

MA Thesis:

Literature as Discourse

*An Educational Research to Bridge the Gap Between Theory
and Practice in the Dutch EFL Classroom*



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“We cannot rely on precept to teach a sense of literature, but we can provide opportunities to help our students learn that sense for themselves.”

(Nance 29)

“Discourse: Linguistically, ‘language beyond the level of the sentence’. But a more useful understanding is as ‘language in use’, or ‘language in social interaction’. In such perspectives, language is seen as an ongoing (sic) activity in which people shape their wor(l)ds and are shaped by the wor(l)ds of others.”

(Hall 303)

“Literature education differs from school subjects like history or mathematics because literature is an art form. Just like music and fine art it is about the senses instead of absolute knowledge. According to Nabokov you read ‘whilst using your spinal cord’. You use senses that do not present themselves under pressure but rather find their way out of curiosity.”

(my trans.; Weijts 120)

Abstract

Dutch teachers of English often struggle to make literature relevant and meaningful to their pupils. In addition, literature lessons are considered time consuming in their preparations. In the Dutch EFL classroom this results in limited attention for literature. However, both researchers and teachers stress the importance of teaching literature. Using extensive earlier research into the theory of teaching literature, a survey on teacher attitudes among Dutch teachers of English and the analysis of *Curriculum.nu*, this thesis aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice on literature education in the Dutch EFL classroom. This paper is guided by the following research question: How can the limitations experienced by Dutch EFL teachers to implement more literature in their lessons be addressed to bring the teaching in line with the preliminary results by *Curriculum.nu*? The results from the questionnaire showed a deep engagement of the teachers about using literature in the EFL classroom. The key restrictions they voiced were time limitations (not having enough time to prepare and teach literature next to the curriculum) and the lack of a clear structure on how to teach literature. The answer to the research question is presented in two diagrams. The first shows the requirements for effective literature education. The key finding is that learners should be acquainted with literature from the first grade upwards to familiarize learners with reading literature. The second diagram visualizes the responsibility on micro, meso and macro level to promote literature education in the EFL classroom.

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Preface

During the writing of this thesis I worked at two secondary schools. What struck me was the stress and high workload under which the colleagues of the English departments had to work. At the first school two English teachers had severe symptoms of burnout to the degree they had to stop working. At the second school one English teacher had to quit suddenly due to a burnout and a second teacher was in conversation with the head of the school to significantly reduce the current workload. Another teacher fell ill. At each school only one of the English teachers was replaced, which meant the rest of the workload was parcelled out between other teachers of English at the school, which resulted in a significant increase in the workload for the other teachers. Incidents like I experienced on these schools are not rare in the teaching profession. The Netherlands is struggling with a shortage of teachers especially in the compulsory school subjects like English.

There are many signals that teachers are under immense stress due to time pressure. When I started the present research I was only partly aware of the scope of this problem. Having read more about it and experiencing the problems first hand, my concern has deepened about the state of mind of teachers (of English) in general, but first and foremost it seems these teachers should not be presented with an increase in their workload consisting of pilots of experimental educational reform, as the initiators *Curriculum.nu* have in mind. These worries are voiced by many others after the transition of *Onderwijs2032* to *Curriculum.nu* in the Spring of 2018. The Board of Education (Onderwijsraad) noted in an article that the development teams consisting of self-registered and then selected teachers and school directors “are working towards ‘large tasks’ and ‘core views’ but lack a clear framework” and the “the teams use educational jargon and abstractions that often affect the readability of the reports” intended to serve teachers with preliminary results of their process (my trans.; Huygen). This awareness has cast a shadow on my research and at the same time

highlights its relevance: teachers should be provided with more autonomy and time to structure their teaching. The recommendations in this paper therefore may seem a bit utopian whereas they were intended to draw theory and practice close. Within the scope of this thesis I have at least been able to take a small but useful step. By identifying the requirements for effective literature lessons in the EFL classroom the path is cleared for an actual detailed lesson series for teachers to use as a starting point for their lessons. I hope the diagrams I came up with can be of help for further research.



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1. Introduction

Dutch teachers of English often struggle to make literature relevant and meaningful to their pupils. This problem is confirmed by several articles describing research about the use of literature in the language classroom (Edmondson 53; Jones and Carter 73). Both researchers and teachers, however, stress the importance of teaching literature (Hommerson-Schreuder 28; Kidd and Castano 337; Kwakernaak 30; Van 2). Yet research has also shown that often teachers do not have enough time to include literature in their lesson plans (Bloemert et al. “Doordacht” 11; Jones and Carter 72), feel unfit to teach literature properly (Duncan and Paran 248) or both. Using extensive earlier research into the theory of teaching literature, a survey on teacher attitudes among Dutch teacher of English¹ and the analysis of *Curriculum.nu*, this paper aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice on literature education in the Dutch EFL classroom.

Nine years after the introduction of the Educational Reforms of 1998, in which the *Tweede Fase*² was introduced, the government introduced another revision, the Improved Educational Reforms of 2007, which is still in use today. Since the latter teachers have been “free to decide on the percentage of all components in the School Exams” including literature (Bloemert et al. “Exploring” 171). In addition, “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” (Bloemert et. al. “Perspective” 4). At Vwo level (pre-university) and Havo level (pre-higher professional education), students should read at least three literary works in English. In addition, Vwo level students should comply with the following objectives (Meijer & Fasoglio 16; SLO “Leerplan”):

¹ The overview with all responses of the questionnaire can be found in the appendix.

² The *Tweede Fase* is a synonym for the upper grades of Havo and Vwo. It covers the fourth year up until the exam year. This division between lower and upper grades (onder en bovenbouw) was initiated in 1998 and revised in 2007. The curriculum has a clear learning trajectory for these two phases of the learners’ school program.

The learner should be able to:

1. Recognize and distinguish literary text types and the use of literary terms;
2. Give a concise overview of the main events in literary history; and
3. Report about the reading experience of (at least) three literary works with clear arguments.

For Havo only the third objective is compulsory (Meijer & Fasoglio 16; SLO “Leerplan”).

In January 2016, the platform of *Onderwijs2032 (Education2032)* released a sixty-five-page advisory document regarding the organization of primary and secondary education in The Netherlands commissioned by the Dutch secretary of Education. Four core aspects concerning the forming of a new curriculum stand out in this document. In addition to the suggestion that learners should be familiarized with digital resources, these are:

1. Concerning English as a foreign language, there is a clear focus on language proficiency (*Onderwijs2032* 30).
2. The platform suggests that citizenship should have a more prominent role than is now the case within the curriculum of the Dutch educational system (*Onderwijs2032* 34).
3. The pleasure of reading should be promoted by acquainting the learners with literature to which they can relate (*Onderwijs2032* 30).
4. The learners should have the time and freedom to reflect on literature and contribute to the meaning of the texts with the use of their own imagination (*Onderwijs2032* 38).

In March 2018 *Onderwijs2032* transitioned into the *Curriculum.nu* project. This project has adopted the core aspects of *Onderwijs2032* and translates research into practical building blocks as a basis for educational reform. The previously mentioned core aspects by *Onderwijs2032* are intended to make changes in the current curricula towards the completion of the main goal: transcending communication in a foreign language. (*Curriculum.nu* “Visie”

1). This means the English language is not only seen as a carrier for international

communication, but also contributes to the intercultural perspective of the learner and his or her knowledge about sound, shape and meaning of words: the (meta) cognitive perspective (*Curriculum.nu* “Conceptvoorstellen” 6).

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and *Curriculum.nu* both underline the importance of literature in the classroom, but the current approach to literature in the classroom seems to negate this importance. In the self-assessment grid of the CEFR it is noted that to reach B2 and C1 level, the learner should at least “understand contemporary literary prose” and “understand long and complex factual and literary texts” (Council of Europe “Self-assessment”). However, literature is the first thing dropped when a teacher is pressed in their time teaching. Instead priority is given to communicative exercises (Van der Knaap 34). In addition, there is criticism suggesting that although *Curriculum.nu* products are written for and by teachers, the project lacks a real connection between theory and practice because the expert teams designing the new curriculum are simply too small (Huygen; Rijlaarsdam & Janssen 46).

This thesis tries to reduce the current distance between advice and practice for using more literature in the EFL classroom. This is done by formulating a set of recommendations on teaching English literature to upper forms of Havo and Vwo. These recommendations are aimed at teachers (micro level), school boards and directors (meso level) and educational developers and the government (macro level). The decision to write a recommendation on these three levels is made because the curriculum can only be adjusted if these levels work closely together towards the same rationale: a curriculum which promotes L2 proficiency with a special focus on the 21st century skills like citizenship and critical thinking. To reach these recommendations, several methods are addressed:

- A literature study, the theoretical framework, is implemented to justify the use of literature in the EFL classroom.

- A questionnaire is used to indicate the problems teachers encounter when teaching literature. The questionnaire is designed and distributed for this thesis and developed during the Utrecht University course Practice Based Research (PGO) in November 2018. A short version of the findings is presented within the context of this course (Boeschoten).
- Additionally, requirements are designed for an effective learning trajectory for literature that is in line with the advice in *Curriculum.nu*. These requirements for a learning trajectory on micro level is the final step towards designing the actual lesson plans and is aimed to help teachers structure their lesson plans for teaching literature throughout the learners' school career.

2. Research Questions

This paper will be guided by the following research question and sub-questions: How can the limitations experienced by Dutch EFL teachers to implement more literature in their lessons be addressed to bring the teaching in line with the advice by *Curriculum.nu*?

- a) What are the restrictions teachers experience regarding the implementation of literature in their lessons and overall curriculum?
- b) What are the requirements for a learning trajectory on literature in the EFL classroom when taking into account the available theory and the needs of the teachers?

The first sub question is answered by presenting the results of a questionnaire distributed among teachers of English at the upper levels of Havo and Vwo. The results highlight the restrictions they experience. With the use of the available theory requirements for a learning trajectory can be composed as proposed in the second sub question. The answer to this question takes the form of a diagram with requirements for effective literature education rather than a concise lesson series because the way learners deal with literature

is dependent on the way they have been introduced to literature. A learning trajectory focuses on a longer period of time in the learner's development to ensure that no "literature shock occurs" once learners are confronted with literature in the upper forms of Havo or Vwo (Van der Knaap 35). The thesis concludes with recommendations on the earlier named levels: micro, meso and macro as these levels all share their responsibility in the promotion of literature in the EFL classroom.

