# The Approaches to Teaching Literature for EFL Young Learners

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## Abstract

*This paper reports on a case study of the teacher's approaches to teaching literature for young learners in Bandung. The research is an attempt to respond to controversy among the use of literature as a media in teaching English for young learners in Indonesian context. Besides, several English teachers have no idea on how to use poetry as learning material. An English teacher and nine six-grade students were participated in this interpretive qualitative case study. Three research instruments, which were observation, interview, and document, were used. Classroom observation as a primary instrument was triangulated by using interview and document analysis. The results showed that: 1) there were three phases in teaching; initial, exploration, and evaluation phase; 2) under the guideline to choose related topic to nature of young learners, the Language-Based Approach (LBA) was the main used approach, followed by Reader-Response Approach (RRA) and Information-Based Approach (IBA); and 3) The teacher played important roles in building classroom atmosphere.*
*Keywords: Literature, Poetry, TEYL*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English to young learners (TEYL) is a dynamic field in Indonesia because many researchers studying this field, although English in the curriculum of primary schools is a local content due to the fact that the Ministry of Education does not provide an English syllabus for primary schools. However, the primary objective of teaching English in primary school is the same as that in other levels of the English language teaching. In this context, the objective is to provide a good basis for communicative competence as a foundation to the next level of study (Kurniasih, 2011).

Communicative competence refers to the capacity to use language appropriately in communication based on the setting, the roles of the participants, and the nature of the transaction. Prastyo (2015) stated that communicative competence is a competence to use the language that the students learn in the classroom for meaningful communication. Important common points are to be found in the general perspective on literature, understood as a domain of knowledge enhancing the development of communicative, literary and cultural competences that can contribute to the formation of the student's personality. The competences developed within the field of literature involve values and attitudes as well. The domain of literature becomes diverse, dynamic and open. In this circumstance, the approaches in teaching literature are focused on the process of reading and on the reader who participates in the construction of meaning (Pieper, Aase**,** Fleming, and Sâmihăian (2007).

Using literature for teaching language skills is quite common in foreign language learning and teaching nowadays (Khatib & Mellati, 2012). Furthermore, literature is one of the resources for language teaching which covers the language skills (Reading, writing, listening and speaking) and language areas, --vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation--, (Hismanoglu, 2005). It is also supported by Nurhayati's researches (2016b) creating students' speaking and writing through literature or local drama.

This study focuses on poetry as the learning material due to its benefit. Sarac (2003) argues that the educational benefits of poetry are: a) providing readers with a different viewpoint toward language use by going beyond the known usages and rules of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary; b) triggering unmotivated readers to be open to explorations and different interpretations; c) evoking feelings and thoughts in heart and mind. The use of poetry as the learning material helps learners to make connection in the field of their own experiences. Teaching language through poetry shows how literature may be used in language classes to develop students' knowledge of English (Llach, 2007; Khansir 2012).

Poetry exposes young learners to meaningful contexts. It introduces a range of vocabulary and dialogues that can be used to prepare student-centered and interesting activities in the language classroom. That is why poetry is considered as a tool for language learning purposes. In order to reach the merits, the acknowledgement to provide a good basis for communicative competence is important for English teachers. It helps teachers in arranging learning devices

(syllabus, lesson plan, etc.), implementing learning materials, and evaluating the process of learning and learning outcomes.

In brief, the purposes of the study are to describe the phase of teaching, to identify teacher's approaches to teaching literature, and to describe teacher's role in teaching and learning activities.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue in language teaching see literature as the communicative approach that have realization of teaching learners to communicate, accounting for real, authentic communicative situations (Sanz and Fernandez, 1997). Literature is used in two different contexts with a clear difference of objective. They are teaching the knowledge of literature and teaching of knowledge about the literature. This study focuses on the teaching of knowledge about the literature. If the teaching and examining approaches focus more on knowledge about literature, the outcome for learners is that they come rely on authorities outside themselves.

