FL, and FL teachers consider the use of a FL in their lessons as a sign of quality (Kordes & Gille [2013](#)). This suggests a careful move towards an integrated language and literature curriculum.

Despite the fact that the three core curriculum standards apply to all FLs taught in Dutch secondary education (i.e. English, French, German, Spanish), in this study we focus only on EFL. The findings may differ for elective languages.

Method

This study was conducted at a research university in the north of the Netherlands and was approved by the ethics committee of the department.

Participants

Between September 2014 and September 2015 the first author contacted several secondary schools in the north of the Netherlands through her professional network. The selection of schools was based

on convenience sampling where the first author knew at least one of the EFL teachers. The schools were all located in the four northern provinces of the Netherlands, representing both rural and small town schools, with a relatively very low level of cultural diversity in the student population. A total of 635 students (all pre-university level Year 5 students aged between 15 and 17) from 15 different schools and 28 different classes participated. Even though participation in this research was voluntary, all students cooperated. Data collection was completely anonymous and students' answers were not shared with their teachers. [Table 1](#) presents an overview of the data collected.

Procedure

Because we wanted to unearth genuine views, allow spontaneity, and avoid bias in answer categories that might result from suggesting desirable answers, we asked the students the following single open question: What do you think are the benefits of EFL literature lessons? We chose this method in preference to interviewing because we wanted to collect answers from a large group of students from many different schools to gain a broad view of students' perceptions on this topic. The single open question survey was handed out by EFL teachers during regular lesson time and all students were instructed to answer the question in bullet points. The students were given approximately 10 minutes to do this. The question was posed in Dutch and, apart from a few exceptions, all students answered in Dutch (all quotations in this study are our translations).

Analyses

[Table 2](#) shows several examples of the data we collected, including the coding procedure (the questions we asked in the analysis and the code we assigned to the examples).

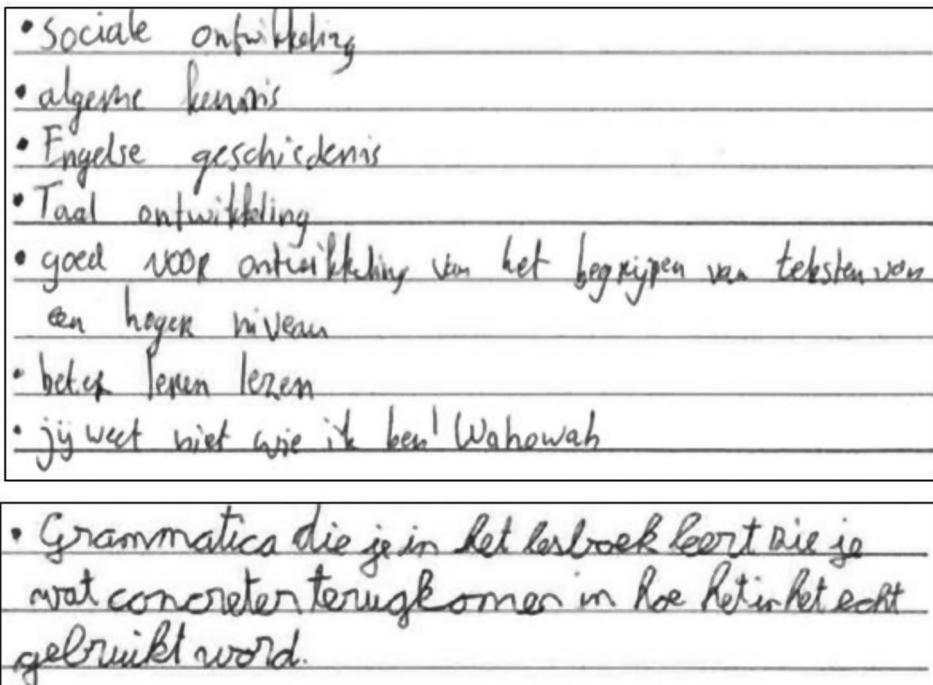
In order to analyse the data we used the Comprehensive Approach to Foreign Language Literature Learning (Bloemert et al. 2016, [in preparation](#)). The data were coded by an independent rater who was first trained in the four approaches and underlying 15 elements of the Comprehensive Approach ([Figure 1](#)) and in identifying these approaches and elements in the data. At the start of the training the independent rater was informed about the background of the instrument and the purpose of its use. To ensure that we could code every single student answer (a total of 2361 answers) we used the coding procedure outlined in [Table 2](#). We first decided whether the answer was positively or negatively worded and whether we could fit it into one of the 15 elements (the subcategories of the four approaches in [Figure 1](#)). When this was not the case we checked whether the answer fitted into one of the four approaches. Then, if this was not the case either, we checked whether the answer was related to English or English literature.