3. Theoretical Framework

Firstly, the content covered in the theoretical framework will highlight the current state of English literature in Dutch upper forms of Havo and Vwo. Secondly, the relevance of using literature in the EFL classroom is looked at in detail. Finally, the four core aspects concerning the forming of a new curriculum by *Onderwijs2032* are used to paint a clear picture of how the current curriculum can be improved and subsequently, what teachers and learners need in the lessons in order to create beneficial literature lessons. The findings in this theoretical framework will then form a base in combination with the results of the questionnaire to answer the research question and sub-questions.

3.1. Literature in the Dutch Educational System

This chapter gives an introduction about the current place of literature in education and specifically, literature in the English curriculum of upper Havo and Vwo forms at Dutch secondary schools. Literature lessons in modern languages such as English are often the first lessons to be dropped when it is necessary to create more space in the curriculum (Van der Knaap 34).

In the book *Literature in Language Education* (2015), Geoff Hall highlights several complications in contemporary EFL literature education worldwide. Firstly, he argues that

learners disliking a piece of literature do not seem to be a “valid aspect of literature reading, or ‘response’ in this perspective” (130). Learners are often expected to like literature and reading, which goes beyond the assumption that literature should be something that triggers and develops the interpretation of individual readers. If critical thinking is an important skill to develop in the language classroom as stated in both *Onderwijs2032* (42) as *Curriculum.nu* (“Conceptvoorstellen” 31), teachers should be open to positive as well as negative reader responses of pupils. Secondly, Hall states that assignments often merely check whether the learner has read the mandatory text (or a summary of that text) whereas they should focus on the progress of the learner as a reader of literature (131). Thirdly, Hall argues that the assessment of literature in L2 education destroys the very nature of the event of reading. The self-consciousness that comes with assessments is incompatible with an intrinsic motivation to read and the pleasure of reading (131). Finally, teachers often have the tendency to explain literary works and how they should be interpreted (Paran 00:04:30-00:05:42). Hall quotes Urquhart (1987) by saying: “Ultimately the interpretation is up to the individual reader” (Hall 132). This is why the interpretation of the teachers is of less importance when teaching literature. Christiaan Weijts, a Dutch writer and critic of the way literature is taught in the Netherlands, describes this as follows in an article from 2016: “Like with music and fine art it is not about facts but about sensitivity. [...] A good teacher only coaches this process” (my trans.; Weijts 120).

In the Dutch educational system and its use of literature in current language education these complications highlighted by Hall are present. The following example of a constructed literature test in an English class at the secondary school Christelijk Lyceum Zeist shows an example of how literary tests may focus on factual aspects rather than analysis (figure 1).

6. What was the Germanic literature tradition based on? Mention some of its features and explain how Beowulf fits the tradition.
7. Explain what the answer to the Queen's question was in the Wife of Bath's Tale and give an example of it from the story.

The full test can be found Appendix A

Figure 1 Literature test CLZ 2017

This example of a representative test at a Dutch school shows that only the facts about the literary works are tested. Learners do not need to read the full literary work: reading an online summary would suffice in preparation of the literature test.

In Dutch modern language education the CEFR is translated to ERK (Europees Referentiekader) goals. The can-do-statements are designed to bring structure and clarity on goals on a European level. These are broad goals leaving much room for interpretation (van der Knaap 35). ERK requires Dutch Havo students to reach at least B2 level (figure 2) and Vwo students should reach C1/B2 level at the end of their school career (figure 3), but again, how these goals should be assessed remains unclear.

Havo reading (B2)

- Can understand contemporary literary prose. (Council of Europe 27)
- Can read with a large degree of independence, adapting style and speed of reading to different texts and purposes, and using appropriate reference sources selectively.
- Has a broad active reading vocabulary, but may experience some difficulty with low frequency idioms. (Council of Europe 69)

Figure 2 Havo ERK goals

Vwo reading (C1/B2)

- B2: Can understand contemporary literary prose. (Council of Europe 27)
- C1: Can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. (Council of Europe 27)
- C1: Can understand in detail lengthy, complex texts, whether or not they relate to his/her own area of speciality, provided he/she can reread difficult sections. (Council of Europe 69)

Figure 3 Vwo ERK goals

Although schools are free to assess literature any way they see fit as part of the School Exams in The Netherlands, there is little explanation as to what this reading experience in the Europees Referentie Kader (ERK) on pre-university and pre-higher professional education should entail (Bloemert et. al. “Doordacht” 12). The document by SLO, “Leerlijn Engels” describing the can-do statements of the English curriculum in the Netherlands for upper levels of Havo and Vwo says: “The learner can report about reading experience of (at least) three literary works with clear arguments”³(SLO 2017), which seems utterly vague. With this objective in mind, it has been pointed out that “questions related to personal opinion and development might be harder to test than the questions related to the text or context” (Bloemert “Exploring” 184).

If the structure for teaching and assessing literature provided by ERK is not worked out in detail and as a result schools are expected to figure out the details themselves, it seems hardly surprising English teachers in secondary schools in the Netherlands do not prioritize literature development.

3.2. Relevance of Teaching Literature

Research shows how effective teaching literature can be for students’ language proficiency and personal development (Hommerson-Schreuder 28; Kidd and Castano 337; Kwakernaak 30; Van 2). However, Amos Paran explains that teachers often fear teaching literature, because literature does not contain absolute knowledge in comparison to the theory of grammar or non-literary informational texts (Paran 00:06:04-00:6:58). Literature in education is often exiled or marginalized as it seems to lack obvious use-value (Jones and Carter 69; SLO 2015). Language in literature often behaves badly in the sense that it violates grammar or sentence structure, and seems “difficult, specialised” and “out of date” (Hall 9). Therefore

³ Original Dutch text: “De kandidaat kan beargumenteerd verslag uitbrengen van zijn leeservaringen met ten minste drie literaire werken” (SLO 2017).

literature may be considered too challenging for the learners, and teachers encounter real obstacles (time, preparation, learners' motivation) for using literature more extensively in the classroom.

While concerns on implementing literature in the EFL classroom should be taken seriously and “the view that literary language is difficult is not totally misguided” (Hall 9), literature can also contribute to the development of empathy of the learner (Kidd and Castano 2013). This argument is discussed in more detail in the chapter on citizenship. Moreover, reading literary fiction in an educational setting may contribute to language proficiency, cultural awareness and personal growth (Bloemert et al. “Doordacht” 11; Van der Knaap 34-5). Engaging with literary works also stimulates the learners' ability to think critically. Challenging learners to think critically may increase their motivation and contribute to their 21st century skills-set promoted by the platform Curriculum of the Future by SLO (Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development) to prepare learners for a quickly changing and digital society (SLO, *Curriculum van de Toekomst*). Critical thinking is an important aspect of a future curriculum as it facilitates an investigative attitude, helps with processing information and making informed decisions.

The refreshing and challenging views in *Curriculum.nu* on a new curriculum offers opportunities to try to understand what are the current limitations for teachers to implement (more) literature in their lessons, but also why the Dutch government and its advisors (SLO, *Onderwijs2032*) marginalize the importance of literature: the advice by *Curriculum.nu* is clear, but it lacks practical guidelines for implementation.

3.3. Curriculum Developments and Advice

Jasmijn Bloemert, professor at University of Groningen Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences, designed the Comprehensive Approach to Foreign Language Literature Education

in order to visualize the different approaches of literary education. This approach was designed taking into account several pilots with students and teachers as well as an extensive review study and is used as advice for future lesson design (Bloemert et. al., “Doordacht” 12). Bloemert’s conceptualisation distinguishes text, context, reader and language approach (figure 4): “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 connections with the text, all the time ensuring that support is being given to language learning” (Bloemert et. al. “Perspectives” 2). Although the overview pinpoints exactly which aspects should receive attention in the language classroom, it is hard to imagine what a lesson or a literature lesson series would look like. The design of the learning trajectory in the conclusion of this paper tries to take the development of effective lessons for both student and teacher one step further by outlining the prerequisites for what Bloemert et. al. describes as “the place where the four approaches overlap” (Bloemert et. al. “Perspectives” 2).

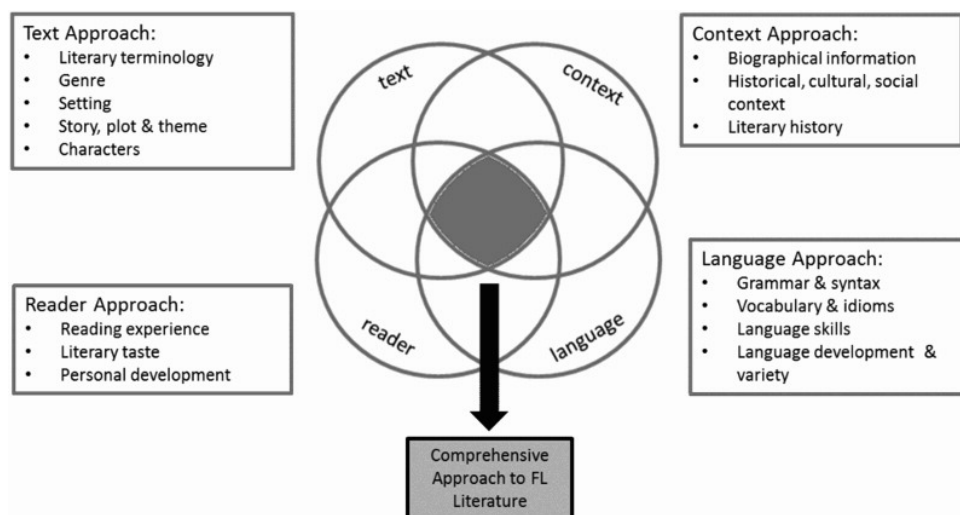


Figure 4 Comprehensive Approach to Foreign Language Literature Education (Bloemert 2016)

With the *Curriculum.nu* initiative, a number of educational reform organizations in the Netherlands⁴ have joined forces to investigate the research question “what do our learners need from primary- and secondary education to grow into adults who contribute to society, are economically independent and live their lives confidently?” (my trans.; *Curriculum.nu*). Early 2018, nine expert groups consisting of school directors and primary- and secondary school teachers started to explore what the objectives should be for young learners in the 21st century and how these can be implemented in the curricula. One of these expert groups will focus on the future of English education as well as the other modern languages taught in Dutch secondary education.⁵ A report and preliminary results will be presented in the House of Representatives⁶ in 2019 to determine a follow-up process (*Curriculum.nu*).