According to Collie and Slater in Cruz (2010) literature can be regarded as a rich source of 'authentic material' because it conveys two features in its written text: one is 'language in use,' that is, the employment of linguistics by those who have mastered it into a fashion intended for native speakers; the second is an aesthetic representation of the spoken language which is meant to recover or represent language within a certain cultural context. **.** All written materials like history books, philosophical works novels, poems, plays entertain readers' feeling. Literature could be classified into two different groups those writings that mainly presenting information, and the other place those mainly entertain the readers (Jones in Fauzan, 2016). Furthermore, literature as aesthetic recreation (that is, as something artificial) can be considered a much more "authentic" source and can inspire more authority in the use and enrichment of language than English textbooks or even than direct samples of language, more so if learners develop an "aesthetic reading" of the text (Langer, 1991, 1998; Many, Gerla, Wiseman, & Ellis, 1995). Through this personal and social experience students can develop a closer relationship with language, since they are reconstructing the target language on their own for their own learning process.

There are some genres in literature including poetry, short fiction, drama and novel. This study focuses on poetry as the learning material due to its benefit. Poetry offers wonderful opportunities for reading, writing, speaking, and listening practice for English language learners. Poetry also gives students a chance to expand vocabulary knowledge, to play with language, and to work with different rhythms and rhyme patterns. "The benefits of using poetry are not simply anecdotal, however — they have been well documented" (Robertson, 2009).

The single most important criterion for the selection of poems is the teacher's enthusiasm and passion. If the teacher does not like the text and cannot get sufficiently enthusiastic about it, then it is unlikely that the children will ever take to it. A teacher has to be a very good actor to convince the children to like a poem that they dislike. There are three principles consider in material selection; 1) readability, it means that the poems able to be read. It has to be clear to read, listen, or watch it

on video. 2) suitability, the children are going to read, hear, learn the words, and words convey information and content that appropriate to their age, maturity, and culture. 3) exploitability, it may simply be for fun and motivation, for social enjoyment within the classroom and worthy purpose.

In a relation to this, approaches to teaching literature adapted from Carter and Long (1992) are discussed. The approaches are: Language-Based Approach (LBA), Reader-Response Approach (RRA), and Information-Based Approach (IBA). Each of the approaches has unique characteristics. For example, the characteristic of LBA focuses on language. This means that when the teacher uses the approach, she seeks a closer integration between language and literature.

In the language model, the main focus is on language as the literary medium. Lazar (1999) stated that a Language-Based Approach (LBA) to use literature would include techniques and procedures, which are concerned mainly with the study of the literary text itself. Thus, students are equipped with the tools they need to interpret a text and to be able to make competent critical judgments of it. The advantages of using literary text for language activities are that they offer a wide range of styles and registers, they are open to multiple interpretations and hence provide excellent opportunities for classroom discussion and they focus on genuinely interesting and motivating topics to explore in the classroom (Duff and Maley, 1990). This approach facilitates student' responses and experience with literature, through a variety of activities such as reading aloud, rewriting, matching, jigsaw reading, gap-filling (cloze procedures), brainstorming, summarizing, , etc. which enhance collaboration, independence, interaction, peer teaching, and motivation (Carter & Long, 1992; Carter & McRae, 1996).

The RRA focuses on the reader's response to the texts. In this approach, the teacher is looking for a transactional relationship between the reader's personal experiences, opinions and feelings on the one hand and the text, on the other. In this circumstance, reading is seen as a dialog with the text and, through it, with the 'other' or with oneself. Plural interpretations are encouraged and the text can be approached from a variety of perspectives. It provides for a student-centered and process-oriented classroom. The purposes of literary education are similar, although a certain stress on language learning is to be expected. Literature is considered as an authentic medium for introducing students to the specific language and culture. The potential of literary reading across the languages is to compare traditions and gain insights into various cultural forms and developments.

