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SHORT STORIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Biodata

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Abstract

Being an important part of culture, literature should be included in foreign language teaching programs. As it is written for the native users of the language, it is an authentic material and presents good examples of target language. Reading literary works gives students great opportunities to improve their language. Nevertheless, students believe that literature is difficult to understand, boring and unnecessary. Therefore, teachers who want to use literature in language classes face a strong resistance of students against studying literature. It is possible to break the resistance of the students by choosing suitable materials to use and finding enjoyable activities. In ELT departments, students are taught how to use literature in EFL situations. This is a descriptive study which shows the ideas of 40 junior students of ELT department of Akdeniz University about the contributions of studying short stories. They were given a questionnaire to learn their ideas about the benefits of short stories. The data were examined through SPSS and the results were interpreted. Their answers showed that they didn't find it boring, difficult or unnecessary any more. They also become aware of the fact that reading short stories has contributed to them in many ways. In the light of the findings, some suggestions were made related to the use of literature in EFL classes.

Keywords: short stories, teaching literature in EFL classes, English language teaching

1. Introduction

It is an indisputable fact that teaching literature is an important part of foreign language teaching. As a reflection of culture of the society in which the language is spoken, literature should be included in all curricula. Literature is an authentic material and by reading literary texts students face language written for native speakers and try to understand the texts. They also have to learn literary features such irony, exposition, climax, narration and so on (Collie & Slater, 1988, pp. 3-4). In this way, literature develops readers' language and literary awareness. It is very motivating and it provides them with an understanding of another culture (Lazar, 1993, pp. 14-15). Together with learning about the culture, students also learn about the past and present and about people's customs and traditions (Erkaya, 2005). It can also be used to reinforce the language skills and complement language teaching (Erkaya, 2005). Literature promotes students' creativity (Brumfit & Carter, 2000, p.193). It can stimulate the imagination of students, develop their critical abilities and increase their emotional awareness (Lazar, 1993, p.19). Another aim of using literature in language teaching is to encourage students to read and experience it for their personal enrichment (Pieper, 2006, p.5). While reading literary texts, the interaction between the reader and the text is very important; personal interpretations and analysis of literature are based on not only the textual elements but also the readers' personal views, experiences and feelings (cited in Khatib, 2011, p. 151). Cruz believes that studying literature enables students to construct their own interpretation and reflection, according to their own experience, by thinking critically and comparing and contrasting two different cultures (<http://relinguistica.azc>.

uam.mx/no007/no07_art09.pdf). As long as readers pay attention to what they are reading and they feel close to the characters and share their emotions, they will feel they are getting possessions of an unknown territory (Collie & Slater, 1988, p. 6). Vandrick states that literature motivates students to explore their own feelings through experiencing feelings of the characters in literature (cited in Erkaya, 2005). As can be seen literature is necessary and beneficial in EFL classrooms. However, what to teach in literature is the crucial point. Carter and Long (1991) emphasise this point as in the following:

To encourage personal growth the teacher has to stimulate and enliven students in the literature class by selecting texts to which students can respond and in which they can participate imaginatively, by promoting the kind of conditions for learning in the classroom which will make the reading of literature a memorable, individual and collective experience and, above all, by enthusiasm for and commitment to the teaching of literature as literature. (p. 3)

The second step in literature teaching in EFL classrooms is to decide which genre should be taught first. Short story has some advantages to teach compared to other genres. Collie & Slater (1988, p. 196) claim that short stories are the ideal way of introducing students to literature. The short story provides the teacher with a rather convenient vehicle for examining literary elements in a limited context. Crumbley & Smith (2010, p. 292) state that short stories connect education with entertainment in order to make learning easier and interesting. Short stories provoke emotions in us. They inform us how people can behave; they teach us something about human psychology. In reading a story, we can recognise and understand ourselves and others (Bohner & Grant, 2006, p. 4). By analysing the short stories, students start thinking critically.

