

## Effective Approaches to Learning Literature perceived by Third Year English Specialization Students from MUFL

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### Abstract

Learning literature at EFL classrooms has always been controversial for decades. It can be highlighted that teaching and learning literature is helpful for language learners in many aspects. A language teacher is responsible for inspiring students to appreciate and analyze the literary work themselves in order to develop knowledge of literature not about literature. In this regard; this paper investigated students' perception of learning literature to get satisfactory achievement in their learning process. In collecting the data of investigating students' perception, 20-item questionnaire is used as a tool and a Comprehensive Approach to Foreign Language Literature (Bolemert, Jansen & Van de Grift 2016) is used as a model of learning literature. The data for this paper is collected from 50 Third Year English Specialization students from MUFL. The question items are classified according to the approaches to learning literature that are used as classroom activities in EFL classroom. The findings show that reader approach is the most favorite way of language learning and context approach is the second preferable way and the least favorable one for them is language approach.

Key words: learning literature, language learners, students' perceptions, language learning approaches

### Introduction

Most of the language teachers and syllabus planners have considered literature as the valuable source for language learners. However, there is a controversy on the view of accepting literature in EFL classrooms. Hismanoglu (2005) points out that the use of literature as a technique for teaching both basic language skills (i.e. speaking, listening, reading and writing) and language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) is very popular within the field of foreign language learning and teaching nowadays. Brandes (1986) claimed that learning what is meaningful and relevant depends partly on what is taught and partly on how it is taught. It is suggested that teaching literature should not only be lecture-based with teacher-centered approach. A literature teacher has to encourage students to appreciate and analyze the literary work themselves in order to develop knowledge of literature not about literature. Moreover, teachers should allow students practice their personal experiences in their interpretation whenever they do reading. Lazer (2000) argued that effective readers of a literary text possess literary competence in that they have an implicit understanding of, and familiarity with certain conventions which allow them to take the words on page of a play or other literary work and convert them into literary meaning. Teachers and students in Myanmar, non-native learners of English Literature, face many problems related to teaching-learning of literature. Thus literature teachers have to find out the appropriate ways of teaching literature which lead students a way to express themselves in English in academic as well as real life contexts. Moreover; it is important for literature teachers to make the study of English Literature interesting and also sustain students' motive to seek an appropriate pleasure and knowledge which is usually found in learning literature. This paper focused on investigating students' perceptions on learning literature to promote teaching-learning English literature. It is hoped that knowing students' perception will be supportive for teaching literature and improving their

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involvement in learning process and love for learning literature. This study tried to investigate students' perception of learning literature to get satisfactory achievement in their learning.

The data for this research were collected from English specialization students of Mandalay University of Foreign Languages because as a language university, it focuses on teaching four language skills. English specialization students study literature only when they have attended third year and fourth year. The courses just focus on mastering of real life conversation and professional achievements. Therefore, it can be assumed that the students' interest in literature may be weak. The difficulties commonly found in EFL classrooms are that most of the students want to focus on the functional use of the English language and hence they are interested in the study of English language and not the English literature. The challenge of a teacher in such classrooms is to engage the students with the learning process and to enable them to gain enjoyment through appreciating literary texts. According to Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English (1948), literature is defined as pieces of writing that are valued as works of arts, especially novels, plays and poems (in contrast to technical books and newspaper, magazines). Literary texts are not just texts but the works of art crafted with experiences from different walks of life: happiness, sorrow, regret, excitement, and self-development. So literature gives emotional as well as intellectual pleasure. According to Tudor (1996), a good pedagogic approach to teaching literature should aim at eliciting the students' responses to the text and guiding them to a personal discovery, thus bringing in them the continuous love, enjoyment and appreciation of literary texts. This would eventually develop the students both language and literary competence. This paper tried to link the text of literature and the interest of students through the comprehensive approach and also find out students' perception of learning literature. It is helpful for students to enjoy in learning literature because they have chances to participate in the activities themselves and to appreciate the literary work in collecting the data of investigating students' perception, the dichotomous questionnaire is used as a tool and a Comprehensive Approach to Foreign Language Literature (Bolemert, Jansen & Van de Grift 2016) is used as a model of learning literature.