3.4. Language Proficiency

In the previous project on educational reform, *Onderwijs2032*, it is pointed out that language proficiency should receive more attention in the modern language classroom in order to stimulate the learners’ language awareness (30). Dutch pupils reading fiction for leisure achieve higher results in nearly all language proficiency tests than their peers who do not read in their spare time (Mol and Bus 8). In his book *Reading in a Second Language*, Grabe explains that there is a strong argument for a reciprocal causal relation between reading and vocabulary in L2: reading leads to an increased vocabulary and vocabulary growth leads to improved reading comprehension (Grabe 266).

Between 2014 and 2015 Jasmijn Bloemert, Amos Paran, Ellen Jansen and Wim van de Grift conducted research on the perceived benefits of literature for students in EFL education. The results show that a large majority, 74% of the 635 secondary school students

⁴ De Onderwijscöoperatie, de PO-raad, de VO-raad, AVS, LAKS and Ouders & Onderwijs

⁵ French, German and Spanish.

⁶ In Dutch: De Tweede Kamer

that participated in the research among fifteen schools in the north of the Netherlands, say that they benefit from the language approach elements in the literature lessons: an increased vocabulary and a better understanding of grammar. 44% of the students point out that literature increases their vocabulary and idioms and 26% says their English language skills improve (Bloemert et. al. "Perceive" 8). According to the writers, this result is as expected: "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" (10) as seen in figure 3.

There are other examples of research that confirm the benefits for proficiency of reading literature for EFL learners compared to more traditional proficiency training. C.Y. Lao and Stephen Krashen performed a comparative study in 2000 to investigate the effectiveness of language proficiency among EFL students in Hong Kong. The research group participated in a literature class that emphasized reading for content and enjoyment. In addition to reading five compulsory novels (by writers such as J.D. Salinger, L.M. Montgomery and R. Cormier) students were invited to select one literary novel themselves. The classes consisted mainly of reading literature in class but another component was the discussion of literary themes and personal opinions. The control group enrolled in a traditional language proficiency class covering oral skills, writing, listening and reading of informational texts. Both groups were tested on their proficiency afterwards. The result shows that the experimental students' vocabulary increased significantly from approximately 17,000 words to 20,000 words (Lao and Krashen 265). The students that participated in the literature class increased their reading skills and verbal proficiency far more than the comparison group, and they also noted the lessons would help them in future study whereas the comparison group were not as enthusiastic about their traditional lessons (267).

The benefits literature can provide in the EFL classroom are described according to Paran in *Literature in Language Education* by Hall (2005) as the “contribution of literature to language learning” (470). Hall addresses three important factors to achieve positive results in language proficiency: (1) the evidence for affective involvement by the learners, (2) their contribution to discussions on the literature that increases their language development and (3) the learners’ perception of the use of literature in the language classroom (472). Without the presence of these three factors it is difficult to achieve a setting in which learners improve their language proficiency when using literature in the classroom. Literature creates an invitation to students for “extended output,” which translates as the opportunity to discuss elaborately what has been read, either in speech or written assignments. This form of communicative language teaching (CLT) has proven to be effective, although this approach also risks a tendency to move “too swiftly to content and response” (123). It is therefore important for teachers to give the learners sufficient time to draw their attention to the literary language and explain about the literary language used. The important role of the teacher is also stressed by Paran. The teacher should avoid the notion of total comprehension or intrinsic meaning of a literary text. The discussion on interpretation should be an open one that may lead to lively conversations which increase the learner’s proficiency. Learners should feel free to talk without the fear of getting the answers wrong. Learners afraid to speak out in class may result in “word or phrase length utterances” which is not beneficial to the development of their language proficiency (Paran 473).

Various studies illustrate the effectiveness of literature education in relation to increasing language proficiency. The research by Bloemert et al. shows that learners are able to point out the benefits of reading literature to increase their English vocabulary and idioms.

This valuable self-reflection by learners should be put to good use in designing an effective literature program in the EFL classroom, for instance by granting the learners more

time to read extensively to experience these advantages in language proficiency. In addition the teacher should put less emphasis on literature comprehension and more lively conversation to increase the use of the English language.

3.5. Critical Thinking and Citizenship

It is necessary to reconsider the position of literature within the 21st century curriculum because increasingly learners are expected to develop a self-reliant attitude towards a future in which little is certain and new developments evolve quickly (Brown 401; Kwakernaak 30; Ten Dam and Volman 359). The most recent publication of *Curriculum.nu* published in May 2019 recommends paying special attention to citizenship and critical thinking when using “creative expressions of language” in the EFL classroom, such as poetry and literature (my trans.; *Curriculum.nu* “Conceptvoorstellen” 28). In *Literature in Language Education* Hall presents an overview of the way in which literature in education has developed over the last centuries. He points out that the second half of the 20th century showed a growing interest in the “humanistic and individualist potential of literary ‘response’” (Hall 100). This humanistic approach may be based on the assumption that literature contributes to a better understanding of others and personal growth that leads to the development of responsible and more critical citizens. *Onderwijs2032* adopts this view in its advice in connection to future focussed education in the 21st century:

Future focussed education [. . .] contributes to the students’ social skills, open attitude, and knowledge and understanding of other cultures and religions. This helps them to address the social issues of their time and think about meaningful solutions. Education will help learners to become responsible citizens by

teaching them how to think critically and how to develop a responsible attitude towards their own actions. (my trans.;⁷ *Onderwijs2032* 23)

To think critically is “a question of making choices and knowing why you are making that choice, respecting the choice and opinions of others, communicating about these, thereby forming your own opinion, and making it known” (Ten Dam and Volman 360). By using literature as a starting point for discussion within the classroom walls the learner develops his or her personal opinions and experiences how others feel about the same subjects. An example of how critical thinking can be used in a classroom environment is a concept known as reciprocal teaching (RT) by which learners train individual strategies such as questioning, clarifying and summarizing the texts they have read (Brown 401; Hall 123). When learners are invited to ask questions on what they read in the language classroom, they train how to ask relevant questions – a skill useful in all occupations and decision making in general.

In addition, critical thinking and literary reading are considered to involve a similar cognitive process (Koek et. al. 251). According to Koek et. al., the mind works with two distinctive cognitive processes: one is automatic and enables us to judge situations quickly and another makes it possible to think hypothetically (247). The second process is triggered when thinking critically because the mind must consider pros and cons in a hypothetical way to find a solution of a problem.

Literature triggers the same process because the mind tries to make sense of what is read. Koek, Janssen, Hakemulder and Rijlaarsdam decided to investigate in 2015

⁷ In Dutch: “Toekomstgericht onderwijs [...] brengt ze ook sociale vaardigheden, een open houding en kennis van en begrip voor andere culturen en religies bij. Dat helpt ze de grote maatschappelijke vraagstukken van deze tijd te begrijpen en na te denken over zinvolle oplossingen. [...] Om leerlingen te helpen verantwoordelijke burgers te worden, leren ze op allerlei terreinen van het leven kritisch na te denken en probeert het onderwijs ze verantwoordelijkheid bij te brengen voor hun eigen handelen.” (*Onderwijs2032* 23)

how effective literature can be in the development of critical thinking skills for Vwo pupils in the Netherlands by raising the research question: “Do upper secondary pre-university students show growth in critical literary understanding after attending lessons with a focus on literature?” (251). Their research consisted of a prospective cohort study, in this case a longitudinal study that followed participants over a four month period, measuring their development of critical thinking skills and critical thinking dispositions. The participants’ developments were measured on two occasions using two different ways of assessment⁸ (252). Results revealed that: “critical thinking skills moderated and critical thinking dispositions mediated growth in critical literary understanding” (267). Their findings suggest that critical literary understanding can improve and develop in the EFL classroom because the critical dispositions were stimulated and developed as a result.

Although these results confirm the hypothesis that the learner benefits from literature to develop critical thinking skills in the language classroom, it should be noted that their research was conducted at one school only and without a control group (269). With their research they hope to stress that, although more research is to be done on the subject, the relatively small role critical thinking has now in the Dutch educational practice should be reconsidered. *Onderwijs2032* and subsequently *Curriculum.nu* embrace this aspect and made it one of its leading focus points, not only in language education but in all school subjects (*Onderwijs2032* 23; 30; 33; 42; 52; *Curriculum.nu* “Conceptvoorstellen” 28; 32; 37; 43).

While Koek et. al. stresses the relevance of developing critical thinking in the EFL classroom, Van remarks in his article that simulating critical thinking can negatively affect learners’ sense of security and hinder their involvement in class: “A teacher using the Critical Literacy approach must take in account the students’ social experiences in order to maintain

⁸ The Critical Thinking Dispositions Questionnaire (CTDQ) and Cornell Critical Thinking Test level X (CCTT). (Koek et. al. 256)

the learner's sense of freedom and openness" (Van 8). According to platform *Onderwijs2032*, schools should be a place of practice for a democratic attitude and learners should develop skills that concern citizenship (*Onderwijs2032* 35). Teachers should therefore create balance between a secure learning environment and enough challenge to prepare learners for their future in our democratic society. There is still much to explore when discussing critical thinking in the classroom. For example, not all teachers wish to engage in critical thinking in the classroom. An example of this is the study carried out by DUO Educational Research⁹ in February 2017, which noted that 11% of all teachers in a survey agree with the statement that sensitive topics are off limits in the secondary school classroom due to an increase of segregation in society (Van Grinsven et. al. 27). In the larger cities the average is higher: 13%. Topics that were considered sensitive included: homosexuality, political situations in for instance Russia or Turkey, cultural and religious differences, terrorism and racism (28).

Research shows that literature can be a great way to involve learners with critical thinking within the language classroom in the upper Havo and Vwo levels. This is in agreement with the advice in *Onderwijs2032* and *Curriculum.nu*. It is advisable for educational developers to look into the design of guidelines for teachers to steer class discussions and conversations that concern sensitive topics into the right direction. This may lower the threshold for teachers to use literature as a starting point for lively discussions and conversations in the target language, which will benefit both language proficiency as the critical thinking skills of the learner.

3.6. Pleasure of Reading

Reading literature can be a challenging, inspiring, relaxing, stimulating but also an experience that requires patience. As with many things that are forced, learners lose their

⁹ DUO Onderwijsonderzoek, Utrecht

interest and motivation quickly. Teaching becomes a more pleasant task when the learners are motivated to engage with the lessons. Zoltán Dörnyei has developed a comprehensive motivational construct relevant to L2 classroom motivations (Dörnyei 280). This construct shows that on the level of the learner there are several aspects that may positively increase their motivation. Pleasure or student satisfaction is one of them (282). The pleasure of learning languages is also one of the main building blocks addressed in the fourth and most recent intermediate report of *Curriculum.nl* (Curriculum.nu “Vierde Tussenproduct” 3). The report describes that creative utterances of languages such as literature stimulate the development of this pleasure (5). *Onderwijs2032* states that the pleasure of reading should be promoted by acquainting the learners with literature to which they can relate (*Onderwijs2032* 30). Gay Ivey’s solutions to increase the motivation of the learners to read and engage with literature include access to more diverse books and more time to read: “When students had plenty of time to read and could secure the books they desired, they were easily engaged. Inexperienced readers in particular were successful when they found books that served their interests and that they could easily read” (Ivey 243). The aspect of the availability of time is addressed in more detail in the next chapter.