On the other hand, students believe that literature is something that is boring and difficult to understand. Lack of literary competence, they believe that they cannot interpret what the idea given in the literary text is. With this anxiety, mostly they refuse to read literature. In English language teaching departments there are some literature courses, which are compulsory. In these courses the students are expected to be familiar with literature and literary terms and also they should gain ability to use them in their language classes. The students of English language teaching departments are not expected to improve their literary competence as much as those of literature departments. In ELT department, literature is only a means of teaching the foreign language. Therefore, to appreciate literature, to enjoy it and to get benefits from literature will be enough for such students.

With these ideas in mind, the students of ELT department of Akdeniz University were exposed to short stories to develop their literary awareness and their abilities to use them. They were expected not only to analyse the short stories but also to develop some activities to teach them in language classroom. At the beginning of the course, they were mostly anxious and against the idea of studying literature. After finishing the education for two months, and reading 7 stories, it was observed that their points of view for the course changed in a positive way. They started to enjoy literature, join the discussions and activities in class. This was the starting point of this study. It was tried to find out if the changes observed would reflect from the ideas of the students in terms of studying short story.

1.1. Problem

What are the benefits of short stories from the perspectives of ELT students?

1.2. Research Questions

With the aim to find an answer for the problem, the following questions are tried to be answered:

1. Does studying short stories broaden readers' perspectives for the events they have never experienced before?
2. Does studying short stories provide readers with a better understanding for different behaviour?
3. Does studying short stories enable readers to see the events from different perspectives?
4. Does studying short stories make readers develop empathy with the people in different situations?
5. Does studying short stories enable readers to think about the reasons rather than the result?
6. Does studying short stories show readers different life styles?
7. Does studying short stories increase readers' understanding about the personal relations?
8. Does studying short stories provide readers with a comparison between his/her own culture and other cultures?
9. Does studying short stories teach readers ethical and moral values of other cultures?
10. Does studying short stories increase readers' wish to read short stories more?
11. Does studying short stories increase readers' appreciation for literature?
12. Does studying short stories make readers more tolerant?

2. Method

This is a descriptive study, which shows the ideas of students related to studying short story. In the study, 40 junior students at the ELT department of Akdeniz University were exposed to different examples of short stories. Short stories were chosen as the literary genre to teach literature because they are read in one sitting, as they have limited context, they are easy to understand and also studying short story is the easiest way to introduce literature to the students. The stories studied were as follows:

The White Stocking by D.H. Lawrence

Hills Like White Elephants by Ernest Hemingway

The Necklace by Guy de Maupassant

The Gift of the Magi by O. Henry

Button Button by Richard Mathison

The Open Window by Saki

Her First Ball by Katherine Mansfield

In all the stories, beside the literary analysis of the story, students had to discuss the topics in detail. Sometimes the story ended in a way they were against. At this point, they tried to see the events from different perspectives and understand the behaviour of the characters even if they did not behave in the same way they expected them to do.

After having finished studying short stories, students were given a questionnaire to see their ideas about studying short stories. This questionnaire was prepared under the control of the field experts. The results were analysed in SPSS statistical program and evaluated.

2.1. Research Group

The research group of the study is 40 junior students of ELT department of Akdeniz University in the 2011- 2012 academic year, fall semester.

2.2. Limitations

1. It was limited to 40 junior students of ELT department of Akdeniz University in the 2011- 2012 academic year fall semester.

2. It was limited to the short stories chosen by the researcher.

2.3. Assumptions

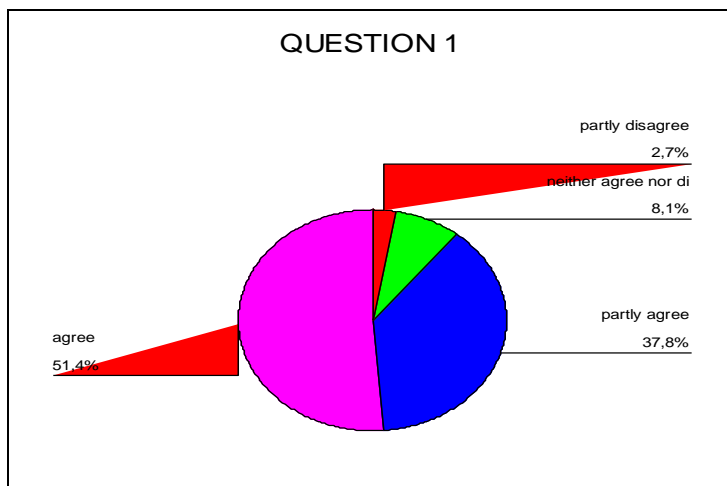
1. As the students are all students of English Language Teaching Department, their level of English is advanced.