Table 1. Overview of 15 participating schools.

School	No. of classes participating	Total no. of students
A	3	61
B	2	50
C	1	28
D	2	48
E	1	21
F	3	75
G	1	16
H	4	88
I	2	45
J	1	19
K	2	51
L	2	50
M	2	23
N	1	31
O	1	29

Table 2. Coding procedure including example student answers.

Step	Question	Example student answer	Code
1	Is the answer positively or negatively worded?	'No complete lessons about strange facts regarding the author because nobody is interested and you will forget these in no time'	Negative
2	Does the answer fit into one of the 15 elements?	'Getting ideas for reading new books'	Approach: Reader approach Element: Developing literary reading taste
3	Does the answer fit into one of the approaches?	'Knowledge of the English language'	Language approach
4	Is the answer related to English or English literature?	'You can join a conversation about English books and appear very intelligent'	Yes

**Figure 2.** Two examples of student answers.

After the independent rater coded all the answers, the first author coded a random sample of the data (20%, $n = 127$ students) to ensure the reliability of the coding. Interrater reliability was established using Cohen's kappa value (.93), which showed a strong agreement.

Figure 2 illustrates the type and variability of data we worked with. The first student mentions a variety of topics ('social development, general knowledge, English history, language development, good for the development of understanding texts of a higher level, improving reading skills'), but then ends with a somewhat facetious answer, 'you don't know who I am, ha ha ha'. The second example shows only one bullet point in which the student mentions one specific topic: 'You see how grammar which you encounter in the course book, is more concrete and how it is used in real life.'

Table 3. Overview of the 2361 answers of Dutch secondary school EFL students ($n = 635$).

Total no. of answers	2361		Positive: 2218 (94%)	Negative: 137 (6%)	Total
Four approaches	1796	Text	78	2	80 (5%)
		Context	517	10	527 (29%)
		Reader	272	4	276 (15%)
		Language	909	4	913 (51%)
Related to English/literature	559		442	117	
Not related to English/literature	6				

Findings

Table 3 presents the percentage of the total number of answers for each of the four approaches.

We were able to code 1796 answers in one of the four approaches. More than half of these answers (51%) fitted into the language approach, followed by the context approach (29%), the reader approach (15%) and finally the text approach (5%). A total of 559 answers was formulated too generally to fit into one of the four approaches but was nevertheless related to English or English literature, such as: 'It creates more depth in the English lessons.' Only six answers (0.25% of the total) were not related to English or English literature. These included the comprehensible 'I prefer mathematics', and the rather obscure (and again, probably facetious) comment, 'beer'. It is worth noting that, despite the positive framing of our single open question in which we asked the students to write down the *benefits* of EFL literature education, 137 answers were formulated in a negative way, such as 'Listening to boring stories.' Some students did mention specific elements of the Comprehensive Approach, but then gave an explanation how these were not regarded as beneficial, such as:

Literary history; I do not see the benefits of this. It does not contribute to Dutch society. Nobody will blame you if you don't know this. The time we spend on literary history can be better spent on something that does contribute to society.

In order to find out to what extent the students' answers encompassed the different elements of the Comprehensive Approach, we also calculated the number of approaches each student mentioned at least once.

As Table 4 shows, the largest number of students (44%) mentioned two approaches, followed by one approach (33%) and three approaches (16%). A very small percentage of the students (1%) mentioned all four approaches. The sizable minority of 17% who provided answers that fitted into three or more approaches, added to the 44% who mentioned two approaches, means that the majority of students mention multiple approaches when asked about the benefits of EFL literature lessons.

Figure 3 provides an overview of the different combinations of approaches, arranged by descending frequency.