### **Aim and Objectives**

This study aims to investigate effective ways of learning literature perceived by Third Year English specialization students from MUFL. The objectives are:

- To link the text of literature and the interest of students through the comprehensive approach.
- To find out the effective ways of approaching literary text and students' perception of learning literature

### **Literature review**

Theoretical background in which the definition of literature, reasons for teaching literature and the formulation of a model of a Comprehensive Approach to Foreign Language Literature Learning and the merits of teaching literature in EFL classrooms are indicated.

#### **Theoretical background**

According to Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English (1948), literature is defined as pieces of writing that are valued as work of arts, especially novels, plays and poems (in contrast to technical books and newspaper, magazines). Literary texts are not just any texts but are crafted with different walks of life; happiness, sorrow, regret, excitement, self-development. So, literature gives emotional as well as intellectual pleasure.

On the other hand, Diyanni (2002) claimed that literature transports us to the world, yet evokes our emotions of love, sorrow, joy and pity and thus enhances our appreciation and

understanding of life. We can teach literature from two approaches: literature for the source of study and literature for personal enrichment. The first one is concerned with literature as an object for teaching/learning development. It is merely treated as one of the tools for course syllabuses. This approach can lose the nature of reading literature. The latter deals with individual's maturity. To measure whether or not literature can develop personal enrichment, students have to take the knowledge of literature beyond the classrooms and use them effectively in real life. In other words, literature gives knowledge about the world and morality of life. Therefore, Kramsch and Kramsch (2000) point out that literature has symbolic prestige, artistic and cultural meanings, entertainment and educational value.

As Obeidat (2005) stated that literature helps the students acquire native like competence in English, learn how the English linguistic system is used for communication, see how the idiomatic expressions are used, speak clearly, precisely and concisely, and become more proficient in English, as well as become creative, critical and analytic learners. Literature not only is a tool for developing students' English language skills, but also can appeal to the imagination, develop culture awareness and encourage critical thinking about plots, themes and characters. Moreover, it is said that literature deals with a mixture of language types and varieties from slang to formal and various subject matters. Also literary texts can develop syntactic knowledge and vocabulary enrichment (Arthur, 1968)

### **Reasons for teaching literature**

In language learning, motivation plays a very indispensable role. If the learner is motivated, he can get understanding of learning the target language. Literary texts are a good source for motivating the learners as they are authentic and provide meaningful contexts. Lazar (1933) states that it can help to stimulate the imagination of the students develop their critical abilities and increase their emotional awareness. He also points out that motivation is especially achieved when students are exposed to literary texts for language learning purpose.

Furthermore, literature expresses the most significant ideas and sentiments of human beings. Teaching literature can put the students in touch with a range of expressions: universal value and validity which is the main reason for teaching literature. Moreover, the reasons for teaching literature have transcended the particular circumstances, places and contexts in which literature is taught. And they embrace a particular set of objectives. They are (1) the cultural model (2) the language model and (3) the personal model (Carter and Long, 1991)

#### **(1) The cultural model**

Teaching literature within the cultural model perceives literature as a source of accumulation of national wisdom and cultural heritage. Students are informed about the development of literature, about individual styles and genres, and they have the opportunity to compare their own cultural tradition with the tradition of someone else. Within the framework of cultural model, students are taught how to interpret and appreciate literary work as a product of particular time, cultural and historical tradition with the tradition of someone else. Within the framework of cultural model, students are taught how to interpret and appreciate literary work as a product of particular time, cultural and historical tradition and an artistic expression of a concrete author. It is considered as the most traditional approach to literature teaching. It is normally associated with a more teacher-centered approach by means of lecturing and providing the background knowledge of the texts. Its pedagogic mode focus on the text as a product.

## **(2) The language model**

The language model focuses on language and the use of it. Consequently, literature is seen as an opportunity to offer students access to a really innovative and highly creative use of language, which can be in such a form and amount hardly found in real-life situations. This is another way of saying that it can explore the student's quality of the literary language and enhance their literary competence. The language model is normally related to the student-centered approach and it is based on the activity and then proceeds to the way the language is used. Literature is considered to be an instrument for use in connection with the teaching of specific vocabulary or structures. In other words, literature can build up the relationship between linguistic forms and literary meanings.

