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Published in:
Language, Culture and Curriculum

DOI:
[10.1080/07908318.2015.1136324](https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2015.1136324)

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Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2016

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Bloemert, J., Jansen, E., & van de Grift, W. (2016). Exploring EFL literature approaches in Dutch secondary education. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 29(2), 169-188.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2015.1136324>

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Exploring EFL literature approaches in Dutch secondary education

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ABSTRACT

There is an increasing awareness that the inclusion of literature in foreign language (FL) curricula can be beneficial to language learners. Especially, the move towards integrated language and literature curricula is gaining ground. In this study we investigated the way English as a foreign language (EFL) is approached in Dutch secondary education at pre-university level. Using a survey study ($N = 106$ EFL teachers), we investigated (1) how EFL teachers approach literature at pre-university level in Dutch secondary education and also (2) which factors are related to the reported occurrence of four FL literary teaching approaches. Confirmatory factor analysis shows that the four identified approaches represent one underlying construct, which underlines our understanding of a Comprehensive Approach to FL literature teaching. Results indicate that the variation between the ways FL teachers approach literature is enormous. Correlation analyses and *t*-tests informed us that curricular factors are significantly related to the way literature is approached. The fact that teacher demographics are generally not significantly related to the way FL literature is approached could be ascribed to curricular heritage or the way FL literature curricula are designed. The study concludes by suggesting several directions for future research.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 1 May 2015


Accepted 16 December 2015

KEYWORDS

Literature education; integrated curriculum; Dutch secondary education; foreign language teaching; EFL; FL literature approaches

Introduction

Ever since the 1980s, educational research has shown an increasing interest in the use of literature in foreign language (FL) education, resulting in a wealth of practical teaching materials (e.g. Collie & Slater, 1987; Kennedy & Falvey, 1999; McKay, 1982). In 1989, Hall expressed some concern regarding the results of this increasing interest, believing that FL education is now introducing literature ‘without having sufficiently carefully theorised what literature might offer and how this potential can best be exploited’ (1989, p. 30). A few years later, Gilroy and Parkinson (1996) noted that ‘the extreme diversity of FL teaching situations ... precludes any grand consensus on the place and form of literature teaching’ (p. 210). Showing that there is indeed a need for a more balanced understanding of

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the place and form of literature in FL programmes, several scholarly works have theorised what literature might offer and seem to conclude that literature can be beneficial for FL students in multiple ways, such as stimulating language acquisition, critical thinking skills, and cultural knowledge of the target language (e.g. Belcher & Hirvela, 2000; Hall, 2005; Parkinson & Thomas-Reid, 2000). The current trend seems to be to empirically research these acclaimed benefits (e.g. Early & Marshall, 2008; Macleroy, 2013; Picken, 2005), moving from mere theory to actual evidence.

One of the latest developments in this field of research comes from the Modern Language Association (MLA), a US organisation dealing with university-level education. In 2007, the MLA encouraged replacing the two-tiered language-literature structure within higher education with a more coherent curriculum in which 'language, culture, and literature are taught as a continuous whole' (MLA, 2007, p. 3). The suggested reform focuses on a unified curriculum that will situate language study 'in cultural, historical, geographic, and cross-cultural frames within the context of humanistic learning' (MLA, 2007, p. 4). In line with recent curricular reforms, more emphasis is placed on interpretative reading, which has resulted in a definite re-emergence of literature in FL curricula in the USA (Urlaub, 2013). Looking at the FL teaching situation in Europe, despite the strong focus of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) on communicative competences, the framework also covers the aesthetic uses of language and 'the cultural context in which language is set' (Council of Europe, 2001). Furthermore, the Council of Europe believes that besides an aesthetic purpose, 'literary studies serve many more educational purposes – intellectual, moral and emotional, linguistic and cultural' (2001, p. 56) (see also Paran, 2010).

Notwithstanding the international consensus regarding the position of literature in FL curricula, this general agreement has not yet reached the majority of classrooms (Paran, 2008). This claim is underlined by Pulverness' plenary talk in Moscow in 2014 entitled 'The Ghost at the Banquet: the use and abuse of literature in the language classroom' in which he compares English as a foreign language (EFL) literature education to Banquo, the unwanted guest at Macbeth's dinner table (2014). Pulverness indicates that the title of his talk seems an appropriate metaphor 'to allude to the rather uneasy position occupied by literature in English language teaching'. When FL curricula became increasingly utilitarian, literature changed from being a 'welcome guest' to an 'unwelcome ghost' (Pulverness, 2014). Another issue that needs to be addressed is the fact that the majority of empirical studies in this field are conducted in higher education (e.g. Beglar, Hunt & Kite, 2012; Lao & Krashen, 2000), whereas secondary school settings are mainly represented by practitioner evidence (Paran, 2008). Paran (2008) calls for empirical research that will show the extent of the inclusion of literature in secondary language classrooms, since 'these school settings are, after all, the locus of most language learning in the world' (p. 490).

The position of EFL literature in Dutch secondary education

English is a compulsory subject at pre-university level¹ and, according to the Dutch core curriculum standards for EFL reading comprehension, students at pre-university level should reach CEFR levels B2 to C1. All students have to take a National Exam in their final year (year 6) as well as various School Exams organised by each individual school taken throughout the final three years. The FL literature component is part of the

Table 1. Organisation of FL curricula in Dutch secondary education.