The IBA is focused on information of the texts. This is a way of teaching knowledge about literature whereby literature is seen to offer a source of information to students. Reading is prominent, but its development is seen in close connection with other communicative skills such as: writing, speaking and listening, or appropriate use of language. The teacher plays important role in this approach. The approach provides teacher-centered classroom activities. This implies a greater responsibility for the teacher who has to make dialogue possible, imagining active stimulating contexts of reading and reflecting upon texts.

The teacher is called upon to perform several functions in context of language learning. Harmer (2007) categorized the roles of teacher as follows; 1)

controller. As controller, teacher is in charge of the class and of the activity taking place. The teacher should make decisions on the materials to be used, as well as the activities and games which will best accord with the learners' needs and abilities. 2) prompter, in order to become a successful communicator and model for learners, the teacher should promote a wide range of behaviors and psychological and social relationships such as solidarity and politeness. The teacher is a live model, a real human being to whom they can more easily relate. 3) participant, there are times when the teacher might want to join in an activity not (only) as a teacher. 4) resource, the onus is on her to provide the learners with the necessary input in order to foster understanding of the relation between language and communication. and 5) tutor, when students are working on longer projects, such as process writing, the teacher can work with individuals or small groups, pointing them in directions they have not yet thought of taking. In such situations, the teacher acts as tutor who has a more intimate relationship than that of controller or organizer.

## 3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was an interpretive qualitative case study. The data analysis involves synthesizing the information the research obtains from various sources; observations, interviews and document analysis into coherent description of what he or she has observed or discovered (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993). In this research, the data were validated through triangulation. The findings can be confirmed from several independent sources. The trustworthiness is enhanced when they are confirmed by more than one "instrument" measuring the same thing (O'Connor, 2014). Methodological triangulation was obtained from classroom observation, interview, and data analysis. This research was conducted at an English course in Bandung in 2014. One English teacher and nine six-grade students were participated in the research.

The data were collected and analyzed as follows. First, classroom observations were attended to identify the approaches employed by the teacher in teaching English through poetry including teaching procedure and teacher's role in teaching. The researcher took a role as non-participant observer since she was not involved physically and psychologically in the interaction in the classroom (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). The observations were conducted two times in a week. The detail of classroom activities were videotaped, and subsequently transcribed and categorized based on the research questions.

Second, interview was employed to gain in-depth information of the program. Seven questions were addressed to clarify the focus of teaching and the employed approaches. In this study, poetry was used as the primary learning material in teaching English. The focus was to teach English, not to teach literature as the objective of teaching. The analysis of interview data was done through three steps as proposed by Maxwell (1996): (1) The interview was transcribed immediately after the data were gathered; the data were initially read, and memos were taken based on the features seen, (2) The data were coded in order to make comparison within and between the categories of the data to develop theoretical

concept and associated to the research questions, and (3) Contextual analysis was employed to understand the data and to get answers for the research questions.

Third, document was used in order to verify the data from observation and interview. The data were documents of syllabus, lesson plan, teaching materials and students' work. Data from syllabus and lesson plan were used to analyze the activities in the classroom. Then, poetry as teaching materials was utilized to investigate the focus of the study.

The poetry was selected under the teacher's guideline by covering three points. First, the topic should be interesting to the students. To cover this point, the survey to measure students' knowledge of poetry and their attitude toward it were conducted by the teacher. The interesting topic would be engaging students in learning. Second, the topic should be familiar. It means that the chosen topic should relate to nature of young learners or resemble their experiences. Third, the topic should be understandable to them. The teacher avoided using specific cultural viewpoint that may be difficult for young learners.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
### 4.1 Phases in Teaching

The research indicates that there were three phases in teaching activities. They were the initial phase, the exploration phase, and the evaluation phase. They were displayed in the following figure.