## **(3) The personal growth model**

The personal growth model lets literature show the students that literature can not only teach them something, but also offers emotional satisfaction and inspiration. Its aim is to motivate the students to read by relating themes and topics to their own personal experience. Proponents of personal growth model try to help the students achieve an engagement with the reading of literary texts that will last for their whole life and that reach beyond the classroom. This approach, however, does not only develop the relationship of students to literature, but by means of intense experience they go through while reading literature. It helps them to gain an insight into their own being, being individual, being a part of larger communities as well. Similarly, the personal growth model is student-centered and students should not analyze the texts in terms of language or particular style, but rather to personalize the topic of the text and compare it with their own experience and perhaps also evaluate.

## **Comprehensive Approach to Foreign Language Literature**

This research is based on the formulation of a model of a Comprehensive Approach to Foreign Language Literature Learning (Bloemert, Jansen & van de Grift 2016). This comprehensive model consists of four approaches, each operationalized in several different elements (Figure 1).

The text and context approaches are both linked to the 'study of literature' (Maley 1989). The text approach is concerned with elements such as literary terminology and setting, whereas the context approach focuses on, for example, the historical or cultural contexts of literary texts. The reader and language approaches on the other hand, are linked to using literature as a resource (Maley 1989). The reader approach emphasizes the connection between the reader and the text and the language approach focuses on using literary texts to advance students' language skills, such as reading and speaking, but also knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. The place where the four approaches overlap would describe a classroom where the teacher deals with all these areas, bringing together a focus on the text itself and information about the context, and encouraging the learners to make connection with the text, all the time ensuring that support is being given to language learning. This then results what we have called the Comprehensive Approach. (Bolemert, Jansen & Van de Grift 2016)

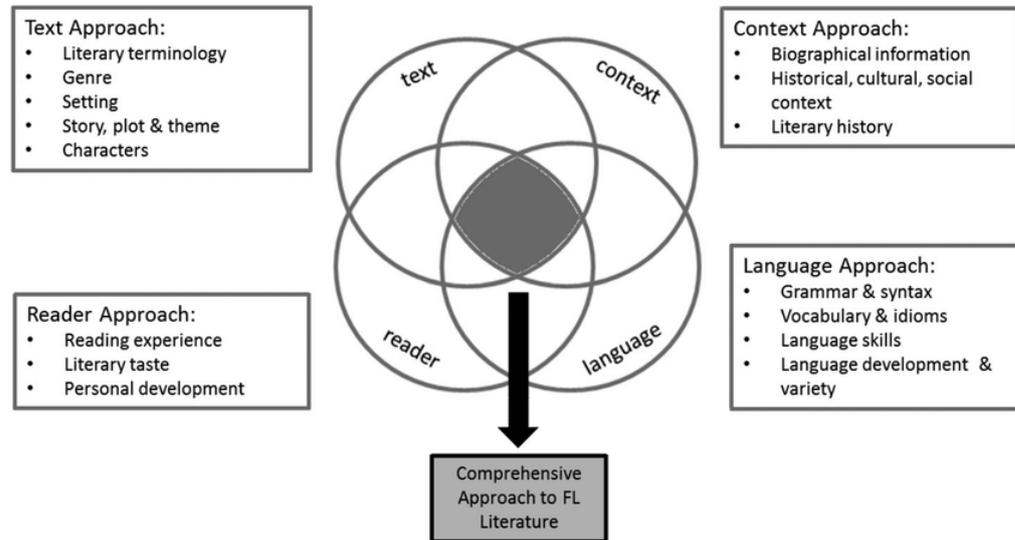


Figure (1) Comprehensive Approach to FL Literature  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2017.1298149>

### The merits of teaching literature in EFL classrooms

Since 1980, literature as a legitimate vehicle for teaching language has gained momentum (Duff and Maley, 1990). Moreover, Hismanoglu (2005) points out that the use of literature as a technique for teaching both basic language skills (i.e. speaking, listening, reading and writing) and language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) is very popular within the field of foreign language learning and teaching nowadays. Another reason for teaching literature in EFL classrooms have been offered by a variety of authors. For example, Parkinson and Reid Thomas (2000) points out the merits of teaching literature as follow:

1. Cultural enrichment- Reading literature promotes cultural understanding and awareness.
2. Linguistic model- Literature provides examples of good writing, linguistic diversity, expressive ranges and so on.
3. Mental training- Better than any other discipline, literature trains the main and sensibility.
4. Extension of linguistic competence- Literature stretches the competence of learner who has mastered the linguistic rudiments.
5. Authenticity- Literature is genuine linguistic material, not a linguistically contrived textbook. In the case of poetry, there is exception as vocabulary and grammar usages in writing poems are free from linguistic rules.
6. Memorability- Because literature, especially poetry and songs, is memorable, it can be memorized by achieving linguistic usage. (Maley and Moduling, 1985)
7. Rhythmic resource- Poems assist the learners in assimilating the rhythms of a language. (Malely and Moduling, 1985)
8. Motivating material- Literature is more likely to engage with and motivate a learner than artificial teaching inputs because it is generated by some genuine impulse on the part of the writer and deals with subjects and themes which may be of interest to the learner. (Duff and Malely, 1990)
9. Open to interpretation- Because literature is open to interpretation, it can serve as a basis for genuine interaction between learners. (Duff and Maley, 1990)

Besides, literature texts offer a rich source of linguistic input and help the learners to practice the four skills-speaking, listening, reading and writing- in addition to exemplifying

grammatical structures and presenting new vocabulary. Stern (1991), Van (2009) believe that literary texts can take care of these skills very well. Through literature, students learn about syntax and discourse, different structures, functions and different ways of connecting ideas, all these help students to develop four language skills.

### **Research Methodology**

This consists of four sections: Research Design, Data Collection, Data Analysis and Data Interpretation.

### **Research Design**

This research is conducted through quantitative survey by means of a questionnaire. The instrument used to investigate students' perceptive of learning literature was 20-item questionnaire and a Comprehensive Approach to Foreign Language Literature (Bolemert, Jansen & Van de Grift 2016) is used as a model of learning literature. The questionnaire consists 20 questions items that are related with four approaches. Q1 to 5 are related with Context Approach, Q 6 to 10 deal with Text Approach, Q 11 to 15 deal with Language Approach and Q15 to 20 are Reader Approach. The data for this paper is collected from 50 undergraduate students attending Third Year English Specialization at MUFL. The participants were 9 males and 41 females. They have been learning English Literature through Comprehensive Approach such as Context Approach, Text Approach, Language Approach and Reader Approach. The scope of the research is limited because it is only focused on learning short stories and a novel, not including learning poetry. The data indicates that students can get better understanding of reading literary text through comprehensive approach and they thought that it is also supportive for improving their language skills.

### **Procedure**

The first step in this study was teaching two short stories and one novel from the prescribed text using comprehensive approach. When it was sure that they had got the idea of how to learn literature through these four approaches, they were told the purpose of this study and then, they were asked to response to the questionnaire to express their perceptive of learning literature. To know students' attitude on literature and their favorite approach, a single open question, "Which approach do you prefer most for improving language and literature learning?" is also used.

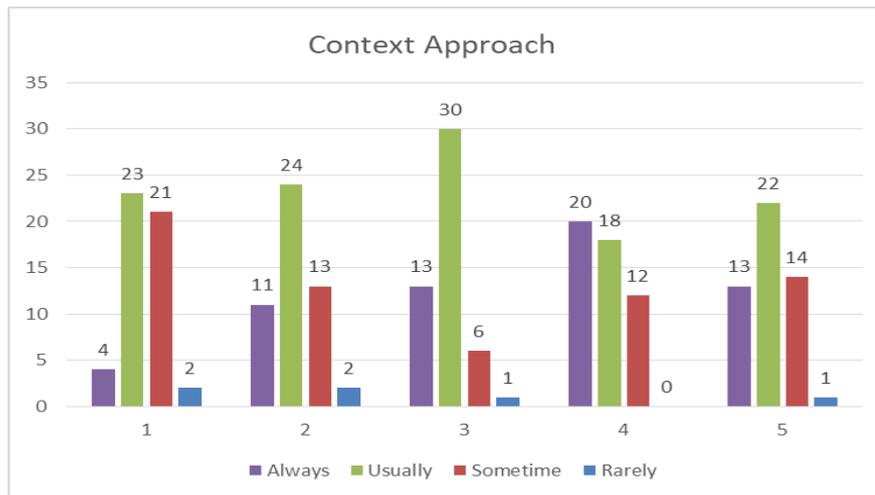
### **Data Analysis and Data Interpretation**