National Exam: year 6 (50% of final mark)	School Exams: years 4, 5, and 6 (50% of final mark)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading skills (expository texts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading skills • Writing skills • Listening skills • Speaking skills • Literature

School Exams, which means that individual schools can decide in what way and how often literature is taught and tested. Table 1 presents an overview of the allocation of the various components.

When FLs became a compulsory component in Dutch secondary education after 1863, canonical works were read aloud and translated sentence by sentence and students had to be knowledgeable about one or two literary periods (Wilhelm, 2005). Between 1968 and 1998, the Dutch secondary school system was determined by the ‘Law regarding Secondary Education’. Even though now more emphasis was placed on practical knowledge and usage of the FL language, literature remained part of the curriculum (Mulder, 1997). Students were required to create an individual *reading list* of 12 literary works, which had to be studied at home without any help or input from FL teachers. Despite this requirement, many schools stuck with the pre-1968 tradition and often about a third of the lesson time was spent on studying literature (Mulder, 1997). The Educational Reforms of 1998 saw the introduction of several prescriptive requirements for FL literature: 13 learning objectives were introduced covering three subdomains (literary development, literary terminology, and literary history); directions about the number of works students had to read were reduced to a minimum of three (Mulder, 1997); and FL teachers received directions about the percentage of the different components for the final English mark (e.g. listening skills had factor 3 and literature factor 1).

Nine years after the introduction of the Educational Reforms of 1998, the government introduced a revised version, ‘the Improved Educational Reforms’ of 2007, which is still in use today. Since 2007, FL teachers are free to decide on the percentage of all components in the School Exams, the required minimum is still 3 literary works, and the number of learning objectives is reduced from 13 to 3 (Meijer & Fasoglio, 2007):

- (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.
- (3) The student can report about his/her reading experiences of at least three literary works with clear arguments.

These three standards are the only guidelines FL teachers have with regard to the literature component. There are, for example, no requirements with regard to the level of some of the standards and neither is there a specification of what can be understood with ‘reading experience’ or ‘literary works’. Even though the three standards offer teachers a great deal of freedom when designing the literature component, they present two issues. Firstly, due to their general and non-prescriptive nature, they do not provide

any form of theoretically informed guidance for FL teachers. Secondly, the standards do not provide clear learning objectives which are based on benefits literature can offer language students.

English, together with Dutch and Mathematics, became a core subject in 2013, which has resulted in excessive National Exam training with expository texts and a dwindling position of literature. This development is in line with the curricular changes in Dutch secondary education since 1968 and underlines the idea of FL education as economically beneficial (Paran, 2008; Shanahan, 1997) where the literature component is not of primary concern. This situation does not appear to reflect the position of FL literature in academic pre-service teacher training programmes in the Netherlands. On average, around 15% of the ELT methodology sessions is spent on FL literature methodology.

FL literature as content

The suggested reform made by the MLA in 2007 to move towards an integrated language and literature curriculum presents the option for FL teachers to use literature as the actual content of language classes. In this light, we can view Paran's (2008) quadrant (see Figure 1) of the intersection of literature and language teaching, as a conceptualisation of these integrated constructs.

Paran's quadrant can be regarded as a visualisation of Maley's (1989) distinction between two primary purposes for FL literature teaching: the *study* of literature and the *use* of literature as a resource. The more academic *study* of literature can be understood as a literary critical approach (quadrant 3) or as a stylistic approach (quadrant 1). In the *use* of literature as a resource, the main focus is the interaction a student has with the text and other students (quadrant 2).

Various researchers and practitioners have defined approaches to the inclusion of literature in FL curricula (see Table 2).

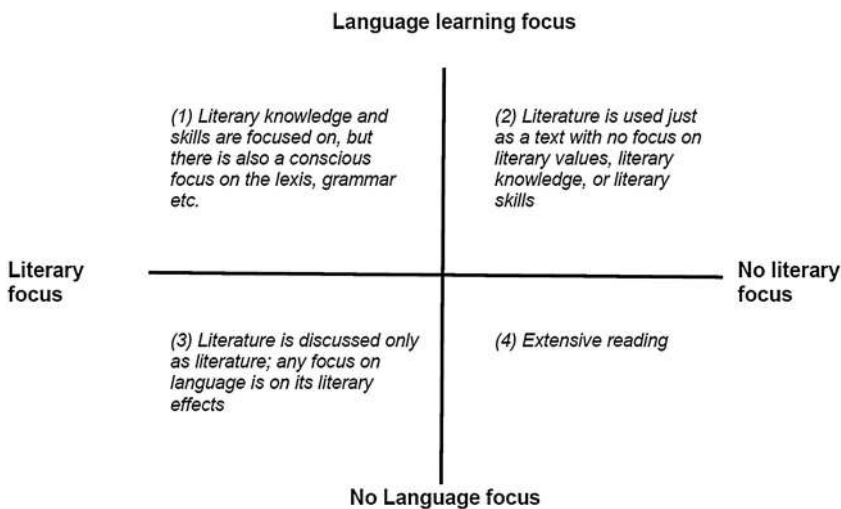


Figure 1. Paran's (2008) quadrant of the intersection of literature and language teaching.

Most of these categorisations are based on practitioner evidence and beliefs, which even though valuable, often lack a clear theoretical concept. In order to move this area of research forward and empirically investigate FL classrooms in secondary school settings, the potential of FL literature should first be clearly defined as well as operationalised. For this reason, we have synthesised Maley's and Paran's ideas, thereby taking into account previous categorisations of approaches such as Sage (1987) and Carter and Long (1991), which lead to four approaches to studying FL literature: the text approach, context approach, reader approach, and the language approach (see Table 3).