Figure 3 shows how all approach combinations are represented in our data, albeit with a vast difference in number of students, varying between 2 and 160 students. This indicates not only the difference between what students believe are the benefits of EFL literature education, but also shows that some approach combinations are clearly dominant. The language/context approach combination features most prominently; the answers of 25% ($n = 160$) of the students fell into this combination, indicating that students regard the benefits of EFL literature in terms of language and context related elements. Furthermore, 56% ($n = 335$) of the students mentioned either the context approach or the language approach, or a combination of the two. At the other end of the

Table 4. Number of approaches addressed by each student.

		Number of approaches addressed by each student				
		1	2	3	4	None
All students	$n = 635$	206 (33%)	282 (44%)	103 (16%)	8 (1%)	36 (6%)

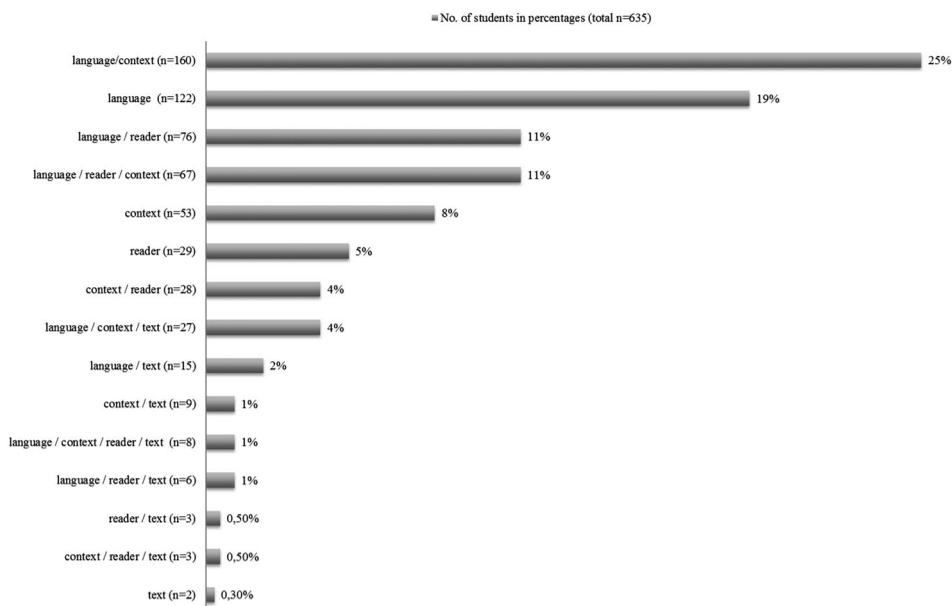


Figure 3. Approach combinations for total number of students in percentages.

spectrum, a total of 11.5% ($n = 73$) of the students mentioned the combinations in which the text approach features which ranged between 0.3% ($n = 2$) and 4% ($n = 27$).

In general, 74% ($n = 472$) of the students mentioned the language approach at least once, followed by 56% ($n = 355$) for the context approach, 33% ($n = 211$) for the reader approach, and 12% ($n = 73$) for the text approach. Table 5 presents a detailed overview of the elements within the four approaches as mentioned by the students. Most students mentioned more than one element.

A large majority of the students (74%, $n = 472$) felt that the benefits of EFL literature lessons were language approach elements, especially 'English vocabulary and idioms' (44%, $n = 279$) and 'English language skills' (26%, $n = 163$). Over half of the students (56%, $n = 355$) mentioned context approach elements; the most frequent element mentioned in this approach was the 'Historical, cultural, and social context' element, mentioned by 47% ($n = 298$) of all students. A third of the students mentioned reader approach elements; the most frequent element mentioned was 'Critical thinking skills and personal development', mentioned by 28% ($n = 178$) as a beneficial element in their EFL literature classes. The approach that was mentioned by the smallest number of students was the text approach (12%, $n = 73$). None of the students' answers related to the elements 'setting', 'characters' or 'personal reading experiences with literary texts'.

The elements connected to the core curriculum standards for FL literature were mentioned by a remarkably small number of students. Literary terminology (Standard 1) was mentioned by 2% of the students; literary text types (Standard 1) were mentioned by 1% ($n = 5$) of the students; English literary periods and history (Standard 2) by 7% ($n = 46$), and personal reading experiences with literary texts (Standard 3) was not mentioned by any of the students at all. This large discrepancy in the number of times these elements were mentioned and the number of times other elements were mentioned raises important questions for the classroom and is examined in the discussion section.