Figure 1. Phases in teaching
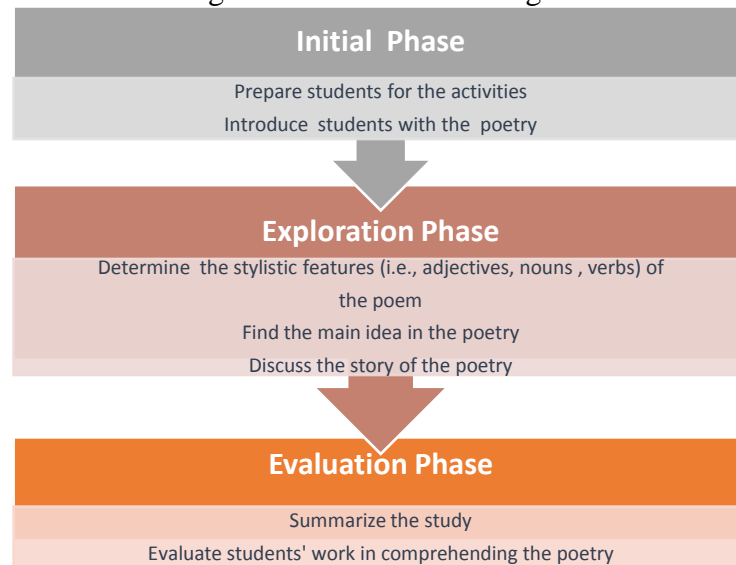


In the initial phase, the teacher provided some activities as an attempt to engage the students in the exploration phase. This phase can be called as preparation phase. There were some activities in this phase, such as: introducing the topic to discuss by playing video player or questioning technique, translating uncommon words, pronouncing the words accurately and knowing the author.

The next phase was the exploration phase. In this phase, the teacher and students discussed the story of the poem. They identified the stylistic features (i.e.,

adjectives, nouns, verbs) of the poem that became the key words or concepts to discuss in context of the poetry. In the same phase, the teacher provided some comprehension questions to identify the setting in which the story of the poetry take place and to know the characters in the poetry, and students tried to answer those questions to understand the poem. The teacher paced the activities to allow students to think what they were discussing. They tried to answer open-ended questions to stimulate their minds and imaginations. Questioning technique was one way to keep students involved in the discussion (Duff & Maley, 2004)

The last phase was the evaluation phase. In this phase, the teacher assessed students' work whereby the students did not know that they were being assessed. There were some activities in evaluating students' work in this phase such as drawing appropriate illustration of the poem, re-arranging the sentences in the poem, re-writing the poem, filling the gap in the poem, etc. The teacher utilized different form of assessment in each meeting. The assessment was adapted to the objective of the study.

### 4.2 Teacher's Approaches and Role
The findings show that three approaches were employed in this study. They were Language-Based Approach (LBA), Reader-Response Approach (RRA), and Informational-Based Approach (IBA). Those three approaches (LBA, RRA and IBA) are theories that blend well due to their natural characteristics of being flexible (Long & Carter, 1992). The detailed explanation of the activities of LBA, RRA and IBA will be discussed as follows.

### 4.2.1 Language-Based Approach (LBA)
There were some classroom activities found which were regarded as the Language-Based Approach (LBA). They were reading aloud, rewriting, matching, jigsaw reading, and gap-filling. Those activities, as revealed by the data from classroom observations as follow. Reading aloud was the common activities in this research (see table 1). Reading aloud allowed learners to become more familiar with the key words (theme) to discuss and also more familiar with literacy (Wood & Salvetti, 2001 as cited in Kowsary, 2013). The activity provided students with group work and discussion which also helped students to enjoy the text in reading session.

Table 1. Observation for Reading Aloud activity

| Time/ Phases | 14th Feb | 20st Feb | 21th Feb | 27th Feb | 28th Feb | 6th March | 7th March | 8th March |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Initial Phase** | | | | | | | | |
| • Students' Reading Aloud | v | v | | v | | v | v | v |
| • Teacher's Reading Aloud | | | v | | | | | |
| • Listen to the video | | | v | v | v | | v | |
| **Exploration Phase** | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Students' Reading Aloud | | v | | v | | | v | |
| • Teacher's Reading Aloud | | v | | v | v | | | v |
| • Listen to the video | | | | | | | | |
| **Evaluation Phase** | | | | | | | | |
| • Students' Reading Aloud | v | | v | v | v | | | v |
| • Teacher's Reading Aloud | | | | v | v | | | v |
| • Listen to the video | | | | | | | | |