Ivey is not the first to point out that interesting and comprehensive input is of great relevance for increased motivation when reading is concerned. According to Ten Dam and Volman it is important that “students work on critical competence in the context of specific school subjects and topics. These topics must refer to practical situations students can relate to” (Ten Dam and Volman 372-3), like discussed in the previous chapter on critical thinking. In short, a learner should feel related or in the least interested in the topic of what is read to experience a positive effect on his or her reading comprehension. If the learner is not motivated, he or she will most likely resent picking up novels, plays, poems or short stories. The teacher’s decision on what literature to read is therefore of great importance. By

involving learners on what novels to read, the learner's need of autonomy is satisfied and therefore their motivation increases (Ivey 240; Dörnyei 282; Van Schooten and De Gloppe 185). This is consistent with earlier research by Krashen on the importance of comprehensive input. Krashen assumes that "the competence in spelling and vocabulary is best attained by comprehensible input in the form of reading" (Krashen 440). By comprehensible input he means information that is attainable from personal perspectives and interests. The other aspect Krashen highlights throughout much of his research is the Affective Filter Hypothesis. Learners are held back from learning when they feel anxiety or little motivation. When the affective filter is high, the learner experiences a mental block that prevents him or her from profiting from the learning experience. It is the task of the teacher to diminish the mental block by making learners aware of connections between the world of the novel and their own. For instance, reading *1984* by George Orwell written in 1949 can be quite a daunting endeavour for secondary school pupils. When the learners are provided with context in contemporary media on online privacy, the affective filter is lowered because they can relate to the context, share their own experiences and are more open to engage with the seemingly complex task of reading this novel. The teacher is here to guide this process.

More can be said about the pleasure of reading, but the most important aspect is that pleasure makes learning so much easier. When pupils are enjoying (aspects of) what they learn, the learning environment is unforced and creativity can flourish. To motivate learners to find pleasure in reading it is important for teachers to create an open and inspiring learning environment, lower the constraints caused by the affective filter, introduce learners to comprehensible input and involve learners in the process of deciding what literature to read.

3.7. Importance of Time

Time is limited in the language classroom and reading in class is a time consuming business. The majority of the EFL teachers at the University of Central Lancashire signal that there is “not enough time available for using literature” in the EFL classroom, as reported by Jones and Carter in their study on the attitude of teachers towards literature (Jones and Carter 72). Teachers elaborated by saying they assume learners desire to spend their class time in a more functional and practical way (Jones and Carter 73). This statement is confirmed by a learner’s response in the research by Bloemert et. al. on the relevance of literature in the language classroom: “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 (Bloemert “Perceive” 7)”. The limited time in the EFL classroom is often the reason teachers decide to train their pupils for the summative grammar and vocabulary tests instead of spending time on literature. A teacher’s statement in the study by Jones and Carter describes this as follows: “While I am confident that literature could play a role in increasing learners’ cultural awareness, I am also concerned that learners are likely to reject it in favour of studying what they need to succeed in exams” (Jones and Carter 73).

Time limitations for implementing literature in EFL classrooms should be taken seriously. Preparing to read a text takes time and the process of reading takes time too. The effectiveness of close reading in the language classroom is confirmed (Duncan and Paran 259; Lao and Krashen 262) but time is also necessary to read and discuss literature properly for the learners to effectively gain from it (Lao and Krashen 264).

Rushing through a literary text, or reading just small fragments of a text takes away the reading experience, making it boring to some and too complicated or fast for others, just as literature assessment may spoil the reading experience. This raises the question: how

should the teacher find the time? Lao and Krashen suggest that replacing traditional language lessons with literature lessons will increase the language proficiency of the learner (Lao and Krashen 268; Krashen 454; Lee 158). This provides teachers and learners with more class time because the direct instruction of vocabulary and grammar is implemented in the literature lesson and does not have to be taught separately. Textbooks such as *Stepping Stones*, *AllRight!*, *New Interface* etc., often combine their vocabulary assignments to short informational texts that relate to topical themes for young adults or articles that refer to literary texts. These are quite short and most of the time focus on retrieving fragments of factual information quickly from the text. A literature assignment in *Stepping Stones* (2013) tries to pay attention to a young adults novel, but only uses a fragment of about 500 words. (See appendix B for the text and questions). Figure 5 shows the questions related to the fragment of *The Hunger Games* (2008):

Reference: Literature > Literary Terms

1 **Fragment**

1 The media play an important part in *The Hunger Games*. Underline at least two examples of this in the fragment.

2 What is the 'reaping'?

3 What makes this book an example of **anti-utopian** (or **dystopian**) literature?

4 Judging from this short fragment, is *The Hunger Games* an example of a **coming-of-age story**, a **children's book** or a **young adult novel**? Or is it a combination of two or three of these? Why do you think so?

Figure 5 *Stepping Stones*, 4 Vwo, Katern 2 (2013)

The first question asks the learner to retrieve certain information from the text and the second question refers to vocabulary knowledge. The third and fourth question address the

learner's knowledge on literary terms. Only the last two questions could invite the teacher to discuss the theme of and the development in *The Hunger Games* with the learners in more detail, but in the average Dutch EFL 4 Vwo classroom just answering the two first questions correctly would suffice due to time limitations. There is not enough class time to go deep into the meaning of 'dystopian' and 'coming-of-age' literature in an assignment that is one out of many and should take around five minutes.¹⁰

Inserting literature in another school subject can provide learners with more time to reflect on their reading experience. Learners would be able to spread the workload of reading literature between two school subjects, thus leaving more time for other aspect of learning English such as listening, writing or speaking. Interdisciplinary programs give learners the opportunity to spend more time on literature and a broad perspective on what is read (Witte 191).

The analysis of interdisciplinary programs is elaborate and would be an independent part of the research into literature in the EFL classroom. It is mentioned briefly in this thesis because much is to gain from interdisciplinary programs between other school subjects. *Onderwijs2032* notes that by presenting learners with a deeper and more coherent understanding of their learning materials, learners' motivation to learn will be increased (40). The platform proposes an interdisciplinary approach to achieve this goal because learners are preparing themselves for a society where problems are often on the cutting edge of different disciplines. The platform suggests a reform should be initiated because school subjects in Dutch secondary education often operate in isolated domains. It is of importance to make a shift to programmes that help learners look at problems from different perspectives.

4. Method

¹⁰ The maximum time spent in class on a full exercise in the Stepping Stones workbook.

The following chapter presents the construction and procedure of the questionnaire designed for this thesis to distinguish the key limitations teachers of English experience in upper levels of Havo and Vwo in the Netherlands. The method was written and tested as part of the Utrecht University course Practice Based Research (PGO) in November 2018 with the supervision of Ada Kool. A short version of the findings were presented in a paper “Teacher Attitudes Towards Using Literature in the EFL Classroom” in November 2018 (Boeschoten). A more extensive analysis of the data taken from the questionnaire results is reviewed in this thesis in in chapter five. The results are presented in chapter six and are included in the final conclusion of this thesis. In this chapter the findings and theoretical framework are translated into recommendations on micro, meso and macro level. For the discussion in chapter eight, the findings and concluding diagrams are shared with two educational professionals: a teacher of English at the upper levels of Havo and Vwo and a curriculum developer for the Department of Modern Languages at SLO.

4.1. Context

The questionnaire used in this study is designed to indicate the problems teachers encounter when teaching literature in the English classroom (Boeschoten 2). This method was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, the online questionnaire made it possible for the participants to respond in their own time. Secondly, it was easier to reach a large group of teachers from different schools without having to visit them all personally. Thirdly, a questionnaire makes it possible for participants to take more time to think about more complex questions and their answers (Stokking 158). Lastly, Jones and Carter used a comparable questionnaire to investigate teachers’ stance towards using literature in the EFL classroom. Their results presented a clear overview as to what limitations teachers of EFL in Nottingham, UK experienced when teaching literature to EFL students (Jones & Carter 70).

The results convey whether the teachers' experience of teaching literature connects with the advice given in *Onderwijs2032* and subsequently *Curriculum.nu*. This comparison of theory and practice will result in a set of recommendations for promoting teaching literature in EFL classrooms in the Netherlands.

4.2. Participants

Between October and November 2018 five secondary schools in the Utrecht area of the Netherlands were approached to join this research (Diagram 1). The questionnaire was sent by email to forty teachers of English at the upper levels (4/5 Havo and 5/6 Vwo). It was communicated to the schools that the study would focus on the attitudes towards teaching literature in the EFL classroom.