In order to answer our second research question, whether there is a difference in perception between students from different schools, we compared how many students from each school mentioned the approaches at least once. Table 6 lists the schools according to the frequency with which each of the approaches was mentioned by the students. Ten of the 15 schools show a pattern where the order of approaches from most to least mentioned is: language, context, reader, and finally the

Table 5. Student answers organised according to the comprehensive approach.

	Element	No. of students (n = 635)	Student example
<i>Language approach</i>	Language approach general	17 (28%)	You study the English language in a different way
	English grammar and syntax	66 (10%)	You develop a 'feeling' for English syntax
	English vocabulary and idioms	279 (44%)	I learn synonyms of words I already know
	English language skills (reading, listening, speaking, writing)	163 (26%)	You improve your English language skills
	Historical development of the English language	117 (18%)	You learn where the language comes from, how it came into existence and how it developed
<i>Context approach</i>	Context approach general	24 (4%)	Knowing about the mindset of writers from that era
	Biographical information	62 (10%)	You learn more about English authors and poets
	Historical, cultural, and social context	298 (47%)	You learn about how people thought in different periods
	English Literary periods and history	46 (7%)	You can place literary works in the right periods
	Reader approach general	5 (1%)	Understanding what a certain story means for your life
<i>Reader approach</i>	Personal reading experiences with literary texts	0 (0%)	–
	Developing literary reading taste	41 (7%)	You read different kinds of texts, novels, literary periods, eras. This is how you can develop your own style and what you like
	Critical thinking skills and personal development	178 (28%)	It gives you time and space to think about topics that you would not look for on your own initiative
<i>Text approach</i>	Text approach general	45 (7%)	You get to know the classics
	Literary terminology	12 (2%)	You understand metaphors better
	Literary text types	5 (1%)	You learn different types of poetry
	Story, plot, and themes	14 (2%)	You discover the meaning behind stories
	Setting (role of time and place)	0 (0%)	–
	Characters	0 (0%)	–

text approach. For one-third of the schools, however, the order of approaches differs, although in each school the text approach came in fourth position.

The results presented in Table 6 suggest that there is quite a difference in the way the students from the 15 schools perceive the benefits of the EFL literature lessons. Even though for the majority of

Table 6. Division of approaches in percentages and the number of students per school who mentioned an approach at least once.

School	n = no. of students	Language (%)	Context (%)	Reader (%)	Text (%)
E	21	95	43	10	10
L	50	94	48	26	6
N	31	94	42	19	19
M	23	93	78	35	9
A	61	84	74	20	16
B	50	84	72	32	14
I	45	82	29	24	7
F	75	76	47	32	17
G	16	69	50	31	0
O	29	66	62	38	10
		Language (%)	Reader (%)	Context (%)	Text (%)
J	19	95	63	42	5
H	88	78	55	45	6
		Context (%)	Language (%)	Reader (%)	Text (%)
K	51	73	61	37	16
C	28	71	36	32	21
		Context (%)	Reader (%)	Language (%)	Text (%)
D	48	65	31	21	8

the schools the language and context approach were mentioned most often by most students, it is noteworthy that in one-third of the schools the combination of the most frequently mentioned approaches is different. Furthermore, each of the four approaches was mentioned in each school, with the exception of school G, yet the difference between schools can be considered substantial for all four approaches: text approach (0–21%), context approach (29–78%), reader approach (10–63%) and the language approach (21–95%). If we compare schools D and I, for example, 82% of the students from school I mentioned the language approach whereas only 21% of the students from school D mentioned it. On the other hand, 65% of the students from school D mentioned the context approach, compared with only 29% of the students from school I. These differences suggest that students from these two schools view the benefits of EFL literature lessons considerably differently.