2. It is accepted that literature reflects the differences between language varieties (Maibodi, 2008) and develops language awareness (Vural, 2013, p.16) and it gives the chance to students to travel in different cultures (Vural, 2013, p.18). Therefore the study is based on other benefits of studying short stories rather than linguistic and cultural basis.

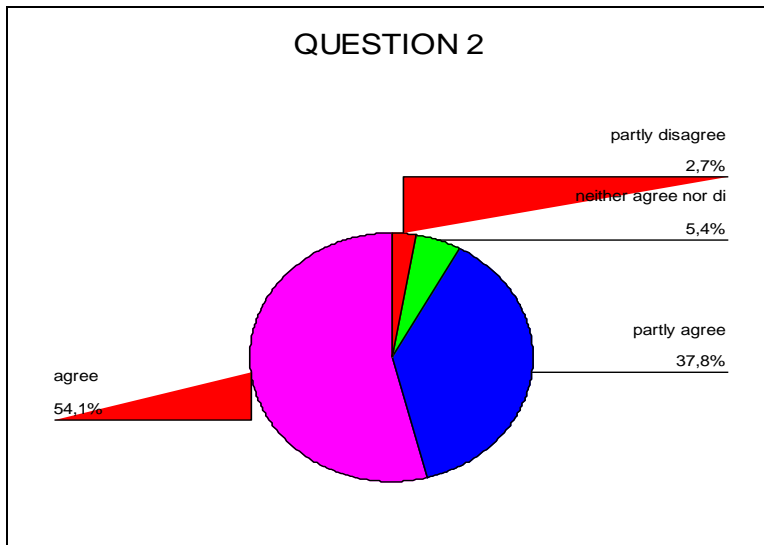
3. Findings and Discussion

Students are asked if studying short story broadens readers' perspectives for the events they have never experienced before, 51.4% of them say that studying short story broadens readers' perspectives for the events they have never experienced before. Besides, 37.8% of the participants partly agree with this idea. The results can be seen in Graph I:

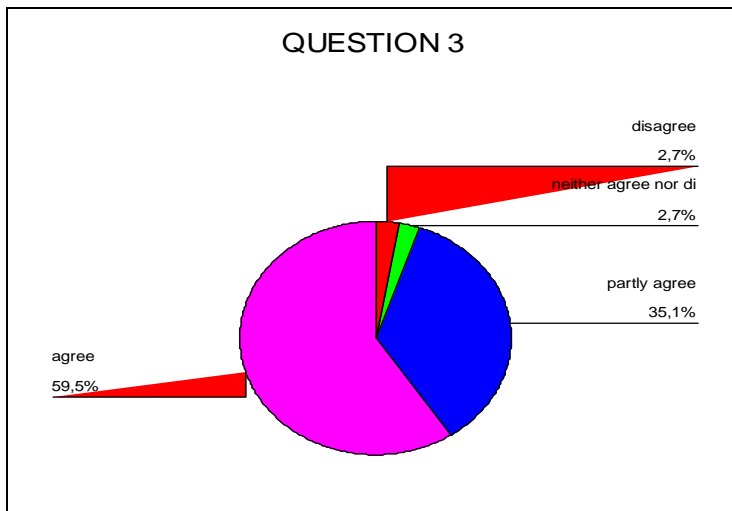
Graph 1. *Short story broadens readers' perspectives*



They are asked if reading short story provides readers with a better understanding as the 2nd question. The first group with the ratio 51.4% believes that it provides with a better understanding and the second group that follows it with the ratio 37.8% supports this idea with the answer 'partly agree'. Graph 2 shows the distribution as in the following:

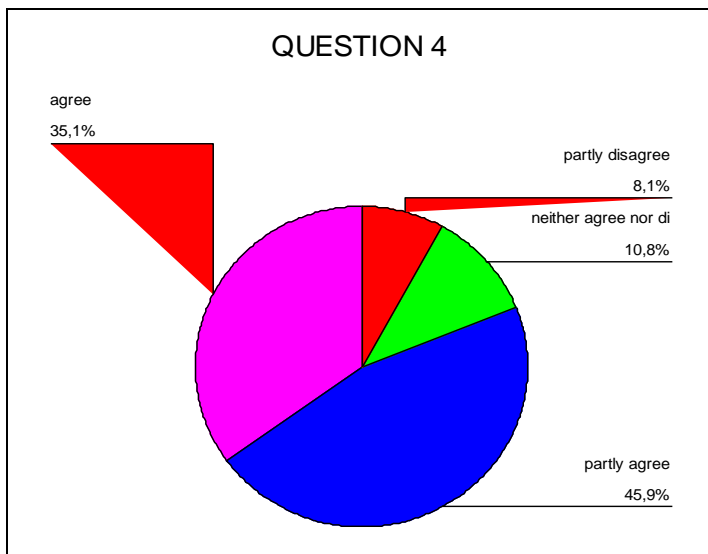
Graph 2. *Short story provides a better understanding*

In the third question they are asked if studying short story enables readers to see the events from different perspectives. For this question, 59.5% of the group accept the idea that studying short story enables readers to see the events from different perspectives. The following graph shows the result:

Graph 3. *Short story enables readers to see events from different perspectives*

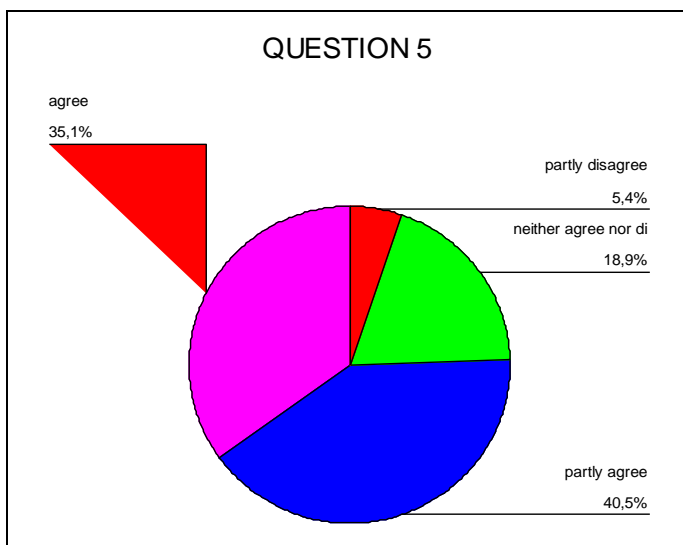
They are asked if studying short story makes readers develop empathy with the people in different situations. 35.1% of the students agree that studying short story makes them develop empathy with the people in different situations. The highest ratio, 45.9%, belongs to the students who partly agree with this idea. The result is shown in Graph 4 below:

Graph 4. *Short story makes readers develop empathy*

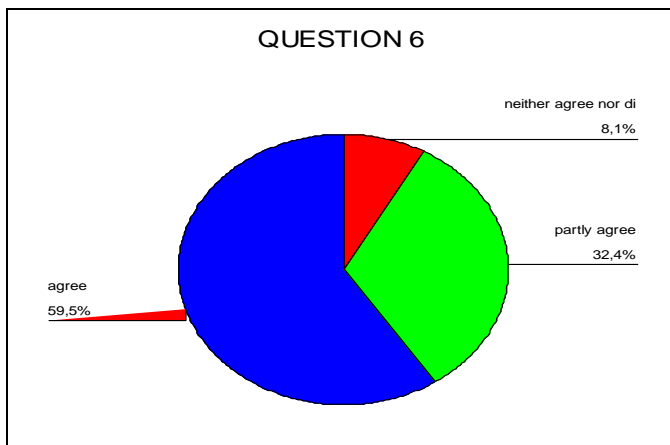


When students are asked if studying short story enables readers to think about the reasons rather than the result, 35.1% agree with the idea and 40.5% partly agree. The ratio of the people who do not agree is 18.9% and 5.4% of the group disagree with the idea. Graph 5 shows the ratio of different answers given for the question below:

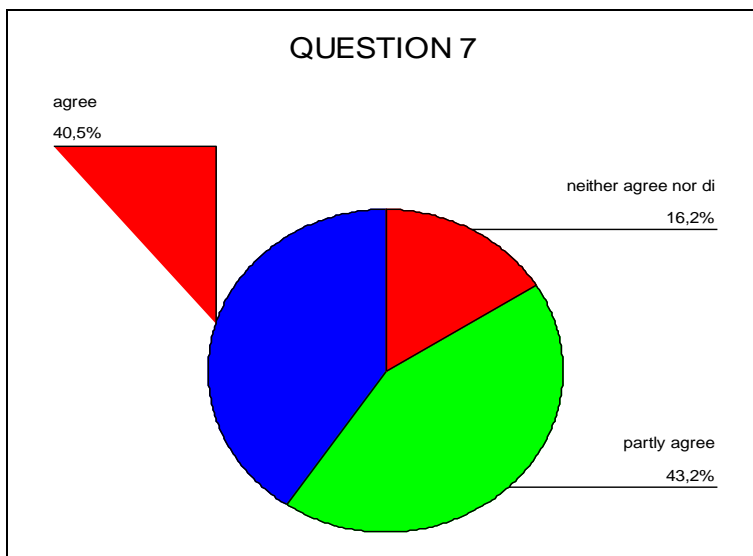
Graph 5. *Short story enables readers to think about the reasons rather than the result*



They are asked if studying short story shows different life styles. More than the half of the group believes that studying short story shows readers different life styles. 32.4% partly agree with this idea. 8.1% do not have any idea for this question. Graph 6 shows the answers given for this question:

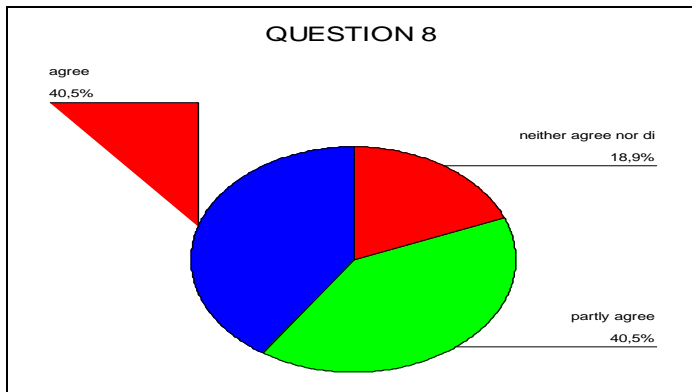
Graph 6. *Short story shows different life styles*

When they are asked if studying short story increases readers' understanding about the personal relations, 40.5% say that studying short story increases readers' understanding about the personal relations. 43.2% of the group partly agree with this idea. The others do not have any positive or negative ideas. The distribution of the answers among the participants can be shown as in Graph 7 below:

Graph 7. *Short story increases readers' understanding*

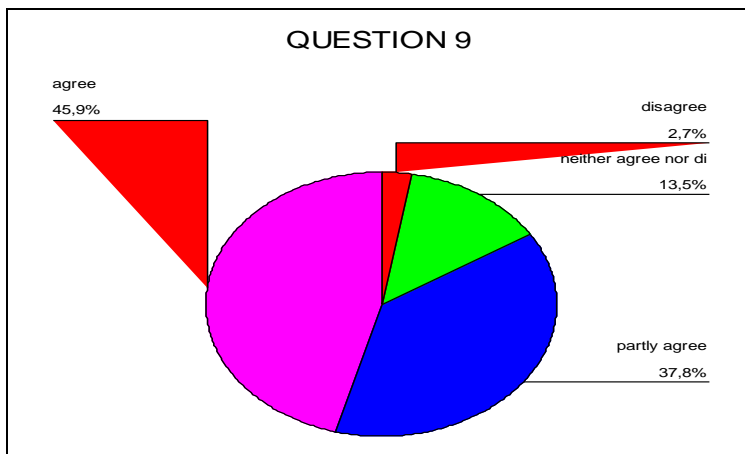
Question 8 was about the effect of short story on the comparison between readers' own culture and other cultures. 40.5% of the group believe that studying short story provides readers with a comparison between his/her own culture and other cultures. Other 40.5% of the group partly agree with this idea. 18.9% do not make a decision about this point. Graph 8 shows the result as in the following:

Graph 8. *Short story provides readers with a comparison between his/her own culture and other cultures*

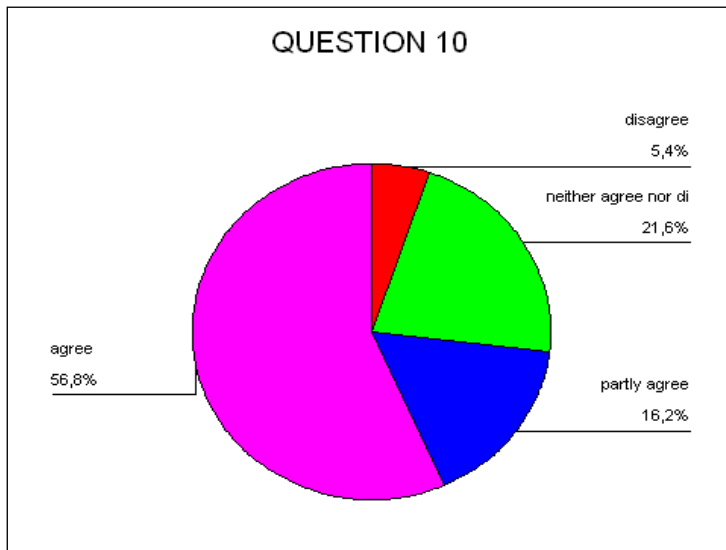


When they are asked if studying short story teaches readers ethical and moral values of other cultures, nearly half of the group say ‘yes’. 37.8% partly agree with the idea. While 13.5% do not make a choice, 2.7% disagree with this idea. Graph 9 below shows the ratio of the participants who believe they learn about the ethical and moral values of other cultures, thanks to literature:

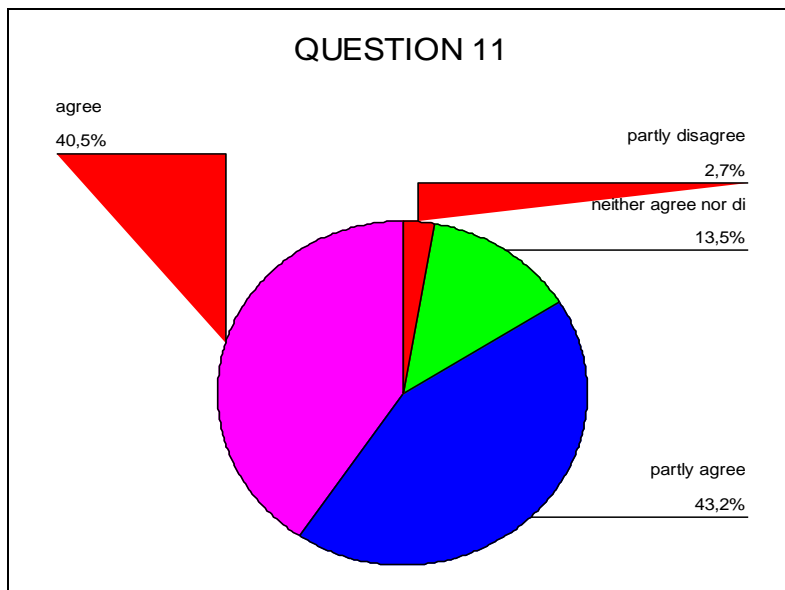
Graph 9. *Short story teaches readers ethical and moral values*