The primary focus of the *study* of literature is the literary text, consisting of either the text itself (e.g. literary terms, character development) or the context surrounding the literary text (e.g. biographical details and cultural elements). The primary focus of the *use* of literature as a resource is the student, dividing into either personal development

Table 2. A selection of categorisations of FL literature teaching approaches.

Littlewood (1986)	1st level: language as a system of structures 2nd level: language as a specific stylistic variety 3rd level: language as the expression of superficial subject matter 4th level: language as the symbolisation of the author's vision 5th level: literary work as part of literary history or of the author's biography
Sage (1987)	The educational value The linguistic importance The cultural value
Carter and Long (1991)	The Language Model The Cultural Model The Personal Growth Model
Lazar (1993)	A language-based approach Literature as content Literature for personal enrichment
Parkinson and Reid Thomas (2000)	1st reason: cultural enrichment 2nd reason: rhetoric 4th reason: language difficulty 5th reason: authenticity and genuine samples 6th reason: literary language is memorable 7th: assimilation of language rhythm 8th reason: non-trivial motivator
Maley and Duff (2007)	Linguistic factors Cultural factors Personal growth factors
Van (2009)	Approach 1: New Criticism Approach 2: Structuralism Approach 3: Stylistics Approach 4: Reader Response Approach 5: Language-Based Approach 6: Critical Literacy
Divsar and Tahriri (2009)	Language-based Literature as content or culture Literature as personal growth or enrichment
Nance (2010)	Cross-cultural understanding and ethical engagement Critical thinking Intellectual exploration Unique language benefits
Barrett, Paesani, and Vinall (2010)	Literary analysis Stylistics Culture

Table 3. Four approaches to FL literature education.

FL Literature education			
The study of literature <i>Focus: the literary text</i>		The use of literature as a resource <i>Focus: the student</i>	
Text Approach	Context Approach	Reader Approach	Language Approach

(e.g. personal interpretation and critical thinking skills) or linguistic development (e.g. vocabulary acquisition and reading skills improvement). In the next section, the four approaches to FL literature education will be discussed in more detail.

Text approach

The text approach is concerned with the teaching of the formal elements of literature, through, for example, close reading or educating students in the terminology of theoretical literary discourse. Within this approach, the aesthetic value of literature can be highlighted by advancing the students' sensitivity to literary texts through analysing literary language and conventions (Van, 2009) in order for students to learn how to read between the lines and interpret relations between linguistic forms and literary meanings (Carter & Long, 1991). Practising interpretation skills with linguistically demanding texts is useful for making sense of all discourse (Widdowson, 1975). Having knowledge of literary terms and understanding their functions in texts can enhance comprehension (Picken, 2005). It could also allow for a more sophisticated understanding of the language, making students aware of how the use of literary terms can have an effect on the interpretation of the text (Barrette, Paesani & Vinall, 2010).

Another aspect of importance in the text approach is knowledge of genre and the ability to recognise and differentiate between different styles and types of texts (Van, 2009). Students at CEFR level B2 are supposed to have knowledge of 'established conventions of genre' (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 62) when it concerns creative writing. Moreover, students at the C1 level should be able to 'appreciate distinctions of style in long and complex factual and literary texts' (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 62). Besides sensitising students to stylistic variation, the text approach is also concerned with the role of story structure. Understanding a text requires the reader's comprehension of how concepts within texts are related (Amer, 2003). Teaching strategies that explicitly focus on narrative text structure could enhance comprehension (Wilkinson, 1999). So-called 'story grammars' are formal devices that represent consistent elements found in narrative texts (Riley, 1993). By identifying these elements and their logical relationships, the reader identifies the story's grammar and therefore the meta-structure of a literary text (Amer, 2003; Early & Marshall, 2008).

Context approach

Another element that is suggested to be of importance when students are required 'to understand contemporary prose' (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 27) is the context surrounding literary works. Within the context approach, literature is regarded as a body of texts reflecting the culturally, historically, and socially rich diversities of our world (Carter & Long, 1991; Lazar, 1993). These diversities, contextualised in a literary work, often represent a 'foreign world' (Littlewood, 1986, p. 180) to the language learner covering issues such as identity, political power, ethnicity, and religion (Barrette et al., 2010; Van, 2009). Being informed

about the history and demographics of literary movements as well as historical and biographical elements of a literary text could add to this contextualisation and, therefore, could further understanding. Even though the world created in a literary work might appear foreign and 'different' to language students, learning that this world is taken for granted by native speakers (Littlewood, 1986) might help develop a sense of tolerance and understanding (McKay, 1982). The imagination, interpretation, and representation of the human experience form the core of the humanities (Carter, 2007; Ceia, 2012). Culture plays a fundamental role in the interaction between language and thought (Kramsch & Kramsch, 2000). Literature not only gives access to a plethora of cultures (Hoecherl-Alden, 2006; Urlaub, 2013) but also allows for cross-cultural comparing (Gholson & Stumpf, 2005) and challenging pre-conceived notions of culture (Costello, 1990), thereby promoting intercultural and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 2014; Kramsch, 1998).