Table 1 indicates that reading aloud activities occurred in each meeting. Reading aloud was done either by the teacher, students or conducted with the help of the video player. The table showed that the first observation was time for teacher's reading aloud, the second observation was for students' reading aloud and the fifth observation was for video playing. Those activities were conducted in the initial phase, the exploration phase, and the evaluation phase in the classroom activities.

Reading aloud by the teacher helped EFL learners discover units of meaning that should be read as phrase rather than word by word and helped them see reading as continuous, meaningful process of building larger units rather than focusing on single unit Swaffar, Arens, & Byrnes, 1991 in (Amer, 2003). Reading aloud was important for EFL learners especially at the early stage of learning. In regular and integral part of the EFL teaching and learning process, it can have a positive effect (Amer, 2003).

The teacher took several considerations into account to make the poetry meaningful for learning. First, the teacher prepared poetry that linked thematically with her objective of teaching and that was suitable with the proficiency level of her students. This is important to be noted since EFL students need to be encouraged to love the poetry, and this will be possible if the poetry is easy to understand and capable of promoting enthusiasm (Utami, 2012). Second, the teacher used the poetry that was short. Third, the teacher explained aims of the activities. By considering these factors she designed teacher-centered learning for her students. The teacher's role in this circumstance acted as controller. As the controller, she told students what to do, organized drills, read aloud and various other ways as a teacher-fronted classroom.

Rewriting was the second mostly done activity after reading aloud. The findings show that it was applied four times (on the third, fourth, sixth, and eighth meeting) in the classroom. The activities were conducted in the evaluation phase. The students shared their work in the classroom. The activity enhanced students' interest in learning English and motivated them to learn from each other. It reveals that "Exercise in creative writing," however rudimentary, put students in touch with the processes of the text and with processes of language and form which are their

own" (Carter and Long, 1992). The activity led students to greater confidence and enjoyment in personalizing the target language.

The teacher helped students to make sense of what they read, write and hear. In this activity, the teacher was as the resource. Acting as the resource, the teacher became the source of information for students. They might need to ask how to say or write something or ask what a word or phrase means or to get feedback on their work.

Excerpt 1. Teacher's feedback

> Mom
> You are a singing earth within my heart**h**
> Dad
> You are a heart**h**-dancing space of mine
> I **hop**(e) (A)**a**llah Bl**ast**(ess) you
> Observation#6

In the third meeting, the poetry entitled 'A Pizza the Size of the Sun' by Jack Prelutsky was presented in scrambled form. Students were invited to rearrange lines in correct sequence of a stanza in group. It was a difficult and challenging task. Jigsaw reading is a student-centered activity which stimulates students interaction with the text.

> "The phrase 'Jigsaw reading' is perfectly defensible, however, on the ground that it is student-centered; it forces the individual to look closely at the language of the text and, more specifically, at the poetic discourse, and it stimulates learner-learner interaction in the solving of puzzle." (Carter & Long, 1991, p. 71)

Therefore, it was important that before students were asked to do the exercise, they should work through one example with the teacher. This kind of activity was meaningful for the students. In this activity the teacher acted as a tutor. She combined the roles of prompter and resource. The teacher played an intimate relationship with students than that of a controller or organizer. However, when students were working in the groups, she went around the class and stayed briefly with a particular group or individual, and gave the sort of general guidance (Harmer, 2007, p. 110). In such situation, students had a real chance to support and help.

In Gap Filling (Cloze Procedure) activity, the teacher acted as the controller and resource. Acting as the controller, she explained how to do the activity properly. The teacher also gave clear instruction to deal with the task. As the resource, the teacher gave students information in encouraging them to finish the task (Harmer, 2007).