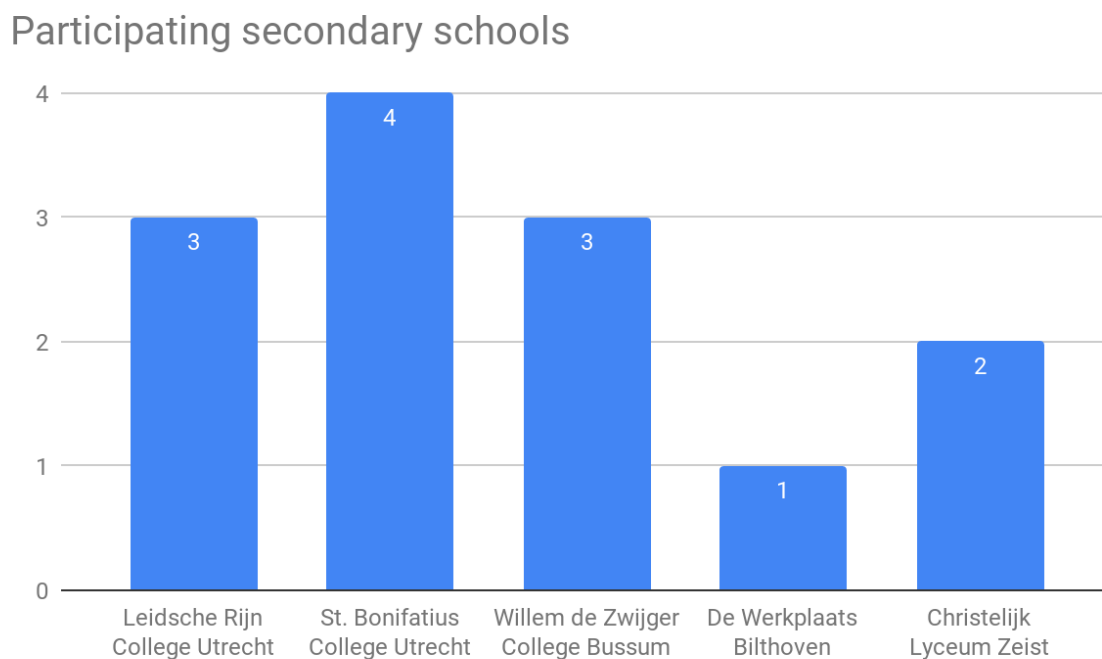


Diagram 1: Participating schools and number of participants

The schools represented in this study are profiled with innovative curricula (Leidsche Rijn College, De Werkplaats) and more traditional structured schools (Willem de Zwijger College,

Bussum, Christelijk Lyceum Zeist and St. Bonifatius College). Participation in the study was voluntary and a total of thirteen teachers from the five different schools participated. This is considerably less than hoped for as the questionnaire was distributed among forty teachers on five different schools. The most often heard excuse was: “no time for another survey” which highlights the high workload teachers experience as well as their tiredness of educational experiments and reforms. There seems to be an ongoing flow of research and educational reform initiatives teachers have to adapt to. The initiatives, often initiated on macro (national) and meso (school) level are ranging from using digital resources in schools like laptops and phones to reforming the curricula completely.

The data gathered were anonymous and it was agreed that the results of this study and the output of this thesis would be made available to the participating schools afterwards.

4.3. Materials

The questionnaire presented the teachers with a set of seventeen statements. Teachers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement:

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
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The statements in this questionnaire were constructed to obtain an insight on teachers' experience on the various aspects of teaching literature highlighted in *Onderwijs2032* and *Curriculum.nu*, such as the learners' development of language proficiency and critical thinking skills. In addition there are statements on the feasibility of using literature in the EFL classroom and the teachers' stance on interdisciplinary programs. The key statements

addressed possible obstacles teachers encounter when implementing more literature in their lessons, such as time and self-confidence, e.g.:

- Using literature in the classroom takes a lot of preparation.
- Not enough classroom time is available for using literature in the classroom.
- I feel well equipped to teach literature in the language classroom.

The questionnaire concludes with several multiple-choice questions like the number of years the participant is teaching and his or her level of education. This way it is possible to distinguish between levels of teaching experience. There is one open question included in the questionnaire (“Do you wish to share any additional comments?”) to allow spontaneity and useful contributions to the study. The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix C.

4.4. Procedure

The questionnaire was sent in October 2018 via email to the EFL teachers with the use of Google Forms. In November 2018 a reminder was sent to the addressees who had not responded yet. The link in the email opened the questionnaire in their desktop or mobile browser. All results were uploaded to an Excel form to be translated into statistics presented in the analysis below. As this a study into teacher attitudes there is no control group or independent variable.

4.5. Collection of Data

Google forms provided statistics and a clear overview of answers per school or individual. All data was gathered anonymously.

5. Data analysis

The answers gathered from all questionnaires were subdivided in groups of teachers teaching for 0-5 years, 5-10 years and more than 10 years. However, due to the small the number of participants it not possible to draw any conclusions based on the years of their teaching experience. Therefore conclusions based on these data are omitted and kept for further research. The same problem occurs when looking at the level of completed degree in relation to the answers given. At University of Applied Sciences (HBO) there is less focus on teaching literature in contrast to teachers educated at university where every student attends compulsory courses on in depth literary analysis. The information on teacher experience and level of completed degree is therefore not connected to any conclusions.

The results are based on the outcomes of the questionnaire that stand out most, meaning the questions with a remarkable conformity between participants or great divisions in their response to the statements in the questionnaire are mentioned. For instance, there is overall agreement on the relevance on using literature in the English classroom, but teachers are divided when asked if literature lessons should result in a grade.

6. Results

This chapter will present the results of the questionnaire on teacher attitudes to answer the first sub-question: What are the restrictions teachers experience regarding the implementation of literature in their lessons and overall curriculum? These results are then used in the conclusion of this paper when formulating recommendations to stimulate teachers to spend more time on literature in the language classroom. The shape of pie charts per question is chosen to give a quick overview of the answers of all participants.

The results show that most teachers are confident that reading literature contributes to language proficiency and see literature as a useful source in the EFL classroom (Diagram 2 & 3)¹², which corresponds with the theory by Krashen (441), Bloemert (2), and Koobs et. al. (14):

Reading English frequently will improve the students' proficiency in English.

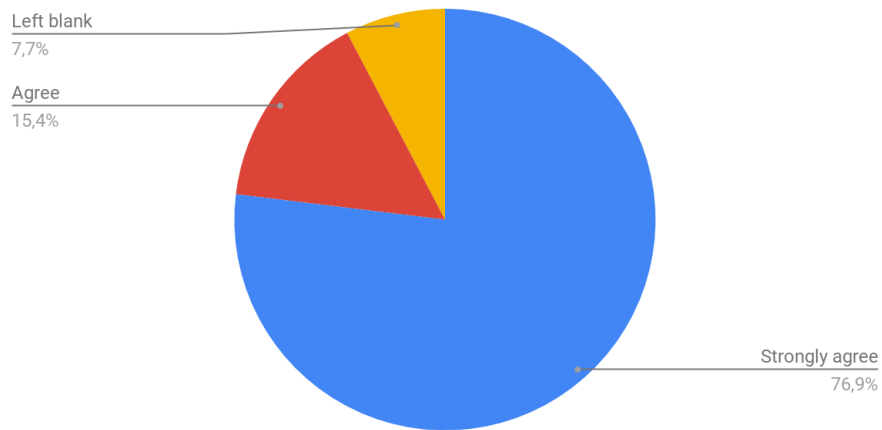


Diagram 2

Literature is a useful source of classroom material.

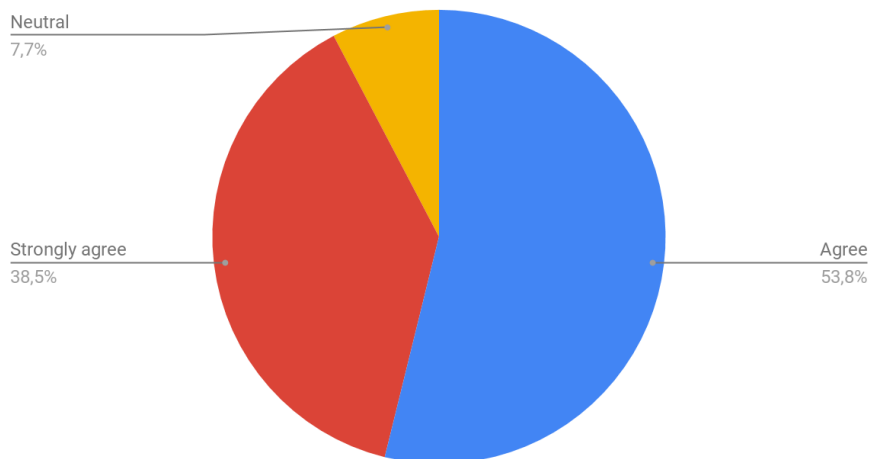


Diagram 3

¹² One participant left his or her answer to this statement blank. Therefore this diagram only shows the answer of twelve respondents.

Respondents are very much convinced that reading literature contributes to an increase of the learners' vocabulary: 84.6% strongly agrees with this.

However, the results also show 30.8% is not completely confident he or she is well equipped to teach literature (Diagram 4), although nearly all of them have noted that it is a useful classroom resource (Diagram 3). Next to this, 53.9% of the teachers say that there is not

I feel well-equipped to teach literature in the language classroom.

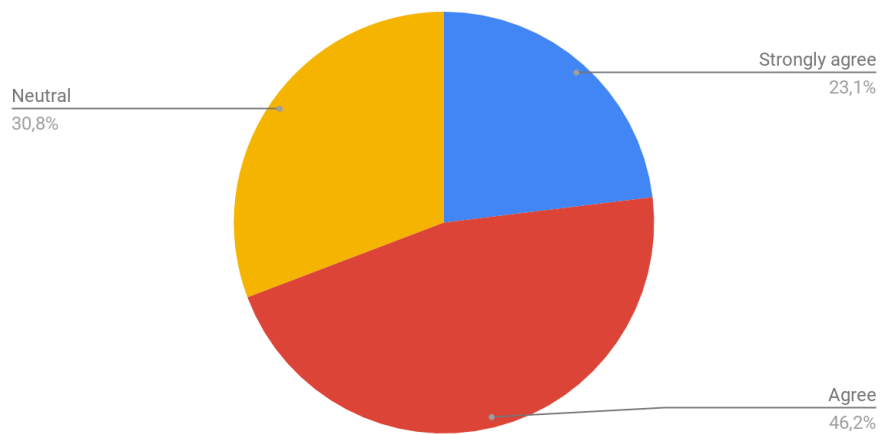


Diagram 4

Not enough classroom time is available for using literature in the classroom.

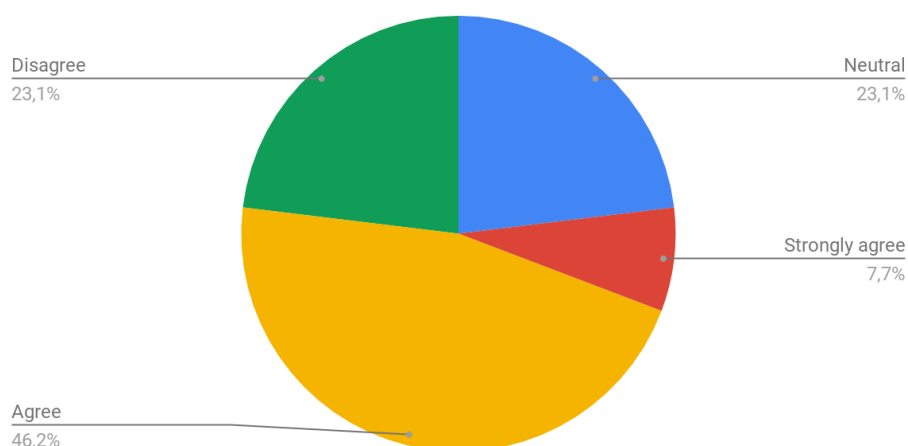


Diagram 5

enough classroom time available for using literature (Diagram 5).