Reader approach

A reader approach to literary texts does not only emphasise specific attention to the reader as an independent maker of meaning (Amer, 2003), but could also encourage FL students to step outside their comfort zone and experiment with looking at (un)known situations in a critical way. FL literature classes can support students develop a so-called Theory of Mind (Dumontheil, Apperly, & Blakemore, 2010), especially because of the often unfamiliar contexts of literary works written in a FL. In other words, through discussing a literary text in the FL classroom, students are invited to analyse how people from different parts of the world where the target language is spoken have beliefs, desires, and perspectives that might be different from their own. This could not only enhance FL students' translingual and transcultural competence (Barrette et al., 2010; MLA, 2007) but can also be seen as an essential in understanding contemporary prose (Council of Europe, 2001).

In the so-called Reader Response Theory to literary texts, students learn that their position as a reader cannot be disengaged from the meaning of the text (Amer, 2003), which is in line with the third core curriculum standard where students are required to report about their reading experiences. The very nature of literature with its multiple levels of meaning invites students to actively 'tease out' the unstated implications and assumptions of the text (Lazar, 1993) since in a literature class, information does not come 'ready packaged, neatly arranged, or prepared for easy consumption' (Nance, 2010, p. 4). Furthermore, specific implementation of reader response techniques is claimed to enforce reading pleasure (Lao & Krashen, 2000), and supports positive self-awareness in students (Lazar & Heath, 1996).

Language approach

The language approach focuses on the use of literature in language education as a vehicle presenting genuine and undistorted language (Lao & Krashen, 2000). One interpretation of this approach is extensive reading: 'the ability to read long texts for extended periods of time' (Grabe, 2009, p. 311). Extensive reading provides FL students with opportunities to see how language works in extended discourse. Various studies (see Grabe, 2009) have demonstrated that long-term extensive reading has a positive influence on reading rates (Beglar et al., 2012), reading comprehension (Grabe, 2009), and vocabulary acquisition, such as the so-called 'Clockwork Orange Studies' (Pitts, 1989; Saragi, Nation, & Meister, 1978). Because extensive reading maximises repeated exposure to specific uses

of the target language, the social and contextualised usage of linguistic structures essentially facilitates the process of the emergence of linguistic skills and literacy (Warford & White, 2012).

Another interpretation of the language approach of literary texts in the FL classroom is mining a text for its language. Literary texts can be a potentially rich source of input for language learners (Krashen, 1981; Nance, 2010; Widdowson, 1975) because it helps to entail a substantial supply of meaningful language in a variety of registers, styles, and text types (Lao & Krashen, 2000). Concentrating on specific use of the language, such as connotation, figurative use of language, or word order, could potentially extend the student's 'range of syntactic patterns, developing a feel for textual cohesion and coherence, and a sense of linguistic appropriacy' (Maley & Duff, 2007, p. 5).

A Comprehensive Approach to FL literature teaching

In our view, we consider literature to be an intrinsic part of languages that can provide rich and valuable content for FL students. Each of the four previously described approaches postulates several distinct benefits for FL students and could be regarded as conceptually separate and even be studied in isolation or in combination. However, we assume that the four approaches function as a unified whole and that there is a reciprocal relationship between the text, context, reader, and language approach. We therefore suggest that a Comprehensive Approach to FL literature teaching in which all four approaches are addressed in an interrelated way could enrich the FL literature lessons and enhance student learning. Other studies that promote the idea of integrated literature curricula are, for example, Barrette et al. (2010), Hoecherl-Alden (2006), Macleroy (2013), and Paesani and Allen (2012).

With regard to the uneasy position of FL literature curricula in Dutch secondary education and in response to Paran's (2008) call for empirical research in secondary FL classrooms, this study reports on a survey ($N = 106$ Dutch EFL teachers in secondary education), providing insight into how literature is approached in the EFL lessons. Furthermore, due to the huge amount of curricular freedom of FL literature curricula in the Netherlands, we explore whether teacher demographics, such as level of education and/or years of teaching experience, and curricular factors, such as the number of hours literature is taught per year and/or the final percentage of the literature component in the FL literature curriculum, are related to how literature is approached in these lessons. This study was therefore guided by the following two research questions:

- (1) How do EFL teachers approach literature at the pre-university level in Dutch secondary education?
- (2) Which teacher demographics and curricular factors are significantly related to the reported occurrence of the four FL literary teaching approaches?

Method

Instrument

In an attempt to operationalise the text, context, reader, and language approaches, we constructed a list of initial practical elements for each approach. These elements were based on a literature review; previous categorisations of FL literature teaching approaches

(e.g. Carter & Long, 1991; Sage, 1987); the three Dutch Core Curriculum Standards for FL literature; the CEFR; a priori introspection; and the first author's personal experience as an English language teacher and her current job as an ELT teacher trainer in which she provided several workshops and lectures which centred around FL literature approaches.

The initial practical elements were part of a questionnaire (see appendix) that provided the data for this study. In order to ascertain that our formulation of the elements was unambiguous, we conducted several consecutive Thinking Aloud Protocols with Dutch FL teacher trainers ($n = 3$), so-called peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and with Dutch EFL secondary school teachers ($n = 4$), so-called member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One by one, the participants were asked to read the predetermined elements aloud and interpret them in their own words. During every protocol, notes were taken and after every protocol, the elements were refined when necessary and presented to the next participant. A total of seven consecutive protocols were conducted in this way until no more refinements were necessary. The protocols were of a deductive nature; the aim was to refine our interpretation and formulation of the four approaches and underlying practical elements. For this reason, we did not include participants' background information nor did we provide room for their personal beliefs during the protocols.