As the major objective of this study is to investigate Students' perception towards the learning of literature and to find out the most preference approach for them. The questionnaire was set up with four parts in which 20 items are conducted. The first part of questionnaire, from statement 1 to statement 5, is related with context approach. Here context approach is learning biographical information of the author, historical, cultural and social context of the story and finding out literary history before reading the text. This approach is helpful for students to get the background information that will support them to understand the theme of the story or plot. The questions from 1 to 5 checked students whether they applied this approach when they studied literature. The responses for these statements are quite positive. Students' perception on context approach can be seen in Table-1. It is found that most students selected "usually". There are all together 50 students, and 4 students chose "always" for the statement, "I can appreciate the library work by using the insight and knowledge of the author's life", 23 students chose "usually" for that statement, and 21 of them selected "sometimes" and only 2 students did it "rarely". The second statement is "I learn the historical background and culture in which the story is taking place", and 11 students thought that they "always" do it, 24 students do it "usually" and 13 of them "sometimes" do it while 2 of them

chose “rarely”. Another statement, “I visualize how and where people lived in the past and understand how social space and time were different from us” and 13 students selected “always” 30 of them, “usually”, on the other hand, 6 of them chose “sometimes” and only one student chose “rarely”. For the next statement, “I believe literature can reflect the culture and social context of the contemporary time of the text”, 20 students agreed they “always” believe it and 18 of them accepted “usually” however; 12 students’ answer was “sometimes” and there was no one who chose “rarely”. Statement five is “I try to figure out where and when the incidents of the story happened”, 13 students “always” do it and 22 “usually” do it but 14 of them argued that they do it “sometimes” and only one “rarely” do it. All these five statements are related with “context approach”, it can be said that more than half of the students, 24.4%, “always” and “usually” 46.8%, accepted this approach and they used it while they were learning literature. Only 2.4% used it “rarely”. The result can be seen in Table-1.

No	Statement	Always	Usually	Sometime	Rarely
1	I can appreciate the literary work by using the insight and knowledge of the author’s life.	4	23	21	2
2	I learn the historical background and culture in which the story is taking place.	11	24	13	2
3	I visualize how and where people lived in the past and understand how social space and time were different from us.	13	30	6	1
4	I believe literature can reflect the culture and social context of the contemporary time of the text.	20	18	12	0
5	I try to figure out where and when the incidents of the story happened.	13	22	14	1

Rarely	Sometime	Usually	Always	St
2	21	23	4	1
2	13	24	11	2
1	6	30	13	3
0	12	18	20	4
1	14	22	13	5