The fact that time is a limiting effect on teaching literature is also explained by the statistics on the statement: “using literature takes a lot of preparation” as 76.9% of all participants agreed or strongly agreed.

Another area of research was about in which way teachers think literature can contribute to 21st century skills like critical thinking and reflection on contemporary events. Both statements show a clear agreement: 46.2% of all participants agree and 46.2% strongly agrees that literature contributes to critical thinking. Only one person states he or she is neutral about this statement. This is also the case for the statement on reflection on contemporary events, although with slightly less certainty: 23.1% strongly agrees, 61.5% agrees and 15.4% feels neutral about this statement.

There are three statements in the questionnaire that relate to the way teachers think literature should be taught and assessed:

1. When implementing literature in lessons, it should also be assessed and result in a grade;
2. In order to use literature, first the teacher should introduce the historical and cultural context; and
3. Understanding literary terms is vital in understanding literature.

These are the statements with answers that are the most divergent. The majority of the participants is undecided whether literature lessons should result in a grade (53.8%). Most of the teachers (69.2%) say the cultural and historical context of a book should be introduced by the teacher whereas 23.1% disagrees. This is echoed in the responses on the statement that literary terms are vital in understanding literature: 69.2% agrees, 30.8% disagrees (Diagram

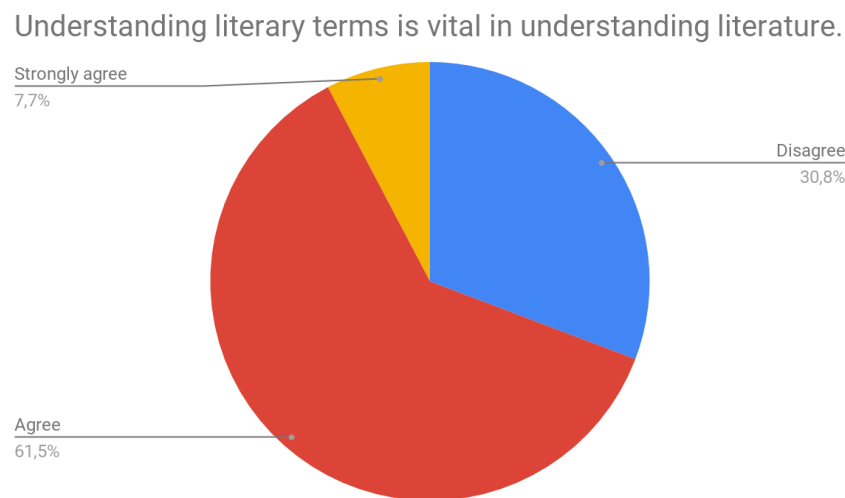


Diagram 6

6).

The last two statements presented to the teachers concerned the preparation for school exams and central exams. Most teachers, respectively 84.6% and 69.2%, agreed that teaching literature prepares learners for their exams. No teacher disagreed, but respectively 15.4% and 30.8% answered neutral.

In addition to the statements, teachers were invited to respond to an open question: “Do you wish to share any additional comments on literature use in the classroom?” (Appendix A). Below are some of the responses:

- I think the effect of literature education depends on how well the teacher can help students relate to the contents. It is vital that students learn to form an opinion and to find enjoyment or at least relevance in this art form.’
- The answers to all these questions are highly dependent on the context and the way that the literature classes are set up.’
- I answered a row of questions neutral: literature helps raise cultural awareness/critical thinking/etc. I did this because I believe that literature in itself doesn't contribute to those things. When you learn students to reflect on the literature, then it does help.’
- I think it depends on the school as to how much class time may be dedicated to literature. In my opinion, it is a crucial part of the curriculum.
- Concerning the statement: In order to use literature, first the teacher should introduce the historical and cultural context - this can be researched by the pupils, of course!

The answers to the open question reveals teachers say the way literature is taught is decided by the teacher or school which means there is much to gain if these schools and teachers have clear guidelines as to how to design these literature lessons. The participants also point out that teaching literature in itself is not relevant, but that its relevance has to do with the way the lessons are set up: with clear purpose and interesting content. This is consistent with the findings by Nystrand in his article “Making It Hard: Curriculum and Instruction as Factors in the Difficulty of Literature” (1991) in which he states “curriculum and instruction - what teachers ask students to do - are themselves significant factors in the difficulty of any work of literature studied in school (Nystrand 143). Positive and inspired teachers are key in the way learners experience literature.

The overview with all responses to the questionnaire can be found in appendix D.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to provide suggestions on macro (system/nation); meso (school/institution); and micro (classroom/learner) level to bring the teaching in line with the advice by *Curriculum.nu* to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The research in this paper has looked at the promotion and feasibility for more literature lessons in the EFL classroom and highlights the restrictions Dutch teachers of English in the upper Havo and Vwo levels experience regarding the implementation of literature in their lessons and overall curriculum. In addition to the recommendations on micro, meso and macro level, the requirements for a learning trajectory on literature in the EFL classroom (micro level) in the concluding chapter of this thesis will ideally lower the threshold for teachers to implement more literature in their lessons because it provides a clear framework for designing lesson plans.

The questionnaire was used to answer the first sub-question: to find out what restrictions teachers experience regarding using literature in the EFL classroom. The teachers who have completed the questionnaire agreed with the consulted theory that literature can be a relevant source of classroom material in terms of enhancing vocabulary, language proficiency, critical thinking skills and the development of cultural awareness. In addition, nearly all teachers agreed that literature as a classroom resource prepares learners for their school- and central exams. In other words, teachers agree with the most recent advice given by the department of modern languages of *Curriculum.nu* in May 2019 (“Conceptvoorstellen” 10). The outcomes of this research also signal that according to the teachers, teaching literature contributes to relevant skills like critical thinking, which are outlined in the advice given by *Curriculum.nu* and the previous version of this initiative: *Onderwijs2032*. However, teachers also signal that they encounter limitations when implementing literature in their lessons. Results from the questionnaire show that the key

restrictions teachers experience in teaching English literature in the upper forms of Havo and Vwo in Dutch schools are:

- Lack of time available for the preparations of literature lessons;
- Lack of time for the actual teaching of these lessons; and
- Some teachers wonder if they are well equipped to teach literature.

The second sub-question addresses the design of effective literature lessons: What are the requirements for a learning trajectory on literature in the EFL classroom look like when taking into account the available theory and the needs of the teachers? The requirements are constructed with the use of the information gathered in the theoretical framework and the advice given in *Onderwijs2032* and *Curriculum.nu*. This trajectory is based on the concept of the ideal curriculum: “the vision or basic philosophy underlying a curriculum” (Van den Akker et. al. 113), which means it consists of guidelines and prerequisites for the actual design of the formal written curriculum. An effective learning trajectory on English literature in the language classroom must offer:

- The cumulative use of literature in the English language classroom. Learners need to be acquainted with reading from a young age in order to appreciate literature in later stages of their educational development (Van der Knaap 35).
- Relevance of what is read. By connecting assignments to deepen the literature experience, learners find purpose in their effort to read (Krashen 440; Lao and Krashen 264).
- Relatable content. If learners feel a connection with the themes and language used, they are more motivated to follow through with the reading, lessons and discussions (Ivey 243; Ten Dam and Volman 372-3).
- A relief of pressure to “like” what is read. By respecting personal opinions, intrinsic motivation is stimulated (Dörnyei 282).

- Time to discuss what is read elaborately (Paran 473):
 - To train critical thinking skills and the personal development of the learner.
 - To process what is read.
 - To talk about what is read with the teacher and peers in the target language so that proficiency in the L2 is stimulated.
- Time to read (Duncan and Paran 243-260):
 - In-class. With the supervision and stimulation of the teacher, learners can train their concentration.
 - Outside of the classroom.

The following diagram visualizes the requirements within the key requirement: a continuous build up starting in the first year up until the upper forms of secondary school as shown below:

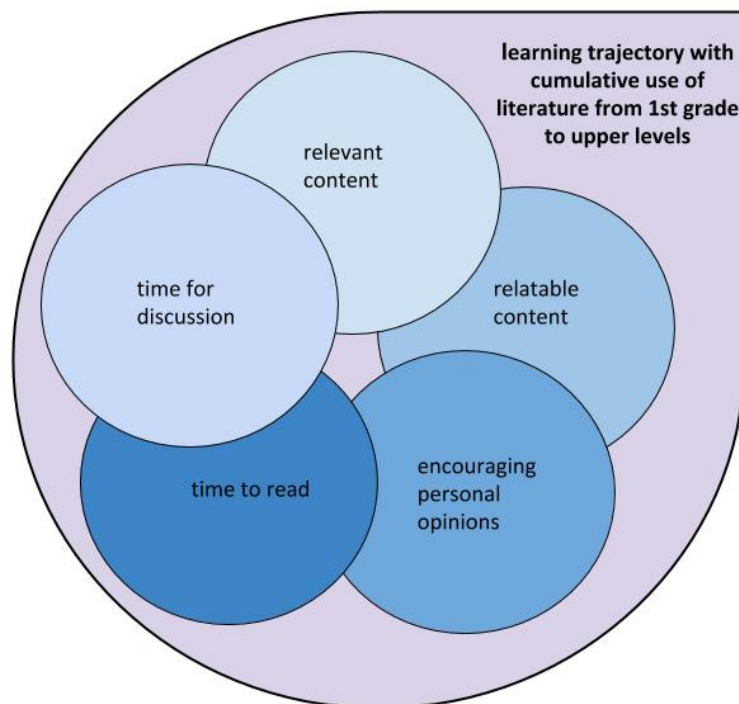
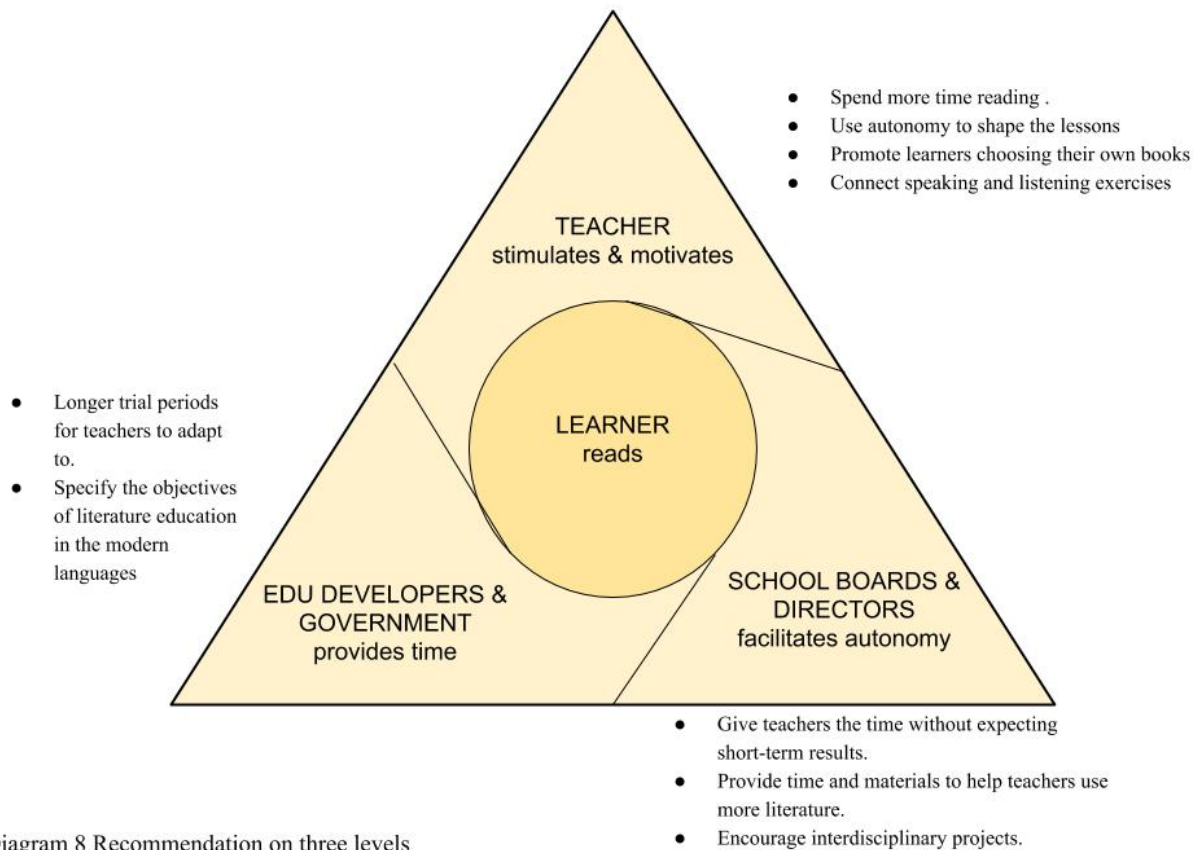