The unexpected cooperation reveals that the students' engagement with a text needs to be both linguistic and experiential (Carter & Long, 1992, p. 81). The students' lack awareness of the pattern of the words tended to disconnect with the text. "The exercise raises a number of useful points of language use, even though the

main point is to promote sensitivity to the use of words for literary purposes (Carter & Long, 1992).

A gap-filling (cloze) procedure was a useful technique for helping students to improve their vocabularies and increase comprehension. Using cloze with fiction and nonfiction texts is a good check to see how well students have learned and understood the concepts being taught or the story being told (Rasinski et al., 2000; Opitz and Eldridge, 2004).

### 4.2.2 Reader-Response Approach (RRA)

The observation data show how the teacher created comfortable atmosphere to stimulate students' response. The teacher made them feel a part of the text. There were some activities showed this kind of stimulus in the classroom activities.
Excerpt 2. stimulating students' response

Teacher: "Can we see stars every night?"
Pasha: "No, di kota gede ga bisa." [we cannot see stars in the big city]
Marsha: "Yes, yes, yes... I see red, yellow, blue, and green."
(Observation#2)

According to Marsha's answer, she actualized real life in responding to the poetry. For towns' people, it is not easy to see the stars because of ray pollution. So that, for the town's people, colorful lamps in the night considered as the stars. "Trying to remedy students' apathy, so that reading and discussing literature could become enjoyable for both teacher and students" (Tukcer, 2000, p. 199). She tried to share her perspective toward the text. Inviting students to share their experience orally with the class was a memorable experience. Whether it was positive or negative experience, they have previously provided to personalize the target language.

Pasha and Marsha' different answers show that RRA allowed students to respond freely to what they read that encouraged varied responses. In Pasha's answer, it can be seen that he was provided by his past experiences, regional, and current circumstance. Meanwhile, Marsha's answer regarded as active contribution to the creation of meaning that takes place during discussion (Chase & Hynd, 1987; Dias, 1992; Hirvela,1996 Karolides, 1992; Rossenblatt 1994 as cited in Abdullah, Zakaria,.et. al, 2007).

Students' perceptions and understandings are revealed in different ways. Many responses were verbal and came without words. From the observation, learners gave verbal responses more than non-verbal. The teacher succeeded to encourage learners to make use of certain interpretation. Teacher led learners speculating about the symbolic meaning of certain key words in the text rather than dwelling solely on their literal meaning. "The responses would not be expressed at all without the direct invitation of teacher who plans extension activities or discussions to generate thoughtful reaction to literary text" (Huck, Hepler & Hickman: 1989).

Furthermore, the data from interview also found that the RRA was utilized in the classroom. It can be seen in the excerpt below.

My teaching not only focuses on teaching language, hmm… but also encourages students to draw on their own personal experiences, feelings and opinions. It means that language based approach is not a single approach. Yaa.. hmm… involving students experience in reading literary text that is how the reader response approach employed in my classroom. (Interview#Q6)
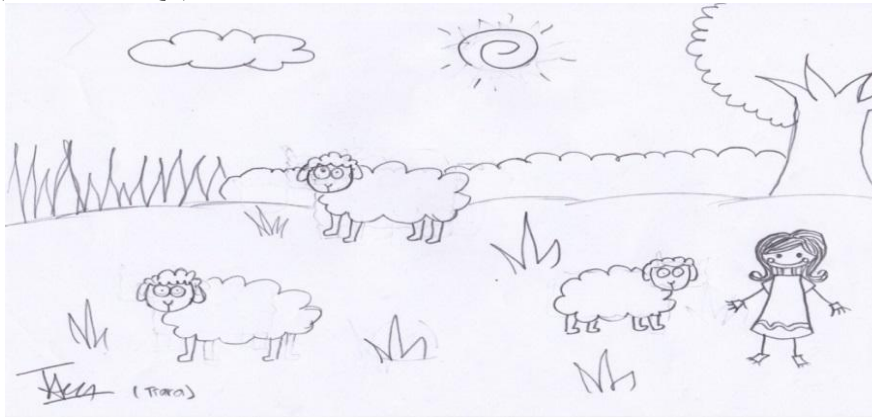


Figure 1: Ara's work

Picture 1. Ara's work reveals that the role of RRA was a necessary tool to confirm understanding of the text. Having students work on visual representations to evaluate students' understanding of the text was one of teacher commitment in this study. It gave her an opportunity to talk to her students, assess their progress, and evaluate effort while they work. The interaction with her students had an impact on their overall evaluation of students' comprehension of the text.