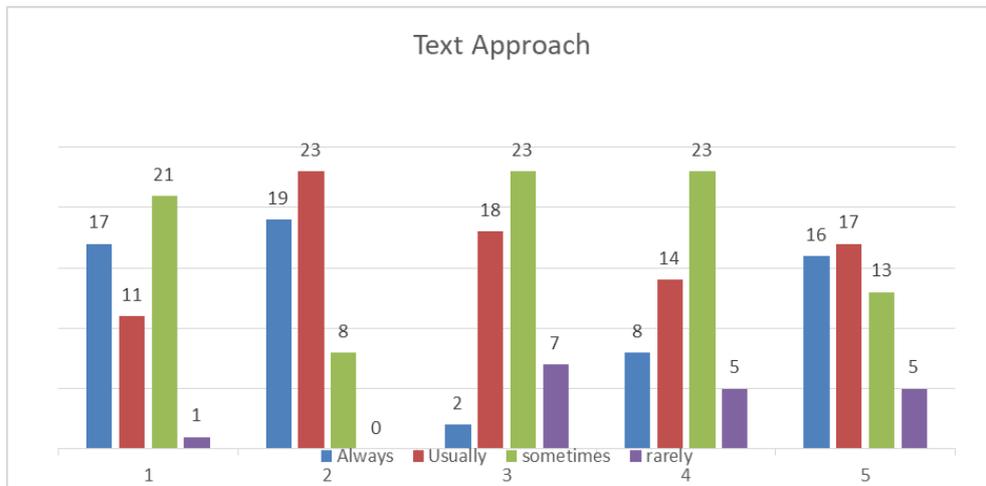


**Table-1 Students' perception for Context Approach**

The second part of questionnaire, from statement 6 to 10, is targeted to the Text Approach. Here, text approach is an approach in which students have to learn literary terminology, genre of the literary work as a very first step and then they have to find out the setting of the story, plot and theme while they are reading the story or novel. Moreover; they have to appreciate the characters of the story. Most of the students are happy to participate the classroom activities of text approach, especially to analysis the characters. The first statement is "I enjoy seeing how the plot develops throughout the story", 17 students accept this and they chose "always", 11 of them selected "usually", 14 students answered "sometimes" and only one student did "rarely". The second one, "Analyzing the characters of the story can give me a strong sense of their personalities and make the story more interesting", is agreed by most of the students, 19 of them said "always" and 23, "usually". While 21 students said that they did it "sometimes" and no one chose "rarely". "Exploring literary devices widen my taste of literature" is less preferable than the former ones. Students thought that it is less true for them so only 2 of them chose "always" 18, "usually", 23 ticked "sometimes" and 5 selected "rarely". Next statement is "I enjoy discussing about the characters, theme and plot of the story with my friends after reading the story". 8 students "always" do it, 14 of them "usually" do it, 23 students "sometimes" do it but another 5 "rarely" do it. the last statement for this part is "I appreciate the way the author describes his characters, his choice of words and his usage of language". 16 students 'always" appreciate, 17 students "usually" accept it but 13 of them do it "sometimes" and only 4 "rarely" do it. All the statements in this part are focused on Text Approach and over half of the students (58%) used this approach for their literature learning and 35.2% sometimes use it but 6.8% rarely use this one. The result is shown in Table-2.

6	I enjoy seeing how the plot develops throughout the story.	17	11	21	1
7	Analyzing the characters of the story can give me a strong sense of their personalities and make the story more interesting.	19	23	8	0
8	Exploring literary devices widens my taste of literature.	2	18	23	7
9	I enjoy discussing about the characters, theme and plot of the story with my friends after reading the story.	8	14	23	5
10	I appreciate the way the author describes his characters, his choice of words and his usage of language.	16	17	13	5

St	Always	Usually	sometimes	rarely
6	17	11	21	1
7	19	23	8	0
8	2	18	23	7
9	8	14	23	5
10	16	17	13	5



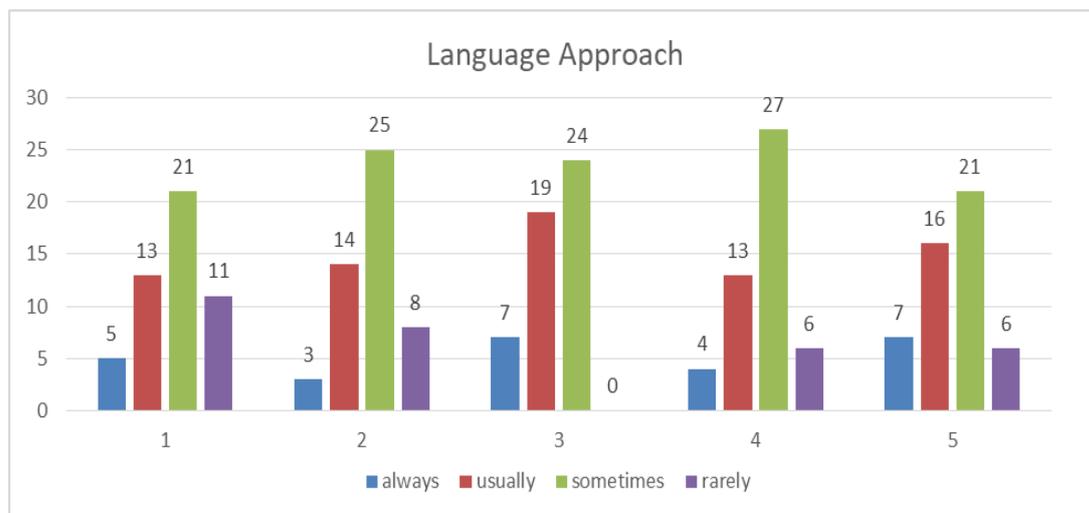
**Table-2 Students’ perception for Text Approach**