Table 4 presents the 20 initial elements as well as the Dutch Core Curriculum Standards and the CEFR descriptions for the required language levels.

We then designed an online questionnaire using the program, Unipark. Teachers were sent a link to the questionnaire in May 2013 and were invited to complete the questionnaire within a month. They were asked to describe the EFL literature curriculum at the pre-university level of the school year 2012–2013. They were invited to fill out the questionnaire for each of the final three years of pre-university level they were teaching. The language of the questions as well as instructions was in Dutch. The participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity in the research.

Participants

Contact details of Dutch secondary schools that offer education at pre-university level were collected via online searches. Heads of Department were sent an email with the request to forward an invitation to participate to the EFL teachers who were teaching the pre-university level in 2012–2013. Furthermore, an invitation to participate was also posted on an online platform (www.digischool.nl). A total of 106 teachers filled out the questionnaire for 1 year, 18 teachers filled out 2 questionnaires for 2 years, and 10 teachers filled out 3 questionnaires, 1 for each of the 3 years. This resulted in the following number of responses for each of the 3 years: year4: $n = 54$, year5: $n = 55$, and year6: $n = 63$. Table 5 presents an overview of the four teacher demographics of the 106 teachers who filled out the questionnaire. The majority of the teachers were female (70%) and university educated (69%).² Furthermore, the average number of years of teaching experience of the teachers was 13, but ranged between 0 and 40, which corresponds to the age range between 25 and 63.

Analytical procedure

In order to answer the first research question, participants were asked how often the 20 elements occurred in their EFL literature lessons. They were asked to mark their responses

Table 4. Detailed overview of the four FL literature teaching approaches.

	Initial elements (summarised)	Dutch Core Curriculum Standards for FL Literature	Common European Framework Reference (CEFR)
Text approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Literary terminology Recognising text types Distinguishing text types Storyline Character development Who, what and where 	The student can recognise and distinguish literary text types and can use literary terms when interpreting literary texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> B1 level: relate the plot of book or film and describe reactions in a sustained monologue B2 level: following established conventions of the genre concerned in creative writing B2 level: understand contemporary literary prose C1 level: appreciating distinctions of style in long and complex factual and literary texts
Context approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Literary periods Literary history Historical aspects of a literary work Cultural aspects of a literary work Social and societal aspects of a literary work Information about the author Biographical aspects of a literary work 	The student can give an overview of the main events of literary history and can place the studied works in this historic perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> B2 level: understand contemporary literary prose
Reader approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Reading pleasure Student's personal reaction Critically report on reading experiences Critical thinking skills 	The student can report about his/her reading experiences of at least three literary works with clear arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> B1 level: relate the plot of book or film and describe reactions in a sustained monologue B2 level: understand contemporary literary prose
Language approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> English linguistic aspects in a literary text Making reading miles to improve language skills English vocabulary in a literary text 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> B1 level: relate the plot of book or film and describe reactions in a sustained monologue B2 level: understand contemporary literary prose

on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). The decision for an even scale was made to rule out the option for answering without considering the item or avoiding making a real choice (Dörnyei, 2003).

We calculated the reliability (Cronbach's alpha coefficient) of the scales measuring each of the four approaches which are based on the average reported occurrence in literature lessons during one school year (September 2012–June 2013) to see if the items of the four approaches each formed a reliable scale. Since it is our understanding that in a Comprehensive Approach to FL literature teaching the four approaches can be regarded as a unified whole, we needed to assess the existence of the reciprocal relationship among the four approaches. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was selected as the most

Table 5. Teacher demographics.

Gender	Male (30%)	Female (70%)	
Education	University (69%)	Higher Professional Education (31%)	
Years of teaching experience at pre-university level	0–40 years	mean 13.44	S.D. 10.97
Age	25–63 years	mean 46.65	S.D. 10.61

appropriate statistical method to test whether the four approaches together represent one underlying construct because judgements were made a priori regarding the latent variables of the study.

Furthermore, we employed *t*-tests and correlation analyses to calculate whether several variables are significantly related to the average reported occurrence for each of the four approaches. It is standard practice to use a *p* value threshold of .05 for the decision as to whether a difference is significant or not. All data were processed and analysed using SPSS software.

Results

We first calculated the reliability of the scale of each of the four approaches in order to explore whether the elements could be considered to form a scale. Table 6 shows almost sufficient to relatively high coefficients (.61–.88) for evidence of internal consistency for each of the four approaches. The reliability analysis of the scale of the language approach showed that the Cronbach's α would be .64 if item 'making reading miles to improve language skills' would be deleted which is slightly higher than the reliability coefficient obtained with all three items (Cronbach $\alpha = .61$). However, we deemed the content of this item of such importance that we decided not to eliminate this item from the scale.

Four approaches and one construct

In order to determine our understanding of a Comprehensive Approach to FL literature teaching in which the four approaches are considered unified, we ran a CFA. The CFA

Table 6. Four approaches to FL literature education and the 20 underlying initial elements.