Visual representations worked as scaffolding to help students better understand the content. Language-related processes served as scaffolding to help students better understand the text (Rossenblatt, 1994). Although the teacher tended to focus on the assessment of content area learning, she did consider visual qualities in their evaluations. By looking at completion, effort, and selection of images, she also considered how well the selection of images symbolizes the topic under study. The teacher cited effort as an important consideration in assessment and evaluation.

Visual representation was an authentic and purposeful ways to assess and evaluate personal expressive, critical, and aesthetic qualities. It made visual representation so powerful and essential (Kohn, 2001 as cited in Bustle, 2004). Thus, illustration was a reflective and creative process. "The meaning and structure of the text are not inherent in the print but are invited by the author and imputed to the text by the reader" (Swaffer, 1988 as cited in Amer, 2003).

In conclusion, the data from document found that one purpose of teaching poetry to young learners was to develop their sense of personal ownership of what they have learned. However, feelings, emotional involvement and personalizing language were essential as the initial desire to learn something start inside the learners.

### 4.2.3 Information-Based Approach (IBA)

The Information-Based Approach (IBA) aims to expose learners the facts and information about a target language, culture and even the writer of the literary text (Carter & Long, 1992). This approach was teacher-centered. IBA was one of approaches employed in this study. The approach enabled students to know the information of the text. The approach helped students to comprehend the text. The approach filled the gap between the text and the learners.

There were some classroom activities found which were regarded as IBA. The activities were; introducing the topic discussed and sharing information of the topic discussed. The purpose of this approach was to help the learners to understand the text.

IBA was a rarely employed approach, this approach did not employ as often as the other approaches. One of reasons for this issue was that IBA was not compatible with students' level in this research. The explanation can be seen in the excerpt below.

Information based approach used to share information about culture… because you know that to understand the culture, it needs more efforts. In the phase of my students, English is a local content. So the objective of teaching is to introduce English,,, hmm.. ya English as a basic for the next level of study. (Interview#Q6)

The excerpt above explains that the approach was used to share information about culture. As mention in previous section, teaching material was designed against the specific cultural viewpoints which reflected in every piece of literary text. Grasping and making sense of the cultural perspectives must be difficult for the students especially for EFL young learners.

### 5. CONCLUSION

The findings of the current study showed that there were three phases in teaching activities. Firstly, the initial phase which prepared students to introduce the (topic) poetry. Secondly, the exploration phase to discuss about the poetry. Thirdly, the evaluation phase to valuate students' work in comprehending the poetry.

Based on the results of the study, it was found that the teacher employed Language-Based Approach (LBA), Reader-Response Approach (RRA) and Information-Based Approach (IBA). Meanwhile, there were no best approaches among the three. The best approaches are the approach that was worthy in accomplishing the objective of the teaching. Teacher's knowledge about the approaches to teaching literature and to whom the approaches apply was the most important one. It was affected on teaching materials selection, classroom instruction and students' work evaluation. Because the respondents of this study were young learners, the teaching materials were adapted to learners' English proficiency in this level. It consists of short and simple literary text in form of poetry.

Another issue in the approaches to teaching literature was teachers' role. When the teacher acted as controller, she was in charge of the class and of the activity taking place. As tutor, pointing them in directions they have not yet thought

of taking. As resource, she provided the learners with the necessary input in order to foster understanding. Teacher as prompter provided times when she might join in an activity not (only) as a teacher.

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