Diagram 7 Conditions for an effective learning trajectory on literature

This diagram of the requirements for a learning trajectory can be used in further research towards the formal written curriculum (Van den Akker et. al. 113) and presents what can be done within the EFL classroom.

The sub-questions have addressed the restrictions noted by teachers in the questionnaire and the shaping of a learning trajectory for teaching literature in the EFL classroom. These two questions have helped structuring the theory on the subject of literature in the classroom and laid a base for the key research question: How can the limitations experienced by Dutch EFL teachers to implement more literature in their lessons be addressed to bring the teaching in line with the advice by *Curriculum.nu*? The former diagram highlighted what are the requirements for literature in the EFL classroom. The next diagram (8) illustrates how the micro, meso and macro level are in connection with each other and what are the key recommendations to promote literature education. To conclude

this paper, the recommendations are described in detail per level.



7.1. Teachers

Teachers signal that they encounter obstacles when implementing (more) literature in their lessons whereas their positive attitude is key in successful literature lessons (Nystrand 143) and they agree with the relevance of teaching literature as stated in the proposals by *Curriculum.nu* (“Conceptvoorstellen” 13-14). Considering the outcomes of the questionnaire and the consulted theory the following advice can be formulated. Teachers should:

- Spend more time reading (silent reading and in-class reading).
- Feel free to use their autonomy to shape the lessons.

- Promote learners choosing their own books and stimulate learners to choose books challenging enough for them to enhance their English. (Lee 158).
- Implement what is read in speaking and listening exercises to address the learners' abilities to practice and improve their English proficiency.

7.2. School Boards and Directors

Time seems to be key in the facilitation towards teachers and learners. Much of the class time is now consumed with a curriculum full of summative testing, textbook exercises and grammar instructions though research has shown language proficiency increases more quickly by reading and talking about what is read (Bloemert et. al. "Perspective" 8). School boards and directors therefore should:

- Give teachers the time to read in-class with the learners thoroughly without expecting short-term results.
- Be aware that teachers might feel insecure about teaching literature. They could provide time and materials to help teachers use more literature in the EFL classroom and connect different school subjects by introducing themes to work on.
- Encourage interdisciplinary projects as this makes it possible for teachers to work together. School boards and directors can lead the redevelopment of a coherent curriculum where the pressure on one teacher is distributed to a group of teachers, each with their own strengths and talents.

American writer Dan Pink has written extensively on motivation. He argues with the three most important factors in his book *Drive*: autonomy, mastery and purpose. If these are all present and well maintained, a person is most happy and motivated in his or her job (Pink 10). Autonomy is the aspect where there is most to be gained within the classroom can be

gained for both teacher and student: less summative testing, less compulsory curriculum modules, more freedom and autonomy to teach and read literature.

7.3. Educational Developers and Government

For educational developers and the government there lies a big challenge in being more patient. They should allow teachers to set the pace of innovation instead of forcing them to keep up with a whirlwind of new ideas: many teachers lose track of what is going on and lose interest. Current educational reforms and experiments change quickly and are set up in haste. The change from *Onderwijs2032* to *Curriculum.nu* is a good example of this. This hunger for new ideas and innovation in the educational industry can be a waste of human and financial resources, but first and foremost, it results in innovation tiredness of the teacher.

The government should specify the objectives of literature education in the modern languages and the way in which teachers can achieve these goals. This way, teachers can be more confident in spending time using more literature in their classrooms because the relevance is confirmed by both theory and practice. As one participant notes in the survey: “The Nobel Prize winning writer Doris Lessing's only form of education was reading books. She was a remarkably erudite person with a wide general knowledge and a critical thinker. Literature can teach much of what we need to know in life”.

8. Discussion

The findings in this paper have been shared with two professionals: an EFL teacher at Koningin Wilhelmina College in Culemborg and a curriculum developer for the Department of Modern Languages at SLO. The former is not one of the teachers who has responded to the questionnaire. Because the questionnaire data was gathered anonymously it was not possible to track down the participants in order to ask for feedback. The latter is also one of the

powers behind *Curriculum.nu* from the department of modern languages. The teacher was positive about the learning trajectory design, especially the focus on relevance: “They should produce something in these lessons to take with them in the future of their school career”. In addition he added:

“I would recommend reading in-class, but I would stimulate pupils to read a novel of their own choice in their own pace with the risk of having to drop the class conversation. Many of the literature programs I know focus on one specific novel. You lose the motivation of pupils not interested in the novel, which is a great loss in my perspective. To me there are two possibilities: you allow learners to read what they like or you invite them to read one specific novel to be able to discuss the text in great detail”.

The feedback of this teacher is very useful as it paints a clear picture of how literature lessons are often organized. He also stressed the fact that literature lessons are demanding in preparation: “One lesson of 50 minutes requests at least 2-3 hours of preparation”. He does however enjoy teaching these lessons more than lessons on vocab or grammar.

The modern language professional at SLO noted that she thought the research was done properly and was satisfied with the use of relevant literature. She agreed with most of the recommendations and highlighted the importance of acquainting learners with literature from the lower grades upwards. She mentioned that the cumulative use of literature in English lessons is of importance but that this use of literature must also be present in other language lessons such as Dutch as the first language. This will enable the learner to be open to literature in second languages. On the subject of interdisciplinary programs she noted “It is great that you mention interdisciplinary projects, the added value of which can be emphasized even more”. Furthermore, she was curious what a research on learner attitudes would add to the conclusions in this thesis. Of course, this is useful feedback for further research.

Her feedback was very clear on the comparison between *Onderwijs2032* and *Curriculum.nu*. On this topic she noted: “Please be aware of the difference between the two projects. Especially on the subject of the modern languages *Curriculum.nu* has learned from the mistakes of the *Onderwijs2032* project”. In addition to the recommendations in the conclusions, she pointed out that it is crucial that teachers engage with and receive the support to facilitate activities that work towards the main goals of literature education. As examples of these goals prioritized by SLO she emphasized the importance of stimulation of empathy, intercultural awareness, critical thinking and language proficiency. She also pointed out that it was important to understand the current *Curriculum.nu* initiative is just the start of the possible reform:

“We offer the parliament our preliminary conclusions on the 10th of October 2019.

After this, we will translate the proposals to the teaching practice, test feasibility and formulate learning objectives for primary and secondary education. This is a process that will take at least two or three years and takes place in close collaboration with teachers and schools. In light of this follow-up trajectory, the recommendations in this thesis can be considered too premature”.

Whilst writing this conclusion the *Curriculum.nu* initiative has received quite some negative attention in the media. In June 2019, the *Volkskrant* columnist Aleid Truijens even warns that the Netherlands is facing an educational disaster with *Curriculum.nu* (Truijens). In another newspaper, *NRC*, Jan Drentje points out that there are relatively few teachers participating in the last round of the *Curriculum.nu* reflection, which may result in yet another curriculum reform forced upon teachers. According to Drentje this is a very undesirable situation for the “currently distressed profession of the teacher” (my trans.; Drentje). In response to this negative portrayal of the possible effects of curriculum reform with the use of *Curriculum.nu*, teacher Jeroen Steenbakkens warns that the negativity used in this discourse will not

constructively add to conversation (Steenbakker). Although a certain resistance to educational change is inevitable, the ones in charge of the reform hopefully do not lose contact with the ones responsible for carrying out the new curriculum: the teachers of future generations of learners of English.

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Appendix A

5TTO (Vwo) English Literature test

Christelijk Lyceum Zeist, April 2017

Answer these questions as fully as you can. Write in sentences and leave a line in between each answer. (20 points total)

1. Name the first 'Britons' who arrived in England and lived under Roman protection.
Where had they come from? (2pts)
2. What were the names of the three groups who next came to England, where were they from and what happened then to the Britons? (2pt)
3. Who were the next group to invade England in the 8th century, where did they come from and how did the population then organize itself? (3pts)
4. In 1066 The Battle of Hastings took place. Describe the events leading up to this battle and what happened. Write at least 100 words. (4pts)
5. What was the situation regarding language in England after 1066? (1pt)
6. What was the Germanic literature tradition based on? Mention some of its features and explain how Beowulf fits the tradition. (2pts)
7. After the French took power in England a Feudal System existed. Explain this system, how it worked and why it was so stable. (2pts)
8. Explain what the answer to the Queen's question was in the Wife of Bath's Tale
9. and give an example of it from the story. (2pts)
10. Describe at least three characteristics of a Ballad and say how ballads were suitable for the original audience. (2pts)

The Hunger Games

The space gets tighter, more claustrophobic as people arrive. The square's quite large, but not enough to hold District 12's population of eight thousand. Latecomers are directed to adjacent streets, where they can watch the event on screens as it's televised live by the state. I find myself standing in a clump of sixteens from the Seam. We all exchange terse nods then focus our attention on the temporary stage that is set up before the Justice Building. It holds three chairs, a podium, and two large glass balls, one for the boys and one for the girls. I stare at the paper slips in the girls' ball. Twenty of them have Katniss Everdeen written on them in careful handwriting.