	Mean	(S.D.)
<i>Text approach</i> (Cronbach $\alpha = .87$)		
storyline	4.54	(1.35)
character development	4.30	(1.35)
who, what and where	4.28	(1.44)
recognising text types	4.08	(1.37)
distinguishing text types	4.05	(1.31)
literary terminology	3.77	(1.45)
<i>Context approach</i> (Cronbach $\alpha = .88$)		
historical aspects of a literary work	4.07	(1.52)
social and societal aspects of a literary work	3.83	(1.33)
cultural aspects of a literary work	3.80	(1.33)
overview of literary history	3.46	(1.59)
literary periods	3.39	(1.46)
information about the author	3.20	(1.22)
biographical aspects of a literary work	3.15	(1.27)
<i>Reader approach</i> (Cronbach $\alpha = .81$)		
student's personal reaction	4.33	(1.27)
critical thinking skills	4.13	(1.30)
reading pleasure	4.02	(1.39)
critical report of reading experiences	3.65	(1.50)
<i>Language approach</i> (Cronbach $\alpha = .61$)		
making reading miles to improve language skills	4.05	(1.37)
English vocabulary in a literary text	3.68	(1.35)
English linguistic aspects in a literary text	2.89	(1.48)

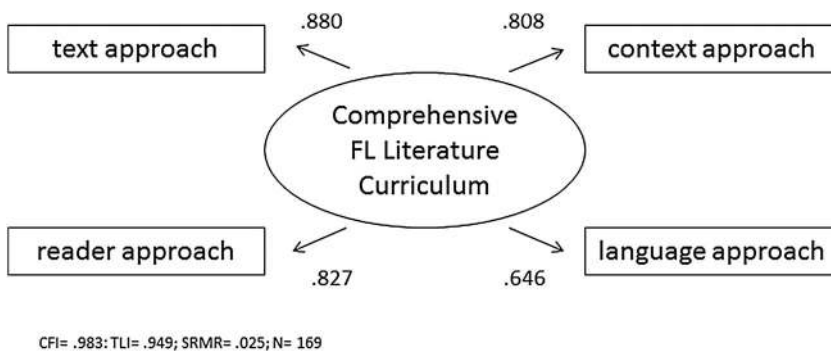


Figure 2. Results of the CFA regarding the Comprehensive Approach to FL literature teaching.

focuses on whether and the extent to which the four approaches are linked to the underlying latent trait (i.e. a Comprehensive Approach). [Figure 2](#) shows the factor loadings of the four approaches regarding a Comprehensive Approach to FL literature teaching.

Following the recommendations of Hu and Bentler (1999), the adequacy of model fit was evaluated on at least two statistics: a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of $>.95$ and a Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) of $<.05$ indicates a good fit. Furthermore, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) value closest to 1.0 is also an indicator of a well-fitting model (Byrne, 2012). Results in [Figure 2](#) show that the CFA resulted in a good fit of the model. The text approach (.880) appears to have the strongest link to a Comprehensive Approach, followed by the reader (.827) and context approaches (.808). The lower contribution of the language approach (.646) might be due to the relatively low reliability because of the low number of items of the language scale. From this, we can conclude that our understanding of a Comprehensive Approach to FL literature teaching can be expressed in a text, context, reader, and language approach.

Research question 1

With regard to the huge amount of curricular freedom FL teachers have with the literature component in Dutch secondary schools, we investigated how EFL teachers approach literature. [Table 7](#) shows the reported occurrences of the four approaches. Marked on a scale of 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*), the difference between the highest mean score for the text approach (4.18) and the lowest mean score for the language approach (3.55) is .63, which is considered small. For each of the four approaches participants have indicated that the approach *never* occurred in their EFL literature lessons. However, each of the four approaches has also been indicated to *always* occur in these lessons. These results show that, on average, each of the four approaches occurs *regularly* in the EFL literature lessons, but there is also a wide range in the way EFL literature is approached.

Research question 2

In order to answer our second research question, we investigated whether several teacher demographics and/or curricular factors are significantly related to the average reported occurrence of the four approaches.

Table 7. Descriptives of the reported occurrences of the four FL literature teaching approaches.

	Mean	S.D.	Minimum	Maximum
Text approach	4.18	1.07	1.00	6.00
Context approach	3.56	1.07	1.00	6.00
Reader approach	4.03	1.09	1.00	6.00
Language approach	3.55	1.06	1.00	6.00

Teacher demographics

We employed a two-tailed *t*-test to find out whether there are significant differences between gender and level of education and the average reported occurrence of the four approaches (see Table 8).

Table 8 shows that no significant results were found for gender nor for level of education. This means that there are no significant differences between the way male and female EFL teachers approach literature. Similarly, there are no significant differences between teachers who received their teacher training at an institute for Higher Professional Education or at a university.

The results of a Pearson's correlation analysis of the variables age and years of teaching experience are presented in Table 9. This coefficient is constrained to lie between 0 (no correlation) and 1 (perfect correlation).

The results show only one significant weak correlation between age and the context approach ($r = .18, p < .05$); older teachers seem to spend slightly more time on this approach than younger teachers. We did not find a significant correlation between the way literature is approached and the number of years of teaching experience.

Curricular factors

We investigated the following three curricular factors: the difference between years 4, 5, and 6; the number of literature lessons taught per year; and the percentage of the literature component for the final English mark. The results presented in Table 10 show that

Table 8. *t*-Test values of variables gender and level of education.