Next questionnaire, from statement 11 to 15, is used for Language Approach. Language approach is learning grammar and syntax, vocabulary and idioms. This approach supports to improve students’ language skills. However; they don’t prefer this approach as much as others. The results can be seen in table-3. The first statement “I learn some of the conversational dialogues from a novel or short story and apply them in real world” is accepted by 18 students, 5 chose “always” and 13 “usually”. On the other hand, 21 students do it “sometimes” and 11 do “rarely”. Also it can be found nearly equal numbers of students in next statement, “I can apply the new words and some idioms from the text in my writing and speaking”, 3 students apply such a way “always” and another 14 use it “usually” but 25 “sometimes” use and 8 of them “rarely” apply it. 7 students “always” think that “Literature is a good source for me to keep in touch with the target language” and it is also true for 19 students who selected “usually” but 24 of them don’t think so, and they chose “sometimes”. However, there is no one who selected “rarely”. Another statement is “I understand how to use the words appropriately and beautifully”. For this statement, 4 students ticked “always”, 13 of them agreed with “usually” while 27 chose “sometimes” and 6 accepted “rarely”. The last item is “I become familiar with many features of the written language of the text.” 7 students chose “always”, 16 “usually”, 21 “sometimes” and 6 “rarely”. This approach is the least preferable approach for students. Only 40.4% used this approach to learn literature.59.6% use this way sometimes or rarely for their learning.

11	I learn some of the conversational dialogues from a novel or short story and apply them in real world.	5	13	21	11
12	I can apply the new words and some idioms from the text in my writing and speaking.	3	14	25	8

13	Literature is a good source for me to keep in touch with the target language.	7	19	24	0
14	I understand how to use the words appropriately and beautifully.	4	13	27	6
15	I become familiar with many features of the written language of the text.	7	16	21	6

St	always	usually	sometimes	rarely
11	5	13	21	11
12	3	14	25	8
13	7	19	24	0
14	4	13	27	6
15	7	16	21	6



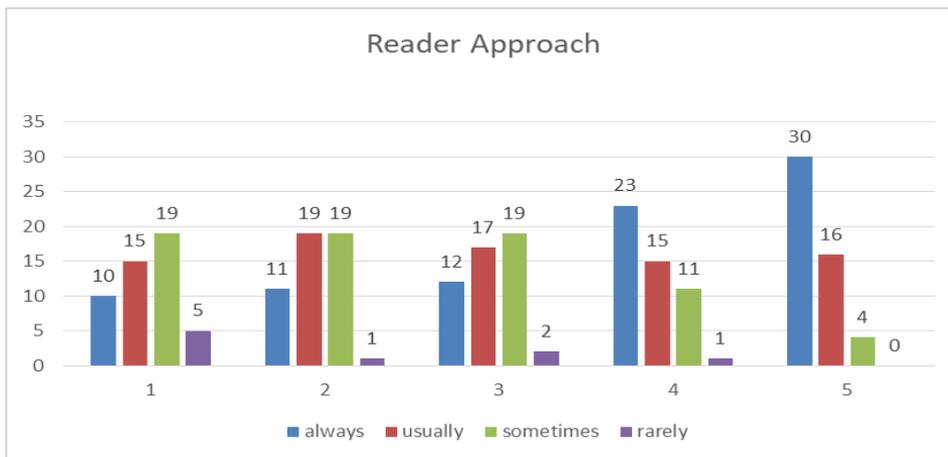
**Table-3 Students' perception for Language Approach**

The last approach is reader approach. Here, reader approach is an approach in which students have to share their reading experiences and they also discuss their literary taste on the story. Most of the students prefer this approach because they think that it is helpful "I compare my own experience with the things happened in the story", 10 students totally agree with this statement and they chose "always", 15 students answered "usually", 19 students partially agree it so they selected "sometimes" but 6 of them "rarely" do it. 11 students "always" accept that "I think whether or not each of the character made the right decision or not" and 19 students chose "usually" and another 19 chose "sometimes" but only one ticked "rarely". "Reading literature can affect the way I see things in real life" is the third statement. 12 students answered "always", 17 of them said "usually", 19 thought that "sometimes" and 2 students chose "rarely". 23 students agreed with the idea of "Reading all sort of books help the readers improve critical thinking skill as well" so they said "always", another 15 also have the same idea and selected "usually", 11 of them partially agree and thus selected "sometimes" but only one has different idea and said "rarely". The last statement is "Literature give the readers not only the knowledge of language but also opens our mind and eyes to see the whole world through books" this is the most acceptable one and more than half of the students agree with it, 30 students chose "always" and 26 "usually", 4 of them accepted "sometimes" but there is no one who chose "rarely". According to the data, it is obviously found that most of the students

accepted that reader approach is a suitable way for their learning literature. 67.6% of students used this one “always” and “usually”,28.8% used it “sometimes but 3.6% of them used “rarely” The result is shown in Table-4.