Discussion and classroom implications

In this study we asked 635 students in 15 secondary schools to write down the benefits of EFL literature education. The most important finding of our study is that the majority of the students see the EFL literature component through the lens of their language course; a total of 74% of the students mentioned the language approach as a beneficial component of EFL literature education. These findings support previous research such as Martin and Laurie's (1993) who showed that the students generally perceived the inclusion of literature in a pragmatic language learning way. Although these results are not surprising (the EFL literature component in Dutch secondary education is after all part of a language course), the fact that the students indicated that they recognise the contribution of literature to their language development underlines the notion of an integrated language and literature curriculum promulgated by, for example, the Comprehensive Approach. This is supported by Dutch EFL teachers who value the use of the FL in the literature classroom (Kordes & Gille 2013) as well as different voices in the literature. Grabe (2009), in an overview of the research, suggests that meaningful FL reading, such as literature, is an important source for improving for example reading accuracy and reading rate. Lao and Krashen (2000), too, argue that reading FL literature exposes language learners to a wealth of language varieties and registers.

The second most beneficial approach according to this group of students was the context approach. Slightly more than half of the students (56%) mentioned the context approach at least once, and 47% of them focused on the 'historical, cultural, and social context' element. The high percentage for this particular element could represent a desire that Martin and Laurie's (1993) students also expressed: a desire for 'relevant cultural content' (195). Since most literary works that are presented to FL students are placed in a 'foreign' world where students learn about the historical, cultural, and social elements through fiction, poetry and drama, studying these works in the FL classroom could enhance the students' intercultural and critical cultural awareness (Byram 2014). One could even argue that being able to contextualise a literary work through a language that is not your own, thereby possibly cultivating a sense of tolerance and understanding (Barrette et al. 2010; Bredella 2013; McKay 1982), might be a unique feature of FL literature education.

The two approaches that were absent from the answers of the majority of the students were the reader approach (where 33% of students mentioned any of the elements) and the text approach (where only 12% of students mentioned any of the elements). The only element of these two approaches that was mentioned by a relatively large number of students (27%, which for one element is a large percentage) was 'critical thinking skills and personal development'. According to Barrette et al. (2010), studying literary texts in the FL classroom could enhance students' translingual and transcultural competence, precisely because they are confronted with stories and themes from other historical, cultural and social contexts. However, when students do not see how this diverse input in their language course could, for example, enhance their personal development (which is part of the reader approach; see Figure 1), or how FL literature can be studied from multiple approaches, this is a missed opportunity in the FL literary experience. The fact that the other elements

of these two approaches were rarely mentioned or not mentioned at all might be because the students simply do not see these elements as beneficial for their EFL learning. Another possibility is that these elements are already covered by the literature lessons in their first language or in a different FL, with the result that students do not see the point of repeating this in the English literature lessons.

Even though the majority of the students (61%) mentioned more than one approach, only 8 students (1%) provided us with answers that fell into all four approaches. In other words, this group of 635 secondary school students did not regard FL literature lessons in what we would call a comprehensive way. Even though each of the four approaches assumes possible benefits for FL students, it is their reciprocal relationship that is particularly enriching in FL literature lessons (Bloemert et al. 2016). Therefore, when students, for example, see the FL literature lesson as beneficial only for their language development but their teachers approach the texts primarily through a text approach, one could understand the student question we quoted at the beginning of this paper about the actual point of reading literature in English.

The findings also show that there is variation in the way students from different schools perceive the benefits of this part of the language curriculum, in spite of the fact that each of the four approaches featured in all schools. Whereas, for example, in some schools the majority of students mention the language approach (e.g. school E with 95%), in school D this was merely 21% of the students. This suggests that within schools and perhaps even within classes, there is variation in how students perceive the EFL literature curriculum. Therefore, a Comprehensive Approach, where the teacher would teach literature through all four approaches, could create a teaching situation where there is congruence between the individual student and teacher perspectives and where constructive frictions are created when the teacher introduces approaches that the student initially did not regard as beneficial.

Taking into consideration that teaching approaches can have an effect on student learning (Many & Wiseman 1992; Tutaş 2006), the differences in students' responses at school level could be related to what students are actually being taught. One interpretation of the findings is that EFL literature in Dutch secondary education is taught primarily through a language approach followed by a context approach in some schools or through a context and reader approach in other schools, thereby reflecting the students' answers. However, it might also be the case that EFL literature is often taught through a text approach in combination with the context approach element 'English literary periods and history' and the reader approach element 'personal reading experiences with literary texts', since these are the elements that cover the three core curriculum standards for FL literature. In the latter case students might consider these elements simply not as beneficial and therefore these elements did not appear often in our data. However, our study does not allow us to draw conclusions with regard to direct relations between how the students are taught and how they perceive EFL literature education.