	Approach		mean	S.D.	Sig
Gender	Text	Male	4.03	1.20	0.42
		Female	4.19	1.05	
	Context	Male	3.70	1.04	0.25
		Female	3.48	1.07	
	Reader	Male	3.89	1.13	0.43
		Female	4.04	1.10	
Language	Male	3.51	0.96	0.95	
	Female	3.50	1.07		
Education	Text	High Prof	4.16	1.04	0.86
		Uni	4.18	1.13	
	Context	High Prof	3.57	1.06	0.73
		Uni	3.51	1.10	
	Reader	High Prof	4.12	1.06	0.13
		Uni	3.85	1.14	
	Language	High Prof	3.55	1.04	0.95
		Uni	3.54	1.10	

Note: *t*-test, two-tailed.

each of the three curricular factors is to a certain extent significantly related to one or more of the four approaches. For this reason, each of the three curricular factors will be discussed in the sections below.

As Table 10 indicates, there is a significant relation between the average occurrence for the context approach and the difference between years 4, 5, and 6 ($r = .26, p < .01$). This means that teachers reported to spend more time on the context approach in year 6 compared to, for example, year 4. We did not find significant relations between the three years and the text, reader, and language approach.

Results from the questionnaire informed us that there is an enormous variation between schools regarding the number of literature lessons taught on a yearly basis, with a minimum of 0 hours and a maximum of 120 hours per year. As expected, the correlation analysis shows that there is a significant relation between the number of literature lessons per year and the average occurrence for the text ($r = .23, p < .01$), context ($r = .34, p < .01$), and the language approach ($r = .19, p < .05$). These results indicate that when teachers teach more hours of literature per year, the reported occurrence for three approaches is higher. The amount of lesson time spent on the reader approach decreases slightly but not significantly when more lesson time is spent on literature.

Similar to the number of literature lessons per year, the percentage of the literature component for the final English mark also differs massively between schools (between 0% and 60%). The results show that the percentage of the literature component for the final English mark is significantly related to the average reported occurrence for the text ($r = .31, p < .01$) and context ($r = .30, p < .01$) approaches. In other words, an increase in this percentage means a significant increase in the amount of lesson time spent on the text and context approach.

Discussion

Previous research regarding FL literature education has often theorised what the benefits are of FL literature education without converting these theoretical constructs into measurable variables. In order to move this area of research forward, we have not only conceptualised four approaches to FL literature education, but we have also operationalised and validated them in a secondary school setting. The reliability of the scales of each of the four approaches ranges from acceptable to relatively high, and results from a CFA inform us that our understanding of a Comprehensive Approach to FL literature teaching seems to represent one underlying construct.

Current research in the field of FL literature education is moving in the direction of empirically researching a selection of the acclaimed benefits largely in the context of higher education. Following Paran's (2008) call for more empirical research in secondary

Table 9. Correlations between age and years of teaching experience and literature approaches.

	Age	Years of teaching experience
Text approach	-0.02	-0.01
Context approach	0.18*	0.07
Reader approach	0.09	0.08
Language approach	-0.04	-0.03

* $p < .05$.

Table 10. Correlations between curricular factors and teaching approaches.

	Years 4, 5, and 6	Number of literature lessons per year	Percentage of the literature component for the final English mark
Text approach	0.06	0.23**	0.32**
Context approach	0.26**	0.34**	0.30**
Reader approach	0.08	0.12	0.14
Language approach	0.03	0.19*	0.08

* $p < .05$.** $p < .01$.

education, translating our conceptualisation into 20 practical initial elements enabled us to research how Dutch EFL teachers in secondary education approach literature in their lessons. The way the FL literature curriculum is currently organised and the nature of the non-prescriptive parameters of the three core curriculum standards provide a lot of freedom for FL teachers. On average, each approach was reported to occur regularly in the EFL lessons, but the wide range in the way literature was approached also indicates vast differences. Even though FL teachers generally enjoy this high level of independence when designing the literature component, it could also cause uncertainty inherent in equivocal situations, such as the ambiguity of the three Core Curriculum Standards. Another issue that this level of diversity raises is the degree of transparency and concerns regarding quality control. In the current situation, it is fairly impossible for students, teachers, and school boards to know whether the FL literature component is taught and tested in an adequate way.

The correlation analyses and *t*-tests provided us with more details regarding the relation of various teacher demographics and curricular factors on the reported occurrence of the four approaches. The data informed us that the way FL literature is approached in the lessons is not significantly related to the gender, years of teaching experience, or education of the teachers. This could be explained by a phenomenon we describe as ‘curricular heritage’: teachers start working at a new school and ‘inherit’ the existing curriculum. Due to factors such as tradition, showing respect towards colleagues, lack of financial means, or lack of experience, new teachers adopt the existing curriculum and teach accordingly. Another explanation could be the way literature curricula are designed; in case of joint effort, this could lead to consensus in curricular decisions.

Albeit not very strong, we did find that the age of the teacher is slightly related to the time spent on the context approach. A reason for this could be their personal experience as secondary school or higher education/ university students; the focus of FL literature curricula used to be rather context approach heavy (Melker, 1970; Wilhelm, 2005).

The context approach also stood out when we examined several curricular factors; it was the only approach that was significantly related to all three factors and it was the only approach that was significantly related to the difference among the three years. An increasing amount of lesson time is spent on this approach when students move from one year to the next, which could be linked to the third Core Curriculum Standard, which requires students to have an overview of literary history and asks students to place studied works in a historic perspective. The increasing experience students have with FL literature and their increasing language levels could be relevant in explaining this significant relation. On the other hand, the fact that most of the approaches did

not correlate significantly with the difference among the three years is not surprising, since the three standards are not associated with any particular year.