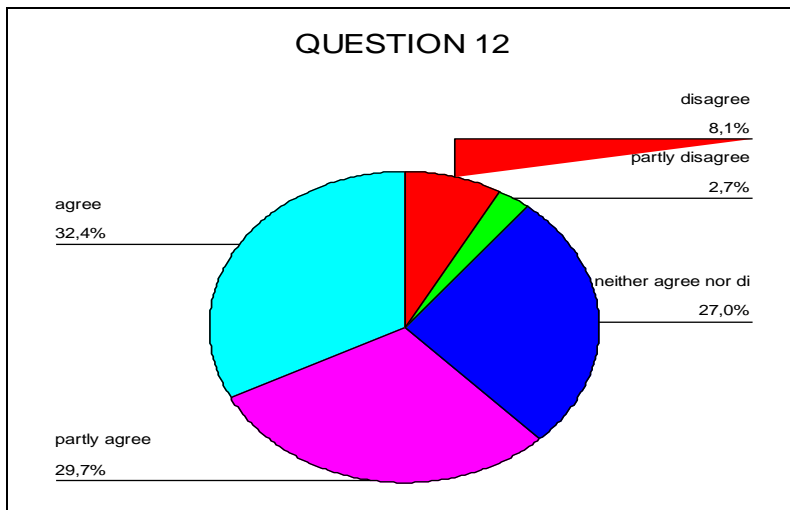
They are asked if studying short story increases readers’ wish to read short stories more, 56.8% of the group want to read short stories more. 16.2% partly agree with this idea. 21.6% do not have any idea. 5.4% do not want to read more. Graph 10 shows the distribution of the answers as in the following:

Graph 10. *Short story increases readers' wish to read more*

They are asked if studying short story increases readers' appreciation for literature, 40.5% of the group accept that studying short story increases readers' appreciation for literature. 43.2% partly agree with this. 13.5% do not say anything. 2.7% disagree with the idea. Their answers are shown in Graph 11 below:

Graph 11. *Short story increases readers' appreciation for literature*

When they are asked if studying short story makes readers more tolerant, 32.4% say that studying short story makes readers more tolerant. 29.7% partly agree with this idea. 27.0% have no idea. 8.1% disagree with it. Graph 12 shows how much the participants believe that short story makes them more tolerant:

Graph 12. *Short story makes readers more tolerant*

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

Students believe that short story broadens their perspectives. When they read different stories and see different lives and events which they have never experienced before, they realise that the same event can be seen differently from different perspectives. Seeing the same event from different perspective provides them with a better understanding. While they are reading the short story, they sometimes have the feeling or the idea of the character as if they were their own. Therefore they mostly agree that short story develops empathy. Examining lives of other people in the short stories shows students that people should think of the reasons for something rather than the result, which we tend to do the opposite. It is clear that short stories present different lives and life styles. It increases understanding for the events or behaviour around us. It is a good way to read short stories to see the similarities and differences between cultures. Students agree that each story gives an idea or moral to the readers. Reading short story increases their wish to read more. It also increases their appreciation for literature, which is the main aim of the literature course. By reading good examples of literature, students will be aware of the world of short stories. These findings are similar to those of Erkaya (2005, p.10), who claims that short stories provide readers with literary, cultural and thinking facilities. On the other hand, despite the positive changes in their feelings and ideas, when the students are asked about a change in behaviour, the answer is not the same. They cannot say that reading literature made them tolerant. It may be easy to change ideas, feelings or thoughts but not behaviour or attitudes. This may be the reason why they do not say that they will be more tolerant.

As a result, the suggestions to be made for this study are as follows:

1. Short stories should be included in all the curricula and students should be encouraged to study them.
2. Short stories should be chosen carefully according to the needs or interests of the students and supported with suitable activities to develop their critical thinking.
3. During literature sessions, students should be given opportunities to express their own ideas.
4. Booklets or materials based on short stories should be prepared with supportive activities to improve the language level, cultural understanding and interpretative abilities of students.

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