In spite of this, the difference in students' responses between different schools does call for future research that focuses on what is actually happening in these classrooms as well as an analysis of learning tasks. We believe that an analysis of these tasks might reveal that learning tasks can be 'very one-sided and more often reflect teachers' personal styles than students' needs' (Vermunt & Verloop 1999: 277). Locating a blind spot or finding out that certain approaches are over-represented can be very helpful in improving the quality of teaching (Vermunt & Verloop 1999). Despite the increasing body of information about student perceptions regarding various parts of the curriculum, more research is needed to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Being aware of the impact of the way literature is taught on how students perceive this component could help teachers in creating an effective situation of congruence as well as constructive friction (Vermunt & Verloop 1999). However, when a teaching approach has negative effects on student learning or when discrepancies between students' and teachers' perceptions are too large, this can create *destructive frictions* (Vermunt & Verloop 1999). Destructive frictions may also occur when students perceive the teaching and learning as irrelevant and do not feel this gap is bridgeable (Hattie & Yates 2014). If teachers in a school like school J, for example, (0% text approach) offered

literature lessons primarily through a text approach, destructive frictions (Vermunt & Verloop 1999) could occur because students do not see the relevance of this type of EFL literature lessons (Hattie & Yates 2014).

One word of caution regarding the interpretation of our study is that although we made considerable efforts to understand the students' point of view, we still were limited to our own ways of interpreting their words due to the format of the students' responses. Because we asked the students a single open question, students were first of all constrained by their ability to articulate their ideas on the spot. Furthermore, our unit of analysis was fully dependent on whether or not students decided to elaborate their responses in detail. Due to this dependence on student willingness to participate, our data may not fully reflect the extent of the students' views about the benefits of EFL literature education. Another issue that should be raised here is the fact that we researched students' perspective with regard to EFL literature education. There is a possibility that students could have a different view of literature in other FLs. Therefore, we would suggest future research being conducted in this in the teaching of other FLs taught in secondary education. Future research could also investigate whether students have the same view of literature in English (a compulsory subject) and the other FL they are taking (as an elective).

Taken as a whole, our methodology did generate a substantial amount of rich data, and the results of this study provide important information about what learners think of EFL literary education, information that can be used by teachers and curriculum designers when working on designing or enriching the literature component. Also, understanding how students perceive specific areas of the curriculum can provide teachers with invaluable information that could be useful to fit course content to specific student needs (Akyel & Yalçın 1990; Cook-Sather 2002; Pflaum & Bishop 2004).

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate EFL literature teaching through the perspectives of a large group of secondary school students. The findings show that although there are considerable differences between the perspectives of students in different schools, each of the four approaches of the Comprehensive Approach nevertheless featured in all but one of our 15 schools. Furthermore, the language approach featured as the most dominant approach. In other words, the students indicated that they primarily see the EFL literature component as a means of improving their language skills but they also, in varying degrees, indicate benefits related to the context, reader and text approach. Considering the impact a student's perspective has on how they learn, these findings have significant implications for the further implementation and development of integrated FL and literature curricula. If teachers want to create the desirable situation of congruence and constructive friction in their FL literature lessons, focusing on the language approach in combination with the context, reader and text approach appears to be the way forward.

Understanding the range of student experiences within classes could contribute to effectively educating a wide variety of students (Pflaum & Bishop 2004; see also Zapata 2016), and there are different ways in which teachers can implement the findings from this study. This would most probably take the form of a small, localised research study in which teachers would: (1) find out what *their* students believe are the benefits of FL literature education, (2) compare the students' perspectives with the curriculum they are offered and (3) enrich existing programmes. Ways in which the student perspective can be researched within the classroom context are, for example: organising focus groups where students discuss a particular part of the curriculum; organising student presentations in which they explain what they would like to learn, how they would like to learn this and why; constructing a web quest where students research different ways of teaching literature and comment on them; or letting students design their perfect FL literature lesson. Gaining insight into how students perceive the benefits of a particular component of the curriculum can enhance current educational practice (Brown 2009) and 're-inform existing

conversations about educational reform' (Cook-Sather 2002). This is especially valuable considering the current position of FL literature education in its transition towards an integrated language and literature curriculum.

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