The reader approach did not significantly relate with any of the three curricular factors, which is especially noteworthy with regard to the number of lessons per year. One possible reason for this could be the way literature is tested; questions related to personal opinion and development might be harder to grade than questions related to the text or context approach. This assumption is underlined when looking at the results of the percentage of the literature component for the final English mark and the four approaches. The higher the percentage, the more lesson time is spent on the text and context approach.

Examining the data, we can conclude that the way FL literature is approached in the lessons is mainly due to curricular factors and not teacher demographics, which emphasises our interpretation of 'curricular heritage'. This brings us to a few limitations that should be highlighted. First of all, because this study has employed self-report questionnaires, sampling relied on self-selection of participants which could lead to a lack of representativeness and therefore to biased estimates. Besides the obvious disadvantages of self-report questionnaires, the retrospective focus of the questionnaire could have further obscured the data since teachers were asked in May/June 2013 to reflect on their teaching from September 2012 until May/June 2013.

Conclusion

The EFL literature component in Dutch secondary education is not so much an 'unwanted guest' or an 'unwelcome ghost', but it does occupy an uneasy position in the otherwise carefully structured FL curricula. The findings of this study indicate huge differences between FL teachers regarding the amount of time they spent on literature and, more specifically, on the four approaches. Furthermore, we can conclude that the way EFL literature is approached is related to several curricular factors and not to teacher demographics, with the exception of the relation between the age of the teacher and the time spent on the context approach.

Our conceptualisation of a Comprehensive Approach to FL literature teaching in which we distinguish a text, context, reader, and language approach is a pragmatic interpretation of educational programmes that promote integrated curricula. In the current utilitarian setting with its focus on expository text comprehension, explicating the benefits FL literature can offer language students by implementing this Comprehensive Approach might be a good way to reverse the dwindling position FL literature is finding itself in.

We suggest that implementing a Comprehensive Approach to FL literature teaching could enrich literature lessons as well as increase FL students' understanding of contemporary literary prose. Even though substantial care was taken in designing the initial elements, we need to make sure that FL students also have a very clear and unambiguous understanding of the various approaches and underlying elements. This implies that future research should first and foremost validate these practical elements with FL students if we wish them to fully benefit from the literature lessons they are offered. Furthermore, little to nothing is known about how FL teacher trainees are instructed to teach literature or what FL students' preferences are with regard to the literature lessons. This means that in order to work towards a Comprehensive FL literature curriculum, we

need to obtain more detailed data at the secondary school level regarding the way literature is taught and tested, and we need to take the venerable adage ‘audience, purpose, context’ into serious consideration.

Notes

1. In the Netherlands, secondary education, which begins at the age of 12 and is compulsory until the age of 16, is offered at several levels. The highest level is the pre-university level (student age 12–18) and this diploma is the minimum requirement for access to a university. The exam programme at the pre-university level is taught in the final three years (years 4, 5, and 6) and also comprises FL literature.
2. Initial teacher training programmes in the Netherlands are provided at institutions of Higher Professional Education (HBO) and at universities. The HBO teacher training course for secondary education is a practically oriented four-year programme, which leads to a grade two qualification, allowing teachers to teach in the first three years of secondary education. After this four-year programme, teachers can continue to obtain a vocational Master’s degree which will provide them with a grade one qualification, which allows teachers to teach in all years of secondary education. The university training programme is a postgraduate programme open to university graduate students who have taken a Master’s degree in a subject closely related to the subject they wish to teach and leads to a grade one qualification.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to our colleagues, Nienke Smit, Dr Marjon Tammenga-Helmantel and Prof. Dr Klaas van Veen, for their support throughout several stages of our study. We would also like to thank Dr Amos Paran for his inspiration, insightful ideas, and helpful comments.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

(Translated from Dutch)

Personal information:

- Age:
- Years of teaching experience:
- Gender:
- Education:

EFL lessons and literature:

- How many EFL lessons do students in year 4/5/6 have per week?
- How many EFL lessons do you spend per year on literature?
- What is the percentage of the literature component for the final English mark?

How much lesson time did you spend on the following elements:

1 = never

2 = rarely

3 = sometimes

4 = regularly

5 = often

6 = always

Literary terminology	1	2	3	4	5	6
Recognising text types	1	2	3	4	5	6
Distinguishing text types	1	2	3	4	5	6
Storyline	1	2	3	4	5	6
Character development	1	2	3	4	5	6
Who, what and where	1	2	3	4	5	6
Literary periods	1	2	3	4	5	6
Overview of literary history	1	2	3	4	5	6
Historical aspects of a literary work	1	2	3	4	5	6
Cultural aspects of a literary work	1	2	3	4	5	6
Social and societal aspects of a literary work	1	2	3	4	5	6
Information about the author	1	2	3	4	5	6
Biographical aspects of a literary work	1	2	3	4	5	6
Reading pleasure	1	2	3	4	5	6
Student's personal reaction	1	2	3	4	5	6
Critically report of reading experiences	1	2	3	4	5	6
Critical thinking skills	1	2	3	4	5	6
English linguistic aspects in a literary text	1	2	3	4	5	6
Making reading miles to improve language skills ³	1	2	3	4	5	6
English vocabulary in a literary text	1	2	3	4	5	6

³Translated from the Dutch: 'leeskilometers maken'. This refers to the notion of the benefits of extensive reading for the language development of FL students.