16	I compare my own experience with the things happened in the story.	10	15	19	
17	I think whether or not each of the character made the right decision or not.	11	19	19	
18	Reading literature can affect the way I see things in real life.	12	17	19	
19	Reading all sorts of books helps the readers improve critical thinking skill and imaginative thinking skill as well.	23	15	11	
20	Literature gives the readers not only the knowledge of language but also opens our mind and eyes to see the whole world through books.	30	16		

St	always	usually	sometimes	rarely
16	10	15	19	5
17	11	19	19	1
18	12	17	19	2
19	23	15	11	1
20	30	16	4	0



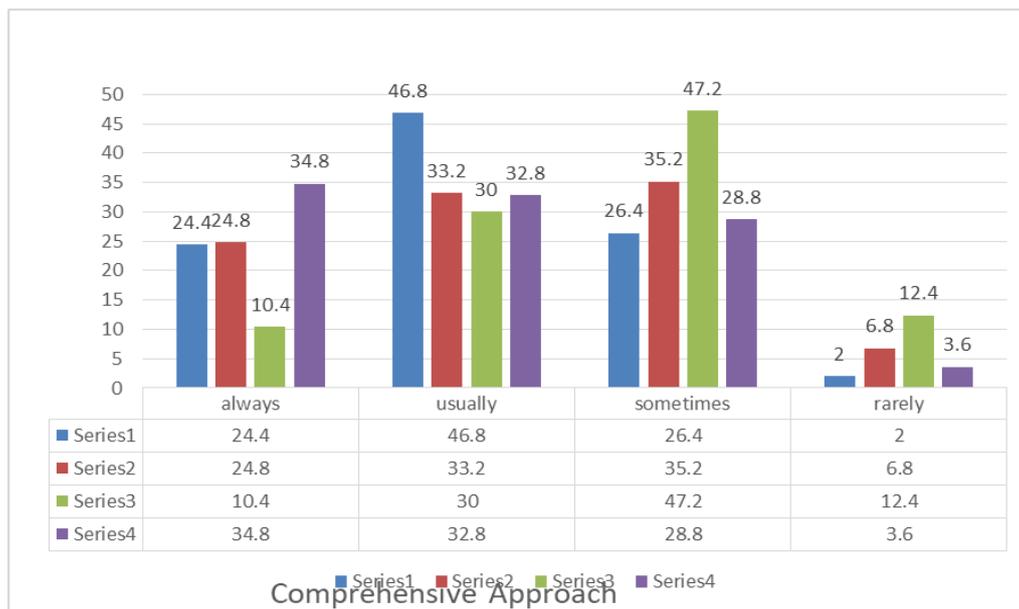
**Table-4 Students’ perception of Reader Approach**

**Findings and Discussion**

The aim of this paper is to investigate students’ perception of the effective approaches for learning literature. The result of this study has shown that reader approach is the most favorite way as it got 34.8% “always” and 32.8% “usually”. The second approach they prefer more is Context approach,24.4% “always” and 46.8% “usually”. The least favorable one for them is language approach, it got 12.4% “rarely”. The result shown in Table -5. As the participants for this study are EFL students, their proficiency skill is good enough to

understand the literary text and they have other chances to learn the language skill so they mainly focused on learning context of the story and they tried to get background knowledge of the story rather than trying to use the text for improving their language. Moreover, they accept that literature gives them knowledge and pleasure as well. That's why language approach is applied less by most of the students.

Approach	always	usually	sometimes	rarely
1	24.4	46.8	26.4	2
2	24.8	33.2	35.2	6.8
3	10.4	30	47.2	12.4
4	34.8	32.8	28.8	3.6



**Table-5 The Effective Approaches to Learning Literature perceived by MUFL Students**

### Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to investigate student's perception of learning literature to get satisfactory achievement in their learning. The data indicates that students can get better understanding of reading literary text through four approaches such as, context approach, text approach, language approach and reader approach. Even though these approaches are applied suitably in classroom and combined with classroom activities, it is also necessary to find out which one is most preferable one for the students. At other universities, literary text is mostly used as a tool for improving language skill. However, at MUFL, which is university of language, literary text should be used as a material for the students to aware target language 's culture and tradition and to appreciate the taste of literature and to analyze writing style of the famous authors. In conclusion, to shed the light on the importance of literature in language classroom, it is clear that the goal is not too far as most of the students held the positive attitudes towards the study of literature and they could also apply the approaches effectively.

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