Two of the three chairs fill with Midge's father, Mayor Undersee, who's a tall, balding man, and Effie Trinket, District 12's escort, fresh from the Capitol with her scary white grin, pinkish hair, and spring green suit. They murmur to each other and then look with concern at the empty seat.

Just as the town clock strikes two, the mayor steps up to the podium and begins to read. It's the same story every year. He tells of the history of Panem, the country that rose up out of the ashes of a place that was once called North America. He lists the disasters, the droughts, the storms, the fires, the encroaching sea that swallowed up so much of the land, the brutal war for what little sustenance remained. The result was Panem, a shining Capitol fringed by thirteen districts, which brought peace and prosperity to its citizens. Then came the Dark Days, the uprising of the districts against the Capitol. Twelve were defeated, the thirteenth obliterated. The Treaty of Treason gave us the new laws to guarantee peace and, as our yearly reminder that the Dark Days must never be repeated, it gave us the Hunger Games. The rules of the Hunger Games are simple. In punishment for the uprising, each of the twelve districts must provide one girl and one boy, called tributes, to participate. The twenty-four tributes will be imprisoned in a vast outdoor arena that could hold anything from a burning desert to a frozen wasteland. Over a period of several weeks, the competitors must fight to the death. The last tribute standing wins. Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch – this is the Capitol's way of



Suzanne Collins

Suzanne Collins (1962) is an American novelist. Ms. Collins wrote fiction for American television. After some less successful books, the first part of *The Hunger Games* was published in 2008. *The Hunger Games* trilogy was completed with *Catching Fire* (2009) and *Mockingjay*

(2010). *The Hunger Games* has become one of the most popular young adult novels of the first decade of this century. The trilogy can be read as a series of anti-utopian or dystopian novels.

In this fragment the character, Katniss Everdeen, has to go to the reaping. Katniss's name is on twenty paper slips in the glass ball, so there is a good chance she will be chosen.

reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. Look how we take our children and sacrifice them and there's nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen.' To make it humiliating as well as torturous, the Capitol requires us to treat the Hunger Games as a festivity, a sporting event pitting every district against the others. The last tribute alive receives a life of ease back home, and their district will be showered with prizes, largely consisting of food. All year, the Capitol will show the winning district gifts of grain and oil and even delicacies like sugar while the rest of us battle starvation. It is both a time for repentance and a time for thanks,' intones the mayor.

Then he reads the list of past District 12 victors. In seventy-four years, we have had exactly two. Only one is still alive. Haymitch Abernathy, a paunchy, middle-aged man, who at this moment appears hollering something unintelligible, staggers onto the stage, and falls into the third chair. He's drunk. Very. The crowd responds with

its token applause, but he's confused and tries to give Effie Trinket a big hug, which she barely manages to fend off.

The mayor looks distressed. Since all of this is being televised, right now District 12 is the laughing stock of Panem, and he knows it. He quickly tries to pull the attention back to the reaping by introducing Effie Trinket. Bright and bubbly as ever, Effie Trinket trots to the podium to give her signature, 'Happy Hunger Games! And may the odds be ever in your favor!' Her pink hair must be a wig because her curls have shifted slightly off center since her encounter with Haymitch. She goes on a bit about what an honor it is to be here, although everyone knows she's just acting to get bumped to a better district where they have proper victors, not drunks who molest you in front of the entire nation.

Through the crowd, I spot Gale looking back at me with a ghost of a smile. As reapings go, this one at least has a

slight entertainment factor. But suddenly I am thinking of Gale and his forty-two names in that big glass ball and how the odds are not in his favor. Not compared to a lot of the boys. And maybe he's thinking the same thing about me because his face darkens and he turns away. 'But there are still thousands of slips,' I wish I could whisper to him.

It's time for the drawing. Effie Trinket says as she always does, 'Ladies first' and crosses to the glass ball with the girls' names. She reaches in, digs her hand deep into the ball, and pulls out a slip of paper. The crowd draws in a collective breath and then you can hear a pin drop, and I'm feeling nauseous and so desperately hoping that it's not me, that it's not me, that it's not me.

Effie Trinket crosses back to the podium, smooths the slip of paper, and reads out the name in a clear voice. And it's not me. It's Primrose Everdeen. My sister.



Reference: Literature > Literary Terms

1

Fragment

1 The media play an important part in *The Hunger Games*. Underline at least two examples of this in the fragment.

2 What is the 'reaping'?

3 What makes this book an example of anti-utopian (or dystopian) literature?

4 Judging from this short fragment, is *The Hunger Games* an example of a coming-of-age story, a children's book or a young adult novel? Or is it a combination of two or three of these? Why do you think so?

5 Is 'Panem' the same as 'District 12'? Explain your answer.

Appendix C

Teacher Questionnaire

Teacher Attitudes Towards Using Literature

Thank you for your time!

The following questionnaire is designed for research at the School of Teaching, Utrecht University. It is conducted among teachers of English at various Dutch secondary schools to get insight on teacher attitudes towards using literature in the English classroom. All data is gathered anonymously.

This research is conducted between October and November 2018 by Anne Boeschoten (MA student, Utrecht University).

Do you have any questions concerning this questionnaire? Please send a message to:

a.boeschoten@students.uu.nl

This questionnaire takes about 4 minutes to complete.

The following 17 questions focus on your attitude towards literature in the language classroom.

1. Literature is a useful source of classroom material.

Markeer slechts één ovaal.

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neutral
 Agree
 Strongly agree

2. Reading English frequently will improve the students' proficiency in English.

Markeer slechts één ovaal.

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neutral
 Agree
 Strongly agree

3. Reading English frequently will improve the students' vocabulary.

Markeer slechts één ovaal.

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neutral
 Agree
 Strongly agree

4. Reading will contribute to critical thinking.*Markeer slechts één ovaal.*

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neutral
 Agree
 Strongly agree

5. Reading literature will help a learner to reflect on contemporary events.*Markeer slechts één ovaal.*

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neutral
 Agree
 Strongly agree

6. Reading literature will help develop cultural awareness.*Markeer slechts één ovaal.*

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neutral
 Agree
 Strongly agree

7. Using literature in the classroom takes a lot of preparation.*Markeer slechts één ovaal.*

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neutral
 Agree
 Strongly agree

8. When implementing literature in lessons, it should also be assessed and result in a grade.*Markeer slechts één ovaal.*

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neutral
 Agree
 Strongly agree

9. **Not enough classroom time is available for using literature in the classroom.**

Markeer slechts één ovaal.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

10. **In order to use literature, first the teacher should introduce the historical and cultural context.**

Markeer slechts één ovaal.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

11. **Understanding literary terms is vital in understanding literature.**

Markeer slechts één ovaal.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

12. **I would welcome an interdisciplinary program connecting English literature to history, philosophy and/or citizenship (maatschappijleer).**

Markeer slechts één ovaal.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

13. **An interdisciplinary program would reduce the workload and would make it more feasible to teach literature.**

Markeer slechts één ovaal.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

14. I feel well-equipped to teach literature in the language classroom.*Markeer slechts één ovaal.*

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neutral
 Agree
 Strongly agree

15. Teaching literature prepares learners for their school exams.*Markeer slechts één ovaal.*

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neutral
 Agree
 Strongly agree

16. Teaching literature prepares learners for their central exams.*Markeer slechts één ovaal.*

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neutral
 Agree
 Strongly agree

17. Do you wish to share any additional comments on literature use in the classroom?

Thank you! The final four are general questions on your teaching.**18. What is the name of your school?**

19. How long have you been teaching English?*Markeer slechts één ovaal.*

- 0-5 years
 5-10 years
 More than 10 years

20. What is the level of your highest completed degree?

Markeer slechts één ovaal.

- BA (University)
- BA (College/Hogeschool)
- MA
- PhD

21. Which level do you teach? (More than one answer may apply)

Vink alle toepasselijke opties aan.

- Vmbo
- Havo
- Vwo

Appendix D

Results Questionnaire

Teacher attitudes towards using literature in the EFL in The Netherlands		Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
1	Literature is a useful source of classroom material.	0,0%	0,0%	7,7%	53,8%	38,5%
2	Reading English frequently will improve the students' proficiency in English.	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	16,7%	83,3%
3	Reading English frequently will improve the students' vocabulary.	0,0%	0,0%	7,7%	7,7%	84,6%
4	Reading will contribute to critical thinking.	0,0%	0,0%	7,7%	46,2%	46,2%
5	Reading literature will help a learner to reflect on contemporary events.	0,0%	0,0%	15,4%	61,5%	23,1%
6	Reading literature will help develop cultural awareness.	0,0%	0,0%	7,7%	46,2%	46,2%
7	Using literature in the classroom takes a lot of preparation.	0,0%	7,7%	15,4%	61,5%	15,4%
8	Literature in lessons should be assessed and result in a grade.	7,7%	30,8%	53,8%	7,7%	0,0%
9	Not enough classroom time is available for using literature in the classroom.	0,0%	23,1%	23,1%	46,2%	7,7%
10	In order to use literature, first the teacher should introduce the context.	0,0%	23,1%	7,7%	46,2%	23,1%
11	Understanding literary terms is vital in understanding literature.	0,0%	30,8%	0,0%	61,5%	7,7%
12	I would welcome an interdisciplinary program.	0,0%	0,0%	15,4%	61,5%	23,1%
13	An interdisciplinary program would reduce the workload.	0,0%	30,8%	53,8%	15,4%	0,0%
14	I feel well-equipped to teach literature in the language classroom.	0,0%	0,0%	30,8%	46,2%	23,1%
15	Teaching literature prepares learners for their school exams.	0,0%	0,0%	15,4%	69,2%	15,4%
16	Teaching literature prepares learners for their central exams.	0,0%	0,0%	30,8%	46,2%